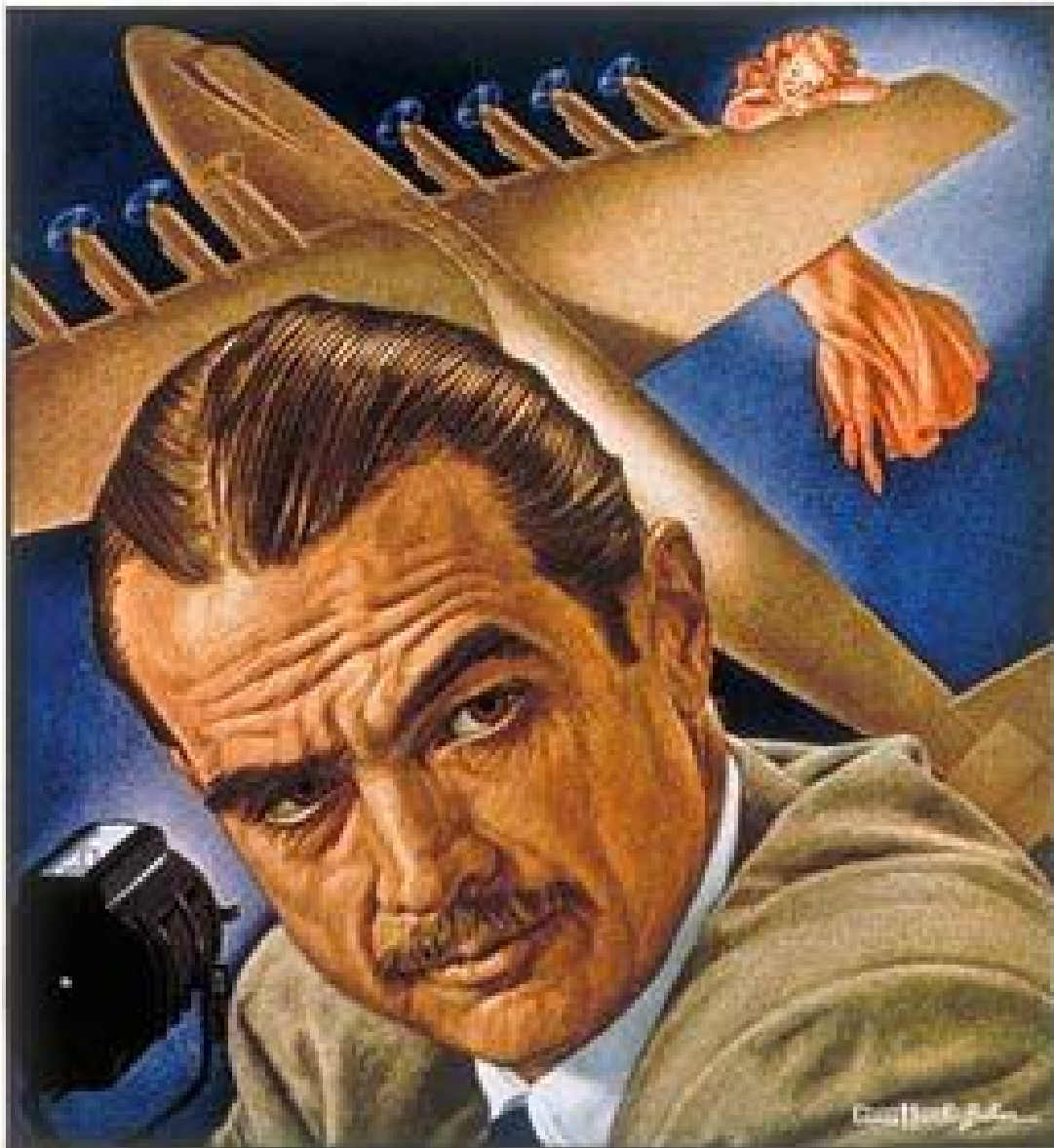


HOWARDS END

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HOWARD HUGHES

Money + brains = fun (sometimes).
(People)

CHAPTER ONE

Hollywood, 1921

Party-loving Hollywood was setting out to put the roar in the Roaring Twenties.

With his wife and son safely tucked away in Houston, Texas, Howard Hughes Sr., or “Big Howard” as he was called, sat looking up at the mauve-colored sky over Los Angeles. But not for long.

Female screams around the swimming pool quickly diverted his eye. Milling about the pool, or else splashing in it, was a bevy of beautiful, long-limbed showgals better looking than any he’d seen in the fleshpots of Chicago or New York.

Hughes was not a handsome man but he was secure in his belief that before the evening ended he could snare any of these big-breasted chorines. Not bad for a Missouri farm boy who had been born dirt poor in 1869.

He was rugged and tall; a man of rough-hewn, roguish looks who’d wandered across the dusty plains of Oklahoma and between the snow-capped mountains of Colorado, seeking to strike it rich by buying and selling leases on silver and zinc mines. He’d also been a regular aboard the gambling showboats that steamed up and down the Mississippi, each of them loaded with wild and wanton women whose charms were usually available for one gold dollar. Whiplashed by the booms and busts of the Robber Baron Age, he sometimes flaunted his bundles of cash to entrap the shapeliest and most glamorous of women and occasionally, a virginal teenage girl.

From boomtown to boomtown, he’d been a wildcatter, coping with a string of broken dreams, but still hoping to acquire “all the pots of gold at the end of the rainbow.”

He’d wanted a wife who “acted and looked like a queen” and he found her one Christmas Day in Dallas in 1902 as he came into the ballroom of the Gaiety Hall for a Yuletide Cotillion. Allene Stone Gano, born in 1883, was only nineteen when he was introduced to her. Clad in a pink lace gown, she’d stunned him with her flowing brunette hair, high cheekbones, and liquid brown eyes—an ascetic appearance of enormous appeal to a thirty-two year-old roustabout who’d spent most of his sexual life suckling at the breasts of prostitutes. She was in the Social Register, daughter of a prominent Texas judge and granddaughter of a famous general in the Confederate army.

He was happy that he’d dressed up that night in his Brooks Brothers, charcoal gray, pin-striped suit, with white spats, a black bowler hat, and a diamond stickpin. Her eyes had seemed to dance as he’d gazed into them. She’d stood before him, tall and reed-thin, a young filly of charm and grace.

From the beginning, he’d viewed her as ideal wife material, the kind of woman he could impregnate, stash away in a fine home somewhere, visit on occasions, and continue to lead the wild bachelor life he’d always had. Wife or no wife, Howard Sr. valued his freedom above all.

In spite of his wild living, he was an educated man, having been born the son of a Missouri lawyer. Hughes Sr. had graduated from Harvard, had earned his law degree from the University of Iowa, and for a time had practiced law with his father in Keokuk, Iowa. His courtship of Allene had been brief. After his proposal under a full Texas moon in March of 1903, the couple were married only a few weeks later, on May 24, at the home of her parents on Masten Street in Dallas.

When Howard Sr. had met Allene Gano, he’d been mesmerized by her charm and her taste in clothing. Although her French Huguenot family had urged her to marry a multi-millionaire, she’d fallen for Hughes Sr. At the time he had exactly fifty-thousand dollars in the bank, and on their 1904 honeymoon in Britain and the Continent, he managed to spend \$49,100 of that treasure, something that even the Gilded Age scions of the Rockefellers, Vanderbilts, and Astors didn’t exceed during their spendthrift tours across Europe.

Even if he had a wife and son, he’d need to be able to run away at a moment’s notice, perhaps to mud-dirt Texas towns like Goose Creek or Pierce Junction where he might strike it rich in the oil business. Back then, he’d known that such rip-roaring towns would be only stations along the way for him, places to join local riggers hunting for the black gold that lurked in the bowels of the earth.

Allene had not only married him, but stood by him, even as he neared the age of forty and still hadn’t hit pay dirt. And then there came a sudden reversal of fortune.

He’d had no great success as a wildcatter, but he had nevertheless struck it rich with his “rock eater,” a drill with 166 cutting edges that could pierce through granite. “Or drill through Hell itself,” Hughes claimed.

Up until then, oilmen had used the standard “fishtail” bit with two cutting edges that blunted whenever they hit hard rock.

Even though he lied and wasn’t the sole inventor, as he’d later maintain, he’d acquired two U.S. patents on August 10, 1909. He’d made many improvements to the bit, but the invention itself had been purchased for \$150 from Granville A. Humason, a young Mississippi millwright.

Hard rock, once thought impenetrable, could be pierced by his “rock bit” and the precious oil reserves tapped. The rock drill had forever changed the way men pursued oil deposits.

Years later, Hughes Jr. was asked if his father’s tool company had a monopoly. “Of course not!” he replied. “People who want to drill for oil and not use the Hughes bit can always use a pick and shovel.”

By the time Hughes Sr. arrived in Hollywood in 1921, word had spread through the movie colony that “the richest oilman in Texas” was in town. With his drill plowing for oil in countries around the world, and his bank account growing fatter and fatter by the day, Hughes felt he deserved some pleasure.

The Hollywood party to which he’d been invited was getting wilder. Already six bathing beauties had pulled down the tops to their suits and jumped into the pool.



Howard Hughes Sr.

He was trying to pick his favorite for the evening when he was overcome with the smell of a strangely scented, over-perfumed cigarette.

Looking around, he spotted his hostess—attired in a flamboyant peacock dress of emerald green and royal blue—gliding toward him with a long cigarette holder. She was the grand empress of the estate, the Garden of Alla, with its swimming pool in the shape of the Black Sea of her homeland.

“Howard, darling,” she called out to him in a Russian-accented voice.

He rose from his chaise longue to stand in front of her. Since she was a virtual midget, he towered over her. Her head of frizzy hair hardly came to his navel, yet this petite little bird was the Queen of Hollywood.

The exotic Alla Nazimova herself.

She extended her mauve-colored gloved hand to him for it to be kissed.

Nazimova artfully seated herself in a peacock chair across from Hughes, as an Amazon-like maiden wearing a breast plate arranged her gown. Standing over her was a Nubian slave in a pink-colored, bulging loincloth gently fanning her, as she continued to smoke her Turkish cigarette. She motioned for the Nubian to offer Hughes one of the cigarettes, which he accepted.

“You Hollywood stars sure like drama,” he said.

With her pumpkin-shaped head and gunboat feet, Nazimova confronted him. “My whole life is devoted to drama. In fact, I don’t think I’m capable of doing anything that’s not dramatic.”

As he inhaled deeply on the cigarette, he leaned back and more closely studied the image of Nazimova. Her beauty was but an illusion, yet she was the highest paid actress in Hollywood, earning \$13,000 a week. He respected women who earned their own money and didn’t depend on a man to keep them like chattel.

When a tall, handsome man came over to shake Hughes’ hand, Nazimova introduced him as Charles Bryant. She called him “the Rosebud of my life.”

Bryant quickly departed. Nazimova moved closer to Hughes, her face coming into the spotlight. He noticed that heavy rice powder covered the pockmarks of some childhood illness.

“Charles is not really my husband,” she said. “He’s actually my beard. He’s a bad actor, really just a bit player. I bring him out to show him off anytime the press wants an interview.” She gazed toward the beauties in the pool. “Otherwise, I prefer my tender young maidens.”

“I hope we won’t be fighting for the same pussies tonight,” Hughes said to her.

“Not at all,” she said. “I’ve arranged very special entertainment for you.”

“Can’t wait,” he said.

“Mr. Hughes,” she said rather abruptly. “You and I have much in common. I am dangerously seductive because of my beauty and charm. In spite of your rather plain looks, you are also dangerously seductive because of your money. You and I ruthlessly pursue glamorous women. But, unlike yourself, I prefer a man from time to time. Not for sexual pleasure of course, but because I want to know how to relate to them on the screen. How to make passionate love to them like I did to Rudolph Valentino in *Camille*.”

“You’re one hell of an emotionalist,” he said.

“Emotionalist,” she repeated, mulling that over a moment. “I’ve been called many things—never that. Noticing how intently he was scrutinizing her, she must have mistaken his interest. “I must warn you,” she cautioned him. “Don’t fall in love with me the way Valentino’s wife, Jean Acker, did. I’m exactly as I am on the screen. I betray lovers as ruthlessly as men have always betrayed women. I would only break your heart. Shatter it into so many pieces you’d never be able to put it together again.”

“I’ve never been in love, Nazimova, and I never will be,” he said. “I take momentary pleasures in bodies presented to me. But when that short-lived pleasure is over, I move on. I prefer to sleep alone. *Love!* Men who fall in love never succeed in this world. They are mere lovesick fools—nothing more.”

“A man after my own heart,” Nazimova said. “The only thing I’ve ever loved is that incredible image of my flickering face on the screen.”

The cigarette was making him feel drugged—almost but not quite like getting too drunk. He knew that Nazimova hadn’t invited him to her Garden of Alla to admire his physique, and he was anxious to finish their business so that he Nazimova could pursue the intrigues of the night. “Assuming I want to go into the business of making movies, and I’m just flirting with the idea, just how much money do you need to make *Salome*?”



Nazimova

"I need another \$100,000," she said matter-of-factly. "I'm putting up \$300,000 of my own money, and that's all I have in the bank. It's what I've saved from what my accountants call a lifestyle lashed with extravagances."

"I know the Biblical story," he said, "but what kind of costume epic are we talking about here?"

"*Salome* will be the most artistic film ever made in the history of Hollywood."

"Artsy-fartsy," he said. "Will it have sex and plenty of it?"

"Beyond anything that's ever made it to the screen," she promised. "In tribute to Oscar Wilde's drama, I'm demanding that my entire cast be homosexual, and very scantily dressed. It will have beautiful slave boys, and a Syrian captain of the palace guard fitted in black tights with a natural pouch showing, a beaded necklace placed over his chest before a fishnet hood is draped over his body and his nipples painted purple. The black male slaves will be selected for their physiques and will wear white wigs with curls like those of Mary Pickford. Each will be clad in a silver lamé loincloth. The handsome Roman soldiers will appear in sleeveless armor to better show off their muscles. They'll wear metallic skirts ending just below their crotches, and they'll each be bare-legged. The black executioner will be played by a stunning Mandingo wearing a fully packed satin loincloth. His string of white beads will be as big as ostrich eggs matching the size of his testicles, with will be outlined in all their male glory."

"And the young gals?" Hughes asked. "What about them?"

"I'm selecting the most beautiful women in Hollywood to play the ladies of Herod's court," she said. "Except they won't be women, but men dressed as women and sporting wigs."

"I see," Hughes said. "Let me think it over tonight, and I'll give you my answer tomorrow morning at nine o'clock."

"As you desire," she said, standing up, as her hand-maiden rushed to help her.

"And my party favor for tonight?" he said, having tired of Nazimova's film talk. *Salome* was not his dream fantasy.

"She's already waiting at the front of the Garden of Alla," she said provocatively. "Waiting to take you in her arms for a night of exquisite pleasure unlike what you've ever known before."

"I can't wait!" Hughes said, getting up and kissing Nazimova's gloved hand once more. "Your film sounds exciting, and I can tell you one thing right now: I think I'm going to back it—maybe back the whole thing so that you won't have to put up one red cent."

"Oh, Howard darling, that would make me the happiest goddess in Hollywood."

Nazimova paled in comparison to what was waiting for Hughes at the entrance to the Garden of Alla. A sleek canary yellow Rolls-Royce stood ready to whisk him away into the night. Because of the car's darkened glass, he could make out only the shadowy figure of the woman seated in the rear.

Upon his approach, two liverymen in pink uniforms rose in their white boots from the box of the limousine where they were waiting patiently. The one on the right opened the door handle to the rear compartment. To Hughes, the handle looked like real gold.

The moment he peered into the vehicle he recognized its occupant. It was Mae Murray, "the girl with the bee-stung lips," who was rapidly replacing Nazimova as the Queen of Hollywood.

Never in his life had Hughes seen such a stunning beauty. All in white satin and ermine, she wore an elaborate headdress of feathers as befits the ex-Follies showgirl that she was. She beckoned him to sit beside her in the midnight blue patent leather interior. Her perfumed aroma evoked a field of gardenias, and her gold gown was studded with white pearls. A dazzlingly large marquis diamond was glued to her forehead, sparkling in the night.

She giggled as Hughes took the seat beside her. He'd heard that Murray had a husband, Robert Leonard, stashed somewhere, but obviously he was not in the picture for tonight. "Miss Murray," he said, reaching out to kiss her extended hand the way he'd paid homage to Nazimova. "I'm your greatest fan!"

"You flatter me, sir!" she said, signaling her chauffeur, also clad in a pink uniform, to drive forward into the night, wherever they were going.

"I'm the one who is flattered," Hughes told her. "I couldn't believe it when Nazimova told me that one of the biggest stars in Hollywood wanted to spend the night with me."

"*The* biggest," she corrected him.

"I'm just a plain man," he said.

"Not to worry," she said. "I'll supply the beauty for both of us."

He noticed her gold purse. "Is it true that you actually carry little bags of gold in that purse?" he asked. "Or is that just newspaper gossip?"

"It is absolutely true, Mr. Hughes." She giggled again and opened her purse.

He peered inside to discover small bags of actual gold dust. "Don't that beat all!"

"If you stay in Hollywood long enough," she said, "you'll discover many strange phenomenon."



Mae Murray

At her mansion, a Spanish-styled hacienda, on Adelaide Drive, one of the pink-clad footmen opened the door and offered his arm to Hughes. Brushing aside such a feminine gesture, Hughes made his way out of the Rolls on his own, and then reached back, extending his arm to Murray to assist her from her chariot.

Lined up in a row, the two footmen and the chauffeur stood at military attention to await their instructions for the evening.

Murray looked first at Hughes and then at her servants. “Boys,” she said, gazing once again at Hughes, “I’m sure the gentleman here will spend the night, so I’ll have no further need of you until morning.”

Taking her by the arm, Hughes followed one of the footmen who opened a side gate that led into a secret garden. Wandering into it with her, he’d never seen a garden in such full bloom and one so beautiful. It overpowered him with the smell of gardenias. That was obviously her favorite flower.

The garden pathway was paved with yellow brick. To his astonishment, he spotted a dead body lying in their pathway. She giggled as he bent to examine the corpse. It was “Gloria Swanson,” or a good facsimile of her. In a beaded dress of silver lamé, the Swanson dummy lay sprawled across the bricks, her dress riding indecently high, revealing red silk bloomers.

Murray giggled again as he took her arm and stepped over Swanson.

“Charlie Chaplin” was propped up drunk on a wrought-iron park bench ten feet away. In the middle of an oleander bush, a soggy “Mary Pickford” was so inebriated she was holding onto the shrub for support.

“I see your friends have lost the battle of the booze,” he said.

She steered him down another yellow brick pathway that led to her menagerie where she introduced him to her favorite, a caged leopard cub named Night Fever. She also showed him a cage containing seven monkeys and an aviary of tropical birds, including birds of prey. As they moved toward the house, a Great Dane and a St. Bernard rushed up to greet them, followed at a more leisurely pace by at least a dozen white and black “showcats.”

A doorman welcomed them into her greenhouse-like foyer and into the baroque parlor where Murray ordered bootleg hooch for the both of them. She just assumed that Hughes was a drinking man.

Tossing her ermine aside, she sat across from him on her red satin sofa. “I believe in leading an electric life. High voltage!”

“Mykindofgal!” he said.

“You’re looking at me like you’re this great big boa constrictor, and I’m a pheasant in the wild. Like you’re about to devour me.”

“Do you think it’s possible for a man to fall madly in love with a woman on first sight?” he asked.

“If that woman is Mae Murray, I believe it is not only possible but highly probable.”

“Would you scream and call the police if I got up from this lonely chair and came to join you on that tempting sofa?” he asked.

“Mr. Hughes, Mae Murray is not among the faint-of-heart. They call me self-enchanted—but that’s wrong. My talent in life involves enchanting others. Please, come hither.”

On wobbly knees, he rose slowly from his chair. “Keep in mind, I’m a mere mortal—not some Greek God down from Olympus.”

“But tonight, I’ll make you feel like a God.”

Her bee-stung lips beckoned for him to taste them.

Texas 1905-1916

The tombstone of Howard Robard Hughes Jr. lists his date of birth as December 24, 1905. Like so much of the Howard Hughes legend, that was a lie. For reasons of her own, his mother, Allene, always insisted during her short life that the date she gave birth to her baby, the child who would become America’s first billionaire, was Christmas Eve. Her beloved Sonny, as she erroneously claimed, was born on “the same night as the Christ child.”

No birth certificate has survived, and most sources and books list Allene’s fictional date as the actual birth of Howard Hughes Jr., a young man who would be called “The Huck Finn of American Industry.”

It was in 1910 that James Lawlow, owner of Houston’s Rice Hotel, reported that Hughes Sr. and Allene dined with him on Christmas Eve in 1905. There was no way she could have been in a hospital giving birth on that night. Lawlow recalled that he’d sat with Mr. and Mrs. Hughes in his dining room, having awarded them the best table in the house. He even remembered the menu of roast Christmas turkey with chestnut dressing along with “Santa Claus potatoes” and candied Jersey sweets. For dessert, he’d ordered his chef to make them festive hot mince pie. Ironically, only a few months earlier, Lawlow had tossed Mr. and Mrs. Hughes out on the street because of their unpaid hotel bill. Since Hughes had recently acquired some money and had finally paid the bill, all was forgiven on the night of the Christmas Eve banquet.

While these Yuletide festivities were being celebrated, Sonny was already three months old and in the care of a nanny back at the Hughes's home,

It was actually during the late summer of 1905, one of the longest and hottest in the history of Texas, that Allene had carried her pregnancy to term. In spite of her claims to the contrary, her son had been born on September 14, 1905, as the first winds of autumn had begun to stir the dust on the sun-baked and unpaved streets of Houston. Stagnant water stood in ditches on the sides of these roads, breeding mosquitoes. Those autumnal winds also had brought the smell of decaying carcasses from the stockyards and the reek of oil "filled the air, painted the houses, choked the lungs, and stained men's souls."

Later in his life, every day that Howard Hughes Jr. spent with his mother, he would be reminded of that fictional date of Christmas Eve when she allegedly brought him into the world when she was twenty-two years old.

When she was angry at him, she would shout at him, "My body's wasted! I'm in constant pain day and night because my guts were all torn up pushing you from my body. All because I gave birth to an ungrateful son."

Dr. Oscar Norsworthy had told her that she could never have another child. Howard Robard Hughes Jr. would never know a brother or sister.

Although the date she assigned to her son's birth was a lie, her extraordinary ordeal had been real. She had endured "nine hours of hell," as she put it, giving birth to her son. Even the doctors at Houston Baptist Hospital had called hers the most difficult birth the hospital staff had ever witnessed.

On the night of the birth, Dr. Norsworthy had reported to Hughes that his wife of eighteen months was hemorrhaging badly. "With the life of your wife fading," Dr. Norsworthy had said, "there is virtually no way to save the baby. Prepare yourself for the worst. I fear Mrs. Hughes will not live to greet the dawn."

Two hours later, a miracle happened. Shortly before dawn on the morning of September 24, Dr. Norsworthy and a team that included two other surgeons had stemmed the flow of blood in Allene. The surgeons had to give her four blood transfusions.

Hughes had been forced to wait in the corridor for thirty minutes before Dr. Norsworthy finally emerged with the good news that he was the father of a robust baby boy.

His wife had been hauled to the recovery room, where it had appeared that it was still unlikely that she'd pull through.

Hughes Sr. had burst into tears when informed of his wife's greatly diminished state. "Money doesn't matter at a time like this," he'd told the doctor. "Do anything, get any specialist. The best in the land."

With his wife sleeping peacefully the following night, Hughes had gone to one of his favorite hangouts, the poker table at Houston's Fire Station Number Eight. With him, he'd brought the fanciest of Havana cigars and the best of French brandy to celebrate the birth of his son. The fire captain, Edgar H. Davis, had ordered the ringing of the giant brass chimes of the firehouse.

Residents, mostly the families of oil workers, had heard the shrill echo of these peeling chimes and had poured anxiously into the streets, which were lit by newly installed electric lights, casting an amber-colored glow. When they'd learned that it wasn't a life-threatening emergency, like the town burning down, but a celebration, they had descended on the firehouse.



Howard Hughes Jr.

Hearing them coming, Hughes had sent word to McDuffy's Tavern to deliver all the kegs of beer he had in his cellar.

The neighbors were celebrating but hadn't been sure why. They were drinking up all the beer. Many of the younger men were also purchasing cocaine from the peddlers working the crowd. In those days, bags of cocaine were just as readily available as a glass of beer in one of the taverns.

Finally, Hughes Sr. had emerged from the firehouse to address the beer-guzzling crowd. "Tonight my son was born," he'd told his cheering audience. "A big healthy boy and a true Texan. He'll be a bigger figure than his old man will ever be. I predict he'll become the most famous and richest man in America. Not only that, but no doubt president of the United States one of these days."

At least two of three of Hughes's predictions would come true.

Years after his death, later day psychiatrists, such as Dr. Raymond Fowler, digging into the long-hidden dossiers and documents in the possession of the Howard Hughes estate, concluded that young Howard's relationship with his beautiful mother, Allene, was "emotionally incestuous."

Dr. Fowler's conclusion, after working for three years on a psychological profile of Howard for the Hughes estate, concluded that Allene was a "phobic, hysterical overseer" of her son.

It was true that Sonny was of a "delicate constitution," not gaining weight as he should, and "being of a nervous disposition." Using the pretense of possible ill health, she virtually didn't let the boy out of her sight until he was eight years old.

From the beginning, Allene believed that her Sonny was special, and she wanted the world to take notice of that. She didn't want her beloved boy to be like the other rough-and-tumble boys growing up in the frontier oil town of Houston. To set her son apart, she began to purchase clothing for him that made him look like a Texas version of Little Lord Fauntleroy.

She dressed him in frilly, heavily starched, and elaborately pressed white shirts with ruffles. His knickerbockers, as she more formally called his

“knickers,” were made of black velvet. She bought only black MaryJane shoes for him, and rather sheer white hosiery that came right up to his kneecaps, as she wanted very little skin showing.

When Allene drove him to school, Sonny stood out from the other kids. With all his shyness and tendency to be embarrassed, that was the last thing he wanted. Even though he pleaded with his mother to let him “blend in with the other boys,” Allene refused to change his dress code.

Looking like a dandy in a frontier town, Sonny had to endure the taunts of his hell-raising classmates, who mocked him for “dressing like a girl.” They called him “a sissy.” In those days sissies were not called faggots.

At night, far from the critical eyes of his schoolmates, she discarded the flannel gowns that many young boys of his age wore to bed. She insisted instead on dressing him in delicate silk undergarments imported from Paris and intended for use by young girls. When Sonny objected to wearing this frilly lingerie, she refused to let him take off the garments. “This lingerie is the most expensive money can buy,” she told him. “Intended for the prettiest little girls in the world. You are the prettiest boy in the world. If it’s good enough for these spoiled little ladies, it’s good enough for my son.”

When Hughes Sr. was home, which he rarely was, Allene assigned him a separate bedroom. In the master bedroom, she slept with Sonny in a four-poster bed draped in delicate lace. When Sonny couldn’t go to sleep, which was often the case, she pulled down her nightgown and allowed him to suckle at her breasts, long after her milk had dried up.

When she woke Sonny in the morning, she insisted on putting him through an elaborate ritual of ablutions, once employed in upper-class Victorian homes in Britain. In her bathroom, she inspected him from head to toe. First she checked his hair for lice, and then he was forced to open his mouth wide while she peered into his throat. After an inspection of his ears, she would begin an intense examination of his body, lingering for a long time in the area of his genitals. Since he was uncircumcised, she would pull back the glans of his small penis, looking for any spot or blotch. Later, she would demand that he turn his back to her and spread his cheeks. Greasing her finger with oil, she would insert it in his anus, ostensibly in a search for hemorrhoids.

Only after this inspection was over would she allow him to use the toilet. She stood by his side as his bowels moved. She inspected his stool, looking for tapeworms, as she claimed. Only then did she allow him to flush. The inspection was followed by a bath in very hot water, using a harsh lye soap to kill germs. Before departing for school, she gave him a heavy dose of Mrs. Rokamov’s Russian Mineral Oil.

At night he had to down Epsom salts, endure another precise physical examination, and another bath in lye soap before she’d dress him in frilly lingerie for sleep in her all-protective arms.



Howard, Jr. and Allene Hughes

“I will always be there for you,” she’d whisper in his ear. “You’ll never have need of another woman.”

Not all the boys at the Episcopal parish school of Christ Church Cathedral made fun of Sonny. After the first week, he’d made friends with Dudley Sharp. Dudley was destined to become one of the most important relationships of young Howard’s life.

As Sonny’s uncle, Rupert Hughes, once remarked, “My nephew, Howard Jr., had only two friends in his life—young Dudley Sharp, whom he betrayed, and Cary Grant, whom he didn’t.”

Dudley was the type of boy Hughes Sr. wanted his own son to be. Tall and rail-thin, Sonny had a ghostly pale pallor and looked sickly. Dudley was the physical opposite. With a swimmer’s build, he was healthy, robust, sun-tanned, surprisingly masculine for one so young, and strikingly handsome. None of the bullies at school called him a “sissy.” If they did, it would be the last time that they would do so.

Just as Sonny “lived within his own shell,” Dudley was very gregarious, making friends, talking to both adults and children with poise, and blessed with a winning personality that attracted both boys and girls to him.

From the first day in kindergarten, Sonny and Dudley became instant friends.

Dudley was the only boy in Sonny’s school to win the approval of Allene. For years, Dudley’s father, Walter Sharp, had been a partner in the Sharp-Hughes Tool Company. Like “Big Howard,” Sharp had been a fellow wildcatter. A tall, rangy man, not unlike a young Gary Cooper, he in time became one of the founders of Texaco. Together with another partner, Edward Prater, Hughes Sr. and Walter Sharp had founded the amusingly named Moonshine Oil Company, forerunner of Hughes Tool Company.

When Sonny was out of school, Allene devoted all her time to him. When her boy was in class, she spent leisurely hours with Estelle, Walter Sharp’s wife who had become her best friend. Privately, in spite of her fondness for Allene, Estelle expressed her reservations to Walter about Allene’s “attempt to keep Sonny in the womb,” as she so graphically put it. When she learned her own son liked Sonny, she encouraged the relationship, feeling that it would be good for young Howard to be “weaned a bit from his mother’s tit.” Estelle probably had no knowledge of how accurate her breast comparison was.

Looking back years later, Dudley, even as a young boy, had been aware of Allene’s unnaturally close ties to her son. He once said, “They shared a bond so powerful and so intense that I’d never seen anything to match it—before or since.”

Also enrolled in the parish school, Ella Rice was a beautiful little girl from a socially prominent family in Texas. Two years older than Sonny, she was the daughter of David Rice. Her uncle, William, had founded Rice Institute, which in time became Rice University.

Even before he was six years old, Sonny was telling Dudley that when he grew up he was going to marry Ella Rice. Howard Hughes Jr. must have been the only six-year-old in Houston plotting his future marriage.

Dudley, as he recalled years later, told Sonny that he not only didn’t like girls, but felt that they were silly things. He claimed when they weren’t playing with dolls, they liked to pester boys, and he didn’t want to have anything to do with them. Sonny persisted in his daydreaming about Ella, and when Valentine’s Day came around, he bought Ella the biggest card in all of Houston, presenting it to her with a mammoth, heart-shaped box of chocolates. Even as a child, Sonny was given ten dollars a week spending money, an unheard-of weekly stipend for a child in those days. Sonny rarely spent the money but instead stashed it in the attic of his home.

When Sonny presented Ella the box of chocolates in the schoolyard, she giggled, took it and the card, and ran over to the corner of the playground where she was joined by three of her playmates. She opened the card and read its message of love before instructing one of her little friends to return it to Sonny. “Tell him I don’t love him,” she told her messenger, “and never will.” Ella kept the box of chocolates, however, and shared them freely with her playmates.

Stunned by the rejection and mocked by Ella’s friends, Sonny retreated from the playground with Dudley by his side. Dudley would remember that day forever. He claimed that Sonny’s face was twisted with anger at his humiliation. “I’ll get even with that Ella Rice if it’s the last thing I ever do,” he told Dudley.

It was a vow he’d keep.

With his pal, Dudley, Allene’s beloved Sonny entered Prosser School at the age of eight. Run by Dr. James Richardson for children of elite Houston parents, it was the city’s best private school. Hughes Sr. was delighted, telling Dudley’s father, Walter, that at last his son “could escape from the boa constrictor grip” of Allene.

Sonny was not a good student and from the beginning showed erratic behavior. Dr. Richardson told his parents that “the boy doesn’t seem to fit in.” He spent his free time on the playground talking only to Dudley, although casting a fascinated eye at a beautiful eight-year-old classmate, Margaret Cullinan. Ella Rice would be put in mothballs for a number of years. It was obvious Sonny had become smitten with Margaret, who went out of her way to ignore him.

Two months into the school term, Sonny smuggled some of Allene’s most precious jewelry from her bedroom and showed up on the playground with it. He put on a pair of his mother’s diamond earrings and fastened on her favorite diamond-and-ruby necklace. In front of an astonished Margaret, he approached her, removed the jewelry, and offered the gems to her as a gift. She gleefully accepted.

This was the first known incident when young Howard had presented jewelry to a girl, and it would become a lifelong addiction. In time he would present jewelry to everybody from Katharine Hepburn to Ava Gardner. Those two stars returned the sparklers, although dozens of starlets accepted, and kept, Hughes’s jewelry and wanted more.

Mrs. Cullinan, Margaret’s mother, arrived at the Hughes’s home around six o’clock that evening and forced her daughter to return the jewelry. Instead of exploding with anger, Allene advised Sonny to give away only the tiniest of her gems—not her most valuable diamonds.

Sonny would take jewelry from Allene’s treasure chest only one more time. He stole a gold ring, studded with rubies and diamonds, and presented it to Dudley as a friendship ring. When Estelle Sharp discovered her son wearing Allene’s ring, she demanded that he return it.

When Dudley brought it over to the Hughes’s home and attempted to give it back, Sonny burst into tears and threatened to jump out of an upstairs window. Instead of accepting the return of the jewelry, Allene graciously told Dudley he could keep the ring. He would wear the ring eight more years until he was forced to hock it when he was strapped for cash.

When Sonny was only ten years old, Allene became determined that he be crowned king of the May Day Fête at Christ Church Cathedral, which she and Big Howard attended when her husband wasn’t riding the rails in his private car with fancily dressed prostitutes guzzling French champagne.

His paid companions entertained him when he wasn’t sitting at table playing poker for high stakes with oilmen to whom he was hawking his new drill bit.

Allene wrote to her church rector, claiming “Sonny is both tall and well-mannered and would make a most excellent King of the May Day Fête. I’m enclosing a check for one thousand dollars to ensure your event will be a big success!” The grateful rector responded that Sonny would definitely rule over the festivities.

For the event, Allene had his costume custom-tailored. He was a vision in green velvet with gold piping, wearing a lace shirt with puffed, gathered sleeves and a white lace collar. Attached to his lean shoulders was a gold cape with a crimson-colored satin lining.

Dudley was rather contemptuous of the honor, claiming that “the other boys at the school thought being king was just for sissies.” That point of view led to an argument, and Sonny struck at Dudley. The much stronger Dudley punched Sonny in the face, bleeding his nose.

Fearing that Allene would not let him see Dudley again if she heard of this violence, Sonny told her he fell off his bike. She put him to bed for three days and demanded that her doctor appear at ten every morning. Three days later when Sonny was allowed to return to school, he made up with his friend.

Later in life, Dudley said, “Being king was real important to Sonny, even if his crown were made of paper. He told me that he was thrilled when he surveyed the other forty-two boys and girls. His ‘subjects’ were dressed in white togas. Sonny said it was at that May Day thing that he decided he wanted to rule over other people and never take orders from anyone again—except his mother.”



Howard Jr. at age 16

Two weeks after the May Day event, Sonny's dentist, Dr. Walter Scherer, reported seeing the boy, along with Dudley, enter Mabel's Luncheonette for a sandwich. Sonny ordered a chicken salad sandwich, Dudley opting for a chocolate milkshake. "When Howard was served the sandwich, he took one bite out of it and declared the mayonnaise rancid. He pushed his plate right off the table and onto the floor. The boy was a real pistol!"

Sonny continued to take his promotion to royalty seriously. In spite of his soft-spoken manner, suggesting humility, Howard Hughes Jr. in time became imperious. His future aide, Noah Dietrich, labeled him "a despot," sometimes behind his back calling his boss "Howard the Arrogance."

It was while enrolled at Prosser that Sonny began to break his strong bond with his mother. In the past she had always arrived ten minutes before school let out to retrieve her son. She would not let him out of her sight until it was time for classes to begin the following morning.

Somehow Sonny prevailed on Allene to allow him to spend his late afternoons with Dudley at a workshop that Walter Sharp had constructed for his son behind their home at the intersection of Eagle and Main Streets. With its beautiful landscaping and old oak trees, the Sharp home resembled Twelve Oaks in the yet-to-be-made film, *Gone With the Wind*.

Both Sonny and Dudley weren't interested in school books, but in mechanics, or anything electronic. The boys built a ham radio set, lifting some of the parts from the Sharp family doorbell. They were among the first government-licensed ham radio ham operators, with the call letters of 5CY. With their transmitter, Dudley and Sonny began to broadcast their own show, mainly comments about the hot weather. Neighbors within a sixteen-block radius of their workshop began tuning in to their show.

With his wireless broadcasting set, Sonny could communicate with ships in the Gulf of Mexico. When he discovered that the bleeps and dashes from these vessels were really Morse Code, he taught himself the code. "Within a week, he was talking to these ships," Dudley claimed. "It was amazing. Unlike me, my best friend was a genius."

Sonny convinced Dudley they should learn to play music so they could entertain their listeners. At first Sonny tried to play the ukulele but quickly switched to the saxophone, convincing Dudley that he should learn the instrument too. Dudley, after less than a month, decided "my mama didn't raise no saxophone player" and abandoned his lessons. A determined Sonny, however, stuck to the saxophone, driving Allene crazy with the noise, which she described as "Sonny's tootlings."

He would continue to play the saxophone, with utterly no tune, in lonely hotel rooms for years to come.

Tragedy struck the Sharp family on November 28, 1912 when Walter Sharp died of a heart attack at the age of forty-two, leaving Dudley and his mother, Estelle, bereft. That afternoon Dudley came by the Hughes household to tell Allene and Sonny the sad news.

Sonny tightly embraced Dudley as the young boy sobbed at the loss of his father. As Allene witnessed the scene, she was sympathetic to a point. But, apparently, she felt the embrace had gone on too long. Very gently she pried Sonny from Dudley's arms and suggested that he'd better go back to the Sharp home to comfort Estelle.

The next week the reality of the situation dawned on Estelle, as she found herself in partnership with Big Howard and his profligate spending habits. Among other items, he was billing the tool company for his wardrobe, as he wanted to be known as the best dressed man in America. So lavish was his wardrobe that when he traveled, he rented a separate rail car with a valet just for his clothing and shoes.

Without telling Allene, Estelle also discovered that her partner was charging "entertainment" costs to the company, including jewelry he purchased for his prostitutes.

Unable to tolerate this behavior, she sold her shares in the tool company for \$65,000 to Ed Prather, one of the biggest mistakes a woman ever made in America's booming Edwardian age. With the new drill bit, the company would one day be worth billions.

Prather, too, tried to control the lavish spending of Big Howard but to no avail. To show him who was really the boss, Big Howard changed the name of the company to the Hughes Tool Company on February 3, 1915.

When Prather could take it no more, he sold out to Big Howard. Since most of this buy-out was in cash and under the table, the exact sum was not disclosed. But it can be assumed that Prather sold his interest in the company for a fraction of its worth.

Hoping to loosen Sonny from his mother's skirttails, Big Howard prevailed upon Allene to send their son to Camp Teedyuskung in the Pocono Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania. It was the summer of 1916. The head master of the camp was Daniel Carter Beard, who six years earlier had been one of the founders of Boy Scouts of America.

He was known for taking "silver-spooners"—young boys born to rich families—and turning them into rugged Buckskin Men after a summer of hiking, camping, canoeing, tent living, and flapjack frying in the mountain wilds.

Only after extreme urging on the part of her husband did Allene agree to escort Sonny to the camp, with the understanding that after she deposited him at the camp, she'd stay in New York City for an extended visit. Once she reached the Poconos, she received endless assurances from Beard that her son's health, including his stools, would be carefully monitored. Sonny was enrolled in a "stockade" (a rustic communal dormitory) on June 28.

Only a week after her return to New York City, Allene was overcome with panic as she read news articles of the spread of infantile paralysis in Brooklyn and elsewhere in the United States. She'd heard that one of the Buckskin boys had a "flu like virus," and she feared that he might spread polio to her son. Beard wrote back and reassured her that Sonny was gaining weight and growing healthier by the day, and that the boy with the flu would be placed in quarantine until he was well again.

Throughout the coming weeks, Allene continued to bombard Beard with letters, each one of which was answered with the scoutmaster's reassurances that her little Sonny was doing very well. "And, yes, his bowels are just fine," Beard added as a postscript, "although I don't relish the job of inspecting them every day."

When Allene could no longer stand the separation from Sonny, she arrived at camp on August 21 and abruptly checked him out, in spite of Beard's pleadings to let him remain.

Sonny's fellow Buckskin Men made fun of him when Allene appeared on the scene in a chauffeur-driven black limousine, complete with maid and eight large trunks. She personally packed Sonny's Russian mineral oils, the patent medicines she'd insisted he take to camp, and his elaborate wardrobe, all of which he'd never worn since the day he enrolled.

With Sonny beside her, Allene fled to Cleveland to wait out the summer polio scare at the home of Felix, her husband's younger brother and a teacher of light opera.

From Cleveland, she wrote Big Howard that she'd rescued "my little chick." During the rest of the summer, Allene lectured Sonny on the dangers he'd face if he came down with polio and how his life would be ruined. In graphic and vivid detail, she described the horrors of "any and all" diseases that he would suffer if he came into contact with germs. At times, according to her brother-in-law, Allene reduced Sonny to tears. He would run screaming in fear to his room.

Thus, the phobia to germs that would haunt the rest of his life was instilled in him during that summer of 1916, if not before.

The other fear she had was that Sonny was growing so fast that his feet might not fit his shoes. She insisted on measuring his feet every morning and then examining the fit of his shoes. She warned Sonny that if this weren't done, he might wake up and not be able to walk. "One morning," she told him in front of Felix, "I'll be able to get up. But when I look back at you, both your feet and legs will be paralyzed. You'll never be able to walk again in your life and will be totally dependent on me." As she delivered that lecture to Sonny, he sobbed in fear.

Allene very tenderly would wipe away his tears and assure him, "If that horrible day ever comes when you can't walk, I'll become your legs."

In light of events to come, it was as if she were an eerie prophet.

Although Sonny begged his mother to be allowed to return to Camp Teedyuskung the following summer, she refused. Big Howard had just acquired a sixty-foot yacht, *Rollerbit*, which he claimed he'd had equipped "Vanderbilt and Astor style" with brass railings, teakwood floors, mahogany trim, and even real gold fixtures in the green marble-clad bathrooms.

With a crew, Big Howard took Allene, Sonny, and Dudley on several cruises in the Gulf of Mexico.

Although his mother demanded that he sleep with her in her cabin, Sonny defied her, perhaps for the first time. He wanted his own cabin, to which he invited Dudley to share his bed.

One morning when Allene entered her son's cabin without knocking, she found Sonny and Dudley asleep in each other's arms. After she'd ordered Dudley from the cabin, she gave Sonny the most thorough inspection he'd ever endured, claiming she was looking for "telltale clues." Later in the day, she complained bitterly to Big Howard, who assured her that nothing was wrong. "All boys go through a stage like that—even myself." He told her that she would either let Dudley continue to sleep with Sonny or else, "as captain of this vessel, I'll have you walk the plank."

Back in Houston, Sonny continued to lobby to go to Camp Teedyuskung, and Allene consistently refused.

With Dudley back in his own home, Allene resumed sleeping with her son. One night he woke her up, crying out that "my body is hurting all over. I'm in pain. Help me, mother!"

In the middle of the night, Allene summoned her doctor who could find nothing wrong with the boy. Sonny continued to cry out in pain. He told the doctor that he needed the bracing air of lake and mountain at the camp and reminded him how much healthier he was when he'd returned from camp last summer.

Allene steadfastly refused to let him go until Big Howard returned from one of his trips. Seeing what bad shape Sonny was in, his father made arrangements for the boy to be sent by train to the Poconos, with a black chauffeur, named "Jonnie Johnson," accompanying him. In spite of Allene's objections, Sonny prevailed upon his father to let Dudley go with him.

Allene warned her husband that he was making a "big mistake," as she'd begun to fear Sonny's attachment to Dudley. She couldn't quite articulate her concerns other than saying, "Dudley is old for his age—much too mature for such a young boy. It's like he's three or four years older than Sonny—not the same age at all."

She fired off a letter to the camp's director, Beard, telling him that he had to continue to inspect Sonny's stool every morning, measure his shoe size, and see that he takes his Russian mineral oil. She added a postscript. "Sonny is forbidden to eat the camp's flapjacks which are bad for his health. While I'm on the subject, I also forbid you to feed flapjacks to Dudley too."

Before Beard had a chance to respond, Allene had written him another letter, warning him that Sonny was "overly sensitive," and that none of the "camp bullies" should be allowed to taunt him.

Beard began to write completely contradictory letters to Allene and Big Howard. After Sonny had been to camp for two weeks, Beard hailed his progress to Allene, citing his bird studies and his scout-crafting skills.

To Big Howard, he painted a different portrait. "Dudley Sharp virtually seems to own your son, protecting him day and night and not letting him mingle with the other boys. They share the same stockade and seem inseparable and will not indulge in activities that don't involve each other. Howard's favorite counselors from last year have joined the Army and your boy is not getting along with the new gang."

As Allene was later to learn, Dudley and Beard had conflicted several times over "exactly who is Howard's boss—you or me?"

In late July, Beard wrote a private and confidential letter to Big Howard. In the letter, not intended for Allene's eyes, he told Hughes Sr. that he'd walked into Howard's stockade and had caught the two boys masturbating each other.

"We just can't allow this at camp," Beard said. "As a founder of the Boy Scouts, I have instilled in our platform our motto of good, clean living. The

Boy Scouts cannot—and will not—tolerate even the suggestion of deviant behavior.”

On the same day, Beard wrote Allene that “Both boys are doing fine and are enjoying camp life to its fullest.”

Since Big Howard was away on one of his trips, Allene read both letters, including the one just for the eyes of her husband.

She became hysterical and called Estelle Sharp to tell her of what she’d learned. Like Big Howard had done, Estelle assured her that “it was just a phase,” and that Allene would make it worse by “making a Federal case out of it.”

Not listening to Estelle’s advice, Allene packed her clothes that day and boarded a train for New York. From there, she planned to have a chauffeur drive her to Camp Teedyuskung where she was going to forcibly remove Sonny from the camp, leaving Dudley to get home however he might.

She did not warn her husband of her impending arrival and headed directly for the lavish suite the two of them occupied at the Vanderbilt Hotel whenever they were in New York together.

Ordering the bellhops to bring up her luggage, she went to the suite and was let in by the assistant manager, Frank Gargan, who knew her well from previous visits.

Inside the darkened living room, she headed for the master bedroom to wake up Big Howard. Turning on the light to confront him, she found him lying naked in bed with one of the most beautiful teenage girls she’d ever seen.

“Okay, okay,” Big Howard said angrily, sitting up sleepily on white satin pillows. The shapely beauty awoke at the same time, rubbing sleep from her eyes.

“You’ve caught me,” he told Allene. “I can’t lie.” He looked at the beautiful girl. “I might as well introduce the two of you. Allene, this is Eleanor Boardman. Eleanor, this is my wife.”

Allene ran screaming from the bedroom threatening to kill herself by jumping from one of the windows of the suite’s living room. The scene was eerily evocative of her son’s earlier threat to jump to his death from their home.

Dudley and Sonny were allowed to stay at camp until it closed for the summer. Beard had tried to transfer Dudley to another stockade until Sonny threatened to run away if he did. Relenting, Beard gave in and let the two boys continue to sleep together.

He figured it was up to Big Howard to send instructions after reading his letter. To his surprise, Beard never received any reply from Big Howard. Also to his amazement, he never received any more letters from Allene either, and she’d been bombarding him with mail all summer.

Three days before the camp closed, Allene wrote him that she’d be sending her black driver, Jonnie, to pick up both Dudley and Sonny. He would drive them to New York where all three of them would then board the train back to Houston.

What Sonny didn’t know, and would not know for several years, was that his mother had been given a far greater problem than Dudley.

She was having to expand the boundaries of her marriage to accommodate the stunning teenage girl, Eleanor Boardman, a model for Eastman Kodak.

Montecito, California, 1985

One of the grand divas of silent pictures, and eventually, the wife of director King Vidor, Eleanor Boardman today is a largely forgotten figure. Her role in the lives of Howard Hughes Senior and Junior has never before been fully revealed.

Inside her Spanish-style home in Montecito, California in the 1980s, Eleanor was still statuesque, patrician, and sophisticated, evoking a character from F. Scott Fitzgerald’s “Lost Generation.”

Still candid in her remarks, she lived up to her long-standing reputation as “The Most Outspoken Woman in Hollywood.”

With the passage of time, and with most of her films turned to dust, Eleanor had remained very down-to-earth, rather realistic in her appraisals, and devoid of the theatricality that encapsulated many other stars of her era. In speaking of “Big Howard” and his son, she had a bittersweet tone in her voice.

She first met Big Howard in 1916 in the lobby of the Vanderbilt Hotel in New York where he was staying in a suite with his wife. Eleanor was lodged at the same hotel with her fiercely religious and overprotective mother.

“Mother and I were sitting across from Mr. and Mrs. Hughes having tea,” Eleanor recalled as if it were yesterday. The Philadelphia-born beauty said she recognized Hughes because his picture had recently appeared in the New York papers, although she couldn’t recall why. “I couldn’t help but notice that, in spite of his wife’s disapproval, he was staring at me as if I were a chocolate fudge sundae and he hadn’t eaten in days. He was making me uncomfortable, but exciting me at the same time. Even in those days I had a wisecrack for every occasion. When he kept staring and staring, I up and told him, ‘If you keep looking for one more minute, you’ll have to pay admission.’”

She remembered him flushing red with embarrassment. He immediately apologized, stood up, and said, “You ought to be in pictures.” She leaned back in her chair in her courtyard in Montecito and laughed. “Remember, this was 1916. That cliché line wasn’t so old back then. Like the true gentleman he was, he came over and introduced himself. Mother nodded politely. When introduced, I smiled my best model portfolio smile at Allene Hughes. From that moment, both of us just knew we were natural-born enemies.”

After the introductions, Hughes had eyes only for Eleanor, telling her that he was a talent scout for his brother, Rupert Hughes, in Hollywood. Rupert was already a celebrated writer in his day. One of his movies, *Gloria’s Romance*, which he’d co-written with his second wife, Adelaide Manola, was doing big box office. It starred Miss Billie Burke, “that apostle of happiness.”

“Hughes wasn’t the prettiest man I’d ever met, but I’d heard he was a very rich oilman from Texas,” Eleanor said. “His son Howard turned into a great beauty. Those looks came from his mother’s side of the family. Initially, I was impressed with Big Howard’s diamond cufflinks and his diamond stickpin. But Allene also wore diamonds, even though it was the afternoon.”

Eleanor claimed that Big Howard’s words were “like an explosion of dreams inside my head. More than anything I wanted to be a film actress, although mother thought films were wicked, even though she didn’t mind me being a model for Kodak. Right away, I figured Hughes was my meal ticket to Hollywood—how wrong I was! I’d heard stories about how beautiful young girls like me screwed their way to the top, and I was ready and raring to surrender my virginity to the right man who came along.”

When Hughes handed Eleanor his business card, his broad, rough hand caressed her more delicate porcelain one and lingered a bit too long. Their bonding was interrupted by Allene, who complained of a headache and demanded to be taken up to her suite.

The actress claimed that when Allene returned to Texas three days later, Hughes called her right after he’d escorted his wife to Grand Central. “He

invited me over that night to a champagne dinner at his suite,” Eleanor said. “I made up some lie for mother. Big Howard was very courtly. As I fully expected, the dirty deed happened that night in the same bed where he’d made love to his wife. When I told him I was a virgin, he at first didn’t believe me. But when I convinced him, he became so excited he could hardly control himself. He was very gentle with me and actually taught me how to make love to a man.”

Eleanor remembered how in the weeks ahead, their love-making grew more robust as she became more experienced. “I refused oral sex, however. He told me most nice gals, including his wife, said no to that. He said it was okay with him because plenty of prostitutes were always available for that.”

Before he left New York, Hughes had confessed that he loved his wife but not in a sexual way, claiming that she was frigid. “He said that Allene was really in love with their son, and he didn’t know what to do about that—‘except get our boy out of her clutches as often and as soon as possible.’”

“Today in a more enlightened age,” Eleanor said, “we’d call both father and son ‘child molesters’—and so they were. I was a bit old for Big Howard at the time, having just turned eighteen. He told me that he and his fellow oilmen often slept with girls sixteen or even younger. He said that some of his best sex was with a beautiful thirteen-year-old girl. Since I’d grown up in an era where old men often married teenage gals, I didn’t find that a particularly strange custom.”

When Eleanor was forced to say good-bye to Hughes, who was returning to Texas, she broke down and cried. Her hurt feelings were soothed somewhat when he presented her with a pair of diamond earrings.

Hughes later told her that wherever he went in America, he saw the picture of her as “The ‘Kodak Girl,’” plastered on billboards, in drug stores, and in train stations. Eleanor was posed in a homemade black-and-white striped dress, standing in a field of daisies with a camera thrown over her shoulder.

“Young women I was meeting in the theater—when mother finally left me in an all-girl hotel—told me that Hughes was very promiscuous and that he’d never call me again.”

That was hardly the case. “He’d left a standing order that I was to be delivered fresh American Beauty roses every day,” Eleanor said. “Within two weeks of checking out of the Vanderbilt, he was calling me to arrange another rendezvous.”

With complete candor, Eleanor claimed that during the short life of Howard Hughes Sr., she was his only long-time mistress. “With all the other floozies,” she said, “it was strictly one-night stands. I think for a while he was actually in love with me, and often spoke of divorcing his wife and marrying me. But the star-launch he’d promised with Rupert Hughes was a long time coming. Howard Sr. looked like a stern-faced Presbyterian deacon, but was a fantastic lover. I was enthralled with him until one afternoon when he unceremoniously dumped me. But that was in the early Twenties, before I became a star. It’s a story for another day.”

Houston, 1916

The exact details of the agreement that was formulated between Big Howard and Allene on the train back to Houston will never be known. But by the time Sonny had finished summer camp, the new rules around the Hughes home had become apparant.

In the aftermath of Allene catching her husband in bed with Eleanor Boardman, she informed him that he’d be denied any conjugal visits. In addition, Allene was granted complete control over her offspring, telling Howard Sr. that he would not be allowed to interfere in the rearing of her son.

At the end of the summer, when Dudley and Sonny arrived from camp at the train station in Houston, Allene was there to meet her boy. She warmly embraced him but didn’t speak to Dudley, who was rescued by his own mother, Estelle. En route home, Allene informed Sonny that he was not to speak to “the Sharp boy ever again.”

Outwardly, Sonny agreed to her demands. But privately, he had no intention of obeying her and would continue his very intimate friendship with Dudley for years to come. He simply defied his mother, but in secret.

For the new school term, he was enrolled at Houston’s Montrose School, which was close to the elegant Beaconfield Apartments where Big Howard had installed his family in a lavish duplex suite with three bedrooms. He had agreed to sell their house after Allene had decided that she preferred apartment living instead of life within a house and garden. At the Beaconfield, Big Howard was assigned a room down the hall from his wife.

Since he had been ostracized from his wife’s bedroom, Big Howard in time became an accomplice of Sonny’s in circumventing his mother’s rigid demands. After Allene refused to go, Howard Sr. took his son yachting in the Gulf of Mexico. He occasionally invited him on special train rides across the country. On each of these trips, he arranged for Dudley to go along too. Allene never found out about this deception, although Dudley’s mother, Estelle, was privy to what was happening.

Big Howard didn’t want to know the exact nature of any personal intimacies between Sonny and Dudley. What impressed him more was that Sonny was defying Allene. Without knowing the exact details of his wife’s relationship with his boy, he instinctively sensed that it was an unhealthy detour.

His father promised Sonny that as soon as he was old enough, he would send him to school back East.

“I might be pulling up stakes in Texas myself,” Big Howard told Sonny. “Relocating in Los Angeles.” Sonny’s romance-writing uncle, Rupert, was dazzling his brother with possibilities of “endless sexual conquests among the most beautiful girls in the world.” Rupert claimed that the cream of America’s young women, often still in their teens, were arriving daily at Los Angeles’ Union Station, and most of them were “available for plucking—that’s plucking, but it also sounds like something even better.”

The only person privy to the private relationship of Allene and Sonny was Dudley himself, who later claimed that “Sonny told me everything that was going on.” Dudley only betrayed young Howard’s confidence when their personal relationship broke up and he was bitterly rejected.

Based entirely on what Dudley later revealed, we know that Allene was not at all severe during her talks to her son about what she’d learned from Beard at summer camp. “I recognize that you are growing up and have the needs of all young men entering puberty,” Allene reportedly said. “It’s only natural.”

“You aren’t mad at me?” Sonny asked.

“Not at all,” she responded. “But we must change the rules somewhat. What you did with Dudley is wrong and must never be repeated. Women were put on the face of the earth to satisfy such needs in a man. One day you’ll marry some fine woman right here in Houston. Since you’re young and your judgment might be questionable, I’ll pick her out for you myself. In the meantime, I will find a way to cope with your growing needs.”

After his return from summer camp, according to Dudley, Sonny was no longer dressed at night in the lingerie that Allene had attired him in when he

was younger. He now started to sleep naked in the same bed with his mother, although Allene insisted that she wear a nightgown.

“I get a hard-on when she touches me real intimate,” Sonny confided to Dudley. “Sometimes at night, she holds me so tight I can hardly breathe. One night she played with me. She told me it would provide some relief to me. I began to like it and sometimes I let her play with me three or four times a night. It does cut down on my being so nervous.”

Sonny once heard one of the boys at school talk about what he’d gotten a girl to do with his penis, claiming she’d taken it in her mouth and “swallowed my seed.” That night Sonny begged Allene to do that to him, but she adamantly refused.

“Instead she brought out a pink porcelain bowl,” Sonny told Dudley. “Mother would approach me with the bowl and play with me even when I didn’t want it. But I always came through for her—so to speak.”

During the course of her masturbatory relationship with her son, Allene refused to allow him to touch himself, claiming that privilege for herself.

And then the relationship with her son took an even more bizarre turn. After months of masturbating her son, she suddenly cut off the practice, claiming it was a “nasty thing to do.” She told him he was never to masturbate himself again. Sonny got around that restriction by slipping off to see Dudley where they continued to occasionally indulge in mutual masturbation.

One night when Sonny came home, Allene had a servant prepare his favorite dinner of steak and peas. She told him that she had a big surprise waiting for him in her bedroom where she wanted to retire to bed with him quite early that evening.

An hour later, upstairs in the privacy of their shared bedroom, Allene ordered Sonny to remove all his clothing so she could bathe him.

Instead of her usual lye soap, she brought out a delicately perfumed lavender soap. After bathing him, she toweled him dry but for some reason did not indulge in her usual examination of his body parts.

She put a big towel around him and led him into the dressing room that adjoined her master bedchamber.

There, laid out on a silk-upholstered divan were four lavishly tailored dresses. “I want you to imagine you’re a model and try on each of these for me. I think when you’re in them, you’ll look even more beautiful than you already are.”

“Do I have to, mother?”

“You must do it for me, son,” she said, kissing him gently on the lips.

“But why?” he protested.

“It has taken me a long time to face the truth. But I’ve come to realize that you are a lovely girl who’s trapped in a boy’s body.”

CHAPTER TWO

Hollywood, 1917

It was one of those blistering hot afternoons that Texans by August 23, 1917 had learned to endure.

Slipping out of his house, Sonny had told Allene he was going for a ride on his bicycle. That was true. He was also planning a forbidden visit with Dudley.

As the afternoon broiled, Sonny and Dudley seemed to be the only life moving on the block. Still dressed in their uniforms from Camp Teedyuskung, with their pointed caps, the boys retired to their workshop.

There they indulged in a ritual common to boys in a pre-AIDS era. It was Sonny who proposed that he delicately slice his wrist with a sharp knife and that Dudley do the same. That way their bloods could mingle into a bond of friendship that would last always. At first reluctant, Dudley agreed to go along with his best friend.

Big Howard had raised Sonny's allowance from ten dollars a week to twenty dollars a week, an amount that was considered a very good paycheck at the time. Since he didn't need the money, Sonny gave Dudley ten dollars a week from his allowance. That allowed Dudley "to buy anything I wanted at the store," as he later put it.

Sonny cut his wrist until it was bleeding profusely, and cut even deeper into Dudley, which brought tears to the boy's eyes. As Dudley later recalled, "our blood flowed together. From that day on, until I began to interpret things differently, Sonny and I were bonded at the hip like Siamese twins."

As Dudley bandaged Sonny's wrist, before tending to his own, Sonny told him that he was going to tell Allene that he fell off his bicycle and cut his wrist on a piece of glass.

Fully bandaged, the two boys walked into the wilting family garden. In the cauldronlike heat, Sonny looked up at the sky and said the he would pray "that ten thousand angels would weep crocodile tears and cool off the damn place."

His wish wasn't granted. If anything, the already fiery hot day was heating up dangerously in another part of the town, only three miles away.

Unknown to him at the time, Sonny's life would forever be altered by events that would occur later on that infamous day.

In another part of town, the 24th Infantry Division of the Third Battalion was a tightly knit, supremely macho, all-black section of the National Guard. Shortly before the United States declared war on Germany, its members were sent by train from their regimental encampment at Columbus, New Mexico, to Houston. They were assigned to guard the military installation being constructed by white laborers at Camp Logan. From the day of their arrival, the black men were subjected to racial slurs from the camp laborers.

On the second day after their arrival, the guardsmen were visited by the police chief of Houston. He told them he didn't know or care where they came from. "But as long as you're in Houston, you're to act like good niggers and behave yourself—or else! We can even regulate which water fountain you Ubangi boys can slurp from."

On the afternoon of August 23, two white policemen arrested a black guardsman when he attempted to interfere with their beating of a drunken black woman. When Corporal Charles Baltimore, one of a dozen military policemen assigned to the division, went to the local police station to inquire about the soldier's arrest, he got into a fight with another policeman assigned to the division and was hit over the head with a rifle. When he attempted to flee, two policemen chased him and found him in an unoccupied house where he was shot in the shoulder.

Taken to a local hospital, Baltimore ultimately survived. But word reached his fellow guardsmen that he'd been killed. The men of the 24th division were sweating in overheated barracks and their tempers rose with the temperature outside.

Their anger raging, the guardsmen, under the supervision of their sergeant, a muscular black man named Vida Henry, who'd been a boxer, hastily organized a vigilante party. At seven o'clock the division marched into the San Felipe section of Houston where Baltimore had been shot.

Seeing the marching men, Houston Police Captain Joseph Mattes defiantly confronted them from his open car. He ordered the march to halt. Henry shot and killed him and his two fellow officers.

From that point on, all eyewitness reports differ from each other. What is known is that the 24th went on a rampage, killing white men, women, and even children, on sight and without provocation.

The riot raged for three hours, causing panic throughout the city. White men, fearing attack, broke into local stores, stealing rifles and ammunition. Each man claimed that he was going to protect his family "at all costs."

The governor of Texas, James Ferguson, summoned white Army reinforcements stationed in Galveston. Hundreds of self-appointed vigilantes took control of the streets, with vaguely defined orders to shoot *all* black men on sight.

Before the night was over, sixteen white men, women and children had been killed, along with four black men. Another twelve were seriously wounded.

Retreating with his men back to their sweltering barracks, Sergeant Henry committed suicide by firing a bullet into his head.

Military tribunals later indicted 118 of the enlisted men and found 110 of them guilty. Nineteen of the mutinous soldiers were hanged, and another 63 received life sentences. No white officers or civilians were brought to trial.

When Sonny at the Sharp house heard about the riot, he quickly bicycled back home "to protect my mother rom the niggers." The exact details of what happened that night in the Hughes household will never be known. Years later, Dudley tried to reconstruct the events based on what Sonny had told him.

Back at the Hughes household, Sonny couldn't find his mother or her two black servants.

Finally, he heard sobs coming from her bedroom. In the room, he searched for her, finding her cowering under the bed, her clothing ripped. She was sobbing so hysterically he couldn't understand what had happened to her.



Howard Jr., at age 14

With the help of a neighbor, he was able to get her moved from the bedroom and transported to the hospital. There a doctor told Sonny that his mother claimed that three of the black MPs had broken in on her and brutally raped her at gunpoint. Supporting her allegations was the fact that Allene's body was severely bruised, and she had cuts on her face and arms.

When Hughes Sr. rushed back to Houston two days later, he found his wife "serenely calm—almost bizarrely so." Her doctor told Big Howard that there were no signs of his wife having been raped, and that he suspected her cuts and bruises were self-inflicted. Allene was referred to as "a sexual hysteric."

In the weeks ahead, Allene kept Sonny close to her protective arms. No longer talking about germs, she filled his head with fears that black men not only rape women but pretty white boys as well. She told him that their penises were three times the size of a white man's and that when they raped young boys they often caused permanent damage to their guts, similar to what her body had suffered while giving birth to him.

In the years ahead, Howard maintained that he had been caught "right in the middle of the race riot." At times, he also claimed that he was struck in the head with the rifle butt of a black guardsman, permanently damaging his hearing. In reality, he was completely unharmed and never encountered one of the rampaging guardsmen.

The overheated events of that August night in Houston, combined with Allene's horrific stories of her brutal alleged rape, would have a profound affect on Howard for the rest of his life.

Las Vegas, 1968

On April 4, 1968, in his Las Vegas office, an older Howard Hughes Jr. sat listening to his television broadcast news about the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. During the nation-wide turmoil that followed the assassination, memories of that August night in Houston must have been evoked.

He called in an assistant and dictated this memo:

I can summarize my attitude about employing more Negroes very simply. I think it's a wonderful idea for somebody else, somewhere else. I know this is not a very praiseworthy point of view, but I feel that Negroes have already made enough progress in the last century, and there is such a thing as overdoing it.

Howard Hughes

Houston, 1918-19

Allene never forgave Big Howard for being out of town when the race riots exploded. In vivid detail, she continued to describe her assault from "those slimy, smelly niggers."

Believing that all black men carried venereal disease, she journeyed to her doctor in Houston for any sign of infection. Even though several doctors diagnosed her as "out of harm's way," Allene was convinced that she had "latent syphilis," which could not be detected by doctors but which might burst out at any minute and destroy her delicate but otherwise healthy body.

As a concession to Allene, Big Howard agreed to erect a big and "secure" two-floor house for his family in the exclusive Montrose district of Houston "where the elite resided." A Georgian styled brick residence with marble floors, five bedrooms, and a garage large enough for two long limousines, it was a respectable addition to the neighborhood. The address was 3921 Yoakum Street, north of Rice Institute, and Big Howard brought his wife and son to live there in the summer of 1918.

Dan Beard seemed to have survived his ordeal of catching Dudley and Sonny masturbating and invited both of them back to Camp Teedyuskung. The director even promised that the newer recruits at camp—called "Buckskin Tenderfoots"—would address Sonny as "Sir" and that as a sign of his seniority Allene's boy would wear three red stripes on his shirt.

But when she learned that Dudley had already signed up for another summer, Allene steadfastly refused to allow her boy to return to camp. In 1918, mother and son jointly weathered another fiery summer together in Houston.

Sonny's interest quickly shifted from bikes to America's new fascination—the automobile. Without telling his parents, at the age of fourteen, young Howard descended on The Stutzy Automobile Purchasing Agency in downtown Houston where the newly arrived 1920 version of the latest Bearcat caught his eye.

As salesman, Jack Horner, later reported, "I didn't pay much attention to the boy, thinking he had just come to admire the cars. In fact, I didn't even get up to greet him. The boy had to come over to me. Finally, he did. He said, 'I'm Howard Hughes Jr. I want to buy that Bearcat. I don't care what it costs. Send it over today' He scribbled his address on a sheet of paper, handed it to me, and walked out of the showroom."

Horner thought it might be some sort of prank. On an impulse, he went and called Hughes Sr. at his tool company, reporting that his son wanted the latest Bearcat even though it bore a staggering price tag of seven- thousand dollars. "I told Hughes that it was the fastest thing on the road and could go at the then-incredible speed of ninety miles an hour."

"Did my son say he wanted it?" Hughes Sr. asked.

"Yeah, he wants it delivered to your house," Horner said.

"If that's what my boy said, you'd better haul ass and get it over there."

Once the Bearcat was delivered, Sonny immediately set about taking it apart and reassembling the roadster piece by piece.

When he'd done that, he invited Big Howard and Allene for a drive in the country.



Eleanor Boardman

Without a lesson, he'd taught himself how to drive.

In spite of Allene bursting into screams two or three times, the ride went smoothly. Eventually, Howard Hughes Jr. would become a natural and intuitive pilot of any vehicle on land or in the air.

One day in early May 1919, Sonny overheard his mother pleading with his father on the telephone. Somehow, she'd learned that Big Howard wasn't in New York, as he had told her, but had taken the train to Philadelphia, the home town of Eleanor Boardman. He had checked into the city's best hotel, where he was entertaining the beautiful young Kodak model and her dreams of movie stardom.

Sonny heard Allene threatening to divorce his father if he didn't abandon his new love. Allene must have know of her husband's dalliances with other women, but this romance with Eleanor threatened her more than any of the others.

Sonny did not hear the rest of the conversation because he retreated upstairs to bed for the rest of the day. When Allene discovered him there, she offered to call the family doctor. But Sonny claimed it wasn't necessary.

Growing taller and with his body filling out, he had recently taken up basketball at he YMCA. He was also becoming skilled at diving and swimming. Claiming that all this vigorous physical exercise had tested his endurance, he demanded total rest for the remainder of the day.

He also insisted that she black out the room with draperies, an eerie evocation of a demand that he would repeatedly make to his Mormon attendants throughout the final decades of his life.

She arose early the following morning. Although she called for him to get up several times, there was no answer. Sensing that something was wrong, she ran back to the bedroom.

"Mother!" he shouted at her. "My legs! I can't move them."

Screaming hysterically, Allene tore the covers from him and began to massage his legs but to no avail. Her worst nightmare had come true. Sonny was paralyzed. On the phone to their doctor, Frederick Lummis, she demanded that he come at once. "Sonny has polio!"

Doctor Lummis arrived to examine Sonny that morning, and informed Allene of what she already knew. Her son had all the signs of infantile paralysis. On the phone from Philadelphia, Big Howard promised to take the next train to Houston.

That night, Allene held Sonny in her arms. He seemed strangely relieved, as he would later relate to Dudley. "Now—maybe—you and father won't

get a divorce. I'll need both of my parents to take care of me now."

Within two days, Big Howard arrived back in Houston. He immediately telephoned the director of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research in New York, wanting only the best for his son.

Dr. Simon Flexner, the country's greatest expert on polio and meningitis research, could not come to Houston but agreed to send his most trusted associate, Dr. H. T. Chickering.

What transpired next became a secret between Dr. Chickering and Sonny.

Howard Hughes Jr. would spend the rest of his life "buying people." Testing the power of money, the first person he "bought" was Dr. Chickering.

Mackinac Island, Michigan, 1919

After six weeks as Howard Jr.'s private physician in Houston, Dr. Chickering agreed to accompany the wheelchair-bound Sonny and Allene to one of the most prestigious hotels of the Robber Baron Age, the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island. Standing on 500 acres of lawns and gardens overlooking the Straits of Mackinac, between the upper and lower peninsulas of Michigan, midway between Lakes Huron and Michigan, it was one of the most stylish midsummer venues in America at the time. Guests fanned themselves on a 600-foot pillared verandah (according to the *Guinness Book of Records*, it's the longest open-air verandah in the country), while seated in upholstered rocking chairs. Modern audiences might remember the hotel as the setting for *Somewhere in Time*, starring Christopher Reeve in his prime and Jane Seymour.

As part of the pomp and circumstance of their arrival, Allene had arranged for them to be picked up at the local railway station by three horse-drawn surreys that carried them, along with massive quantities of luggage and medical equipment, up to the hotel.

From the very first, as Dr. Chickering was to record in his medical journal, he knew that Sonny was perfectly healthy when he initially examined him in Houston. But his boss, Dr. Flexner, had told him that he could interpret his sojourn in Texas and on Mackinac Island as a well-deserved vacation. For his efforts, Chickering drew a high salary, with all his expenses paid, and Flexner was particularly grateful for the ten-thousand dollar check that the Rockefeller Institute had received from Big Howard.

Week after week, Dr. Chickering hovered over Sonny as protectively as Allene had done. He lifted him in and out of his wheelchair, tested his blood, and examined him thoroughly every day. Allene also conducted her own examinations.

Dr. Chickering didn't record this, but he later admitted that Sonny paid him five thousand dollars, which he'd accumulated from unspent allowances, as part of a conspiracy to keep his secret.

Every afternoon in Houston, the doctor had wheeled Sonny down Yoakum Boulevard in the Montrose section. Allene had been told it was for the fresh air. Actually the doctor was taking Sonny to Dudley's house.

Once in Dudley's backyard, Sonny would rise unassisted from his wheelchair and disappear into the workshop with Dudley for perhaps an hour and a half before being wheeled back to the Hughes home.

This charade continued from their suites at the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island. Every afternoon Sonny would be wheeled into the park. Allene never accompanied them because of her "deadly fear of wild animals and winged creatures."

As Allene enjoyed afternoon tea on the verandah of the resort, Dr. Chickering would disappear with Sonny, still in his wheelchair.

Sonny had met a twenty-three-year-old man who worked as a waiter in the resort's grand dining room. Phil Arthur had a wife stashed away somewhere back in Virginia, but he was meeting Sonny secretly every afternoon.

The young man was well-muscled and extraordinarily handsome. In spite of the difference in their ages, Sonny seemed enthralled to be in his presence.

When the doctor and his patient had moved away from the sightlines of the verandah, Sonny would rise from his wheelchair and race toward the lake where he had a rendezvous with Phil in the boathouse.

As Dr. Chickering later reported to Dr. Flexner, "Howard Hughes Jr. is a homosexual." He suspected that Sonny was paying Phil to have sex with him.

Allene had reported to the manager the theft of one-thousand dollars from her purse, blaming one of the maids. Although two maids were fired, Dr. Chickering believed that Sonny stole the money and was slowly distributing it to Phil for favors rendered.

At the end of their stay at the Grand Hotel, when they were leaving the next day, Allene was having her afternoon tea on the hotel's verandah. Suddenly, from across the wide porch, Sonny walked toward her, accompanied by Dr. Chickering. There was no wheelchair in sight.

Allene practically screamed when she spotted her son walking upright and raced to embrace him. He told her that the doctor, like some faith-healer, had miraculously cured him and that his legs felt fine. Overjoyed, Allene burst into tears.

The next morning Dr. Chickering was "richly rewarded" before his return to the Rockefeller Institute, his vacation over.

Back in Houston, Big Howard was overjoyed, marveling at his son's recovery. Abandoning Eleanor Boardman back East, he and Allene had a reconciliation.

There was more. Big Howard invited both Allene and Sonny for a yachting trip to Coronado Island off the coast of California.

After a few days on the West Coast, Sonny told both his parents that he had fallen in love with California that late summer and that he planned to live there for the rest of his life. He begged to be enrolled in school in California, claiming that his parents could come and visit him whenever they wanted to.

Allene steadfastly refused, telling him that he was to return to South End Junior High, the public school in Montrose where they lived. Although Sonny threw a temper fit, the passion that was associated with his California quest was not lost on Big Howard. But it would have to wait for another day.

Houston, 1920

In Houston, Sonny spent a disappointing year enrolled at the South End Junior High School, where his grades were “lackluster.” He had no interest in books and couldn’t wait for the school day to end so that he could slip off with Dudley.

Big Howard knew that his son’s “unnatural attachment” to his former partner’s son was continuing. Unlike Allene, he didn’t feel that forcibly cutting off the relationship was the way to handle it.

One afternoon, Big Howard invited both Dudley and his son to the Hughes Tool Company where he had set up a worktable for them. Even though Allene protested that she didn’t rear “my son to be a garage mechanic,” she reluctantly allowed him to work at the company. Big Howard challenged the boys to “invent something.”

Within Howard’s first week back from school, he and Dudley plotted to invent a “motorcycle.” A few months previously, both Big Howard and Allene had refused to purchase a motorcycle for him, even though his father had bought a roadster for him in spite of the fact that he was under aged. Like many parents, Big Howard felt that his son would be safer driving a car than a motorcycle.

In the shop, Dudley and Howard attached a small gasoline engine and a newly developed automobile self-starter to a standard pedal-driven bicycle. The boys were assisted in no small part by Big Howard’s chief engineer, Matt Boehm.

Although the contraption couldn’t go very fast, Dudley and Howard offered neighborhood kids a ride on their motorized bike for a nickel. Having never seen such a machine, concerned mothers were horrified when they spotted their offspring riding along the streets atop such a strange vehicle. Their fear was that the gasoline tank would explode and burn their children alive. It never did. In fact, it proved to be a fairly reliable vehicle until Howard abandoned it, preferring to drive around town in his roadster instead.

Howard never bothered to get a driver’s license, but told Dudley that he always kept two- hundred dollars in cash in the vehicle’s glove compartment in case a patrolman stopped him. “All cops can be bought,” Howard told Dudley, and during the decades that followed, events would prove how right he was.

The fame of the motorbike grew and on June 10, 1920, *The Houston Post* headlined the story: 14-YEAR-OLD INVENTS LIGHTER AND CHEAPER MOTORCYCLE. Dudley’s contribution wasn’t mentioned. This would be but the first of thousands of headlines in the years to come, announcing young Howard’s inventiveness to the world.

West Newton, Massachusetts, 1920-21

One night, during a dialogue with a fellow oilman on a train, after a visit to Eleanor Boardman in Philadelphia, Big Howard learned of the exclusive Fassenden School in West Newton, Massachusetts. The school was founded in 1903 in the rolling hills of one of Boston’s oldest suburbs. It even had a nine-hole golf course, a game to which Sonny was becoming addicted. Golf would later become one of his lifetime passions.

Intrigued with the prospect of sending Sonny to this school, he came to realize that he could gracefully break up the relationship his son had with Dudley and at the same time free his boy from the clutches of Allene. He also wanted to send Sonny to Harvard, following in his own footsteps, and felt that at Fassenden Sonny might take his education more seriously.

In spite of his agreement with Allene not to interfere, Big Howard decided, in his own words to his brother Rupert, “To take the bull by the horns—and just do it. After all, what can Allene possibly do to prevent it?”

When Allene learned about Big Howard’s plans for Sonny, she took to her bed where she “lay in agony” for three weeks, administered to daily by Dr. Frederick Lummis, a family friend who would eventually marry her sister, Annette.

Ignoring her protests, Big Howard boarded the train to Boston with his fourteen-year-old son, heading for Fessenden. On the way there, he couldn’t help but notice the admiring glances from young women that his son received. Painfully shy, Sonny had blossomed into an exceptionally handsome young man at six feet, three inches.

“When I take you to Hollywood and my brother Rupert gets a look at the fine man you’ve become, I bet he’ll turn you into a film star for sure. My boy, Sonny!”

It was at that point that his son informed his father that he didn’t want to be known as Sonny any more and that he had “no interest whatsoever in the flickers.”

Big Howard confessed that, in contrast, he himself was very interested in breaking into pictures as a financial backer. He claimed that Rupert was stepping up the pressure for him to relocate to Hollywood, maintaining that there was “big money” to be made in pictures, citing his own successful writing career as an example of that.

“Rupert told me that if I come to Hollywood, instead of ‘*Samuel Goldwyn Presents*’, signs will say ‘*Howard Hughes Presents*.’”

Although Big Howard would continue to flirt with the idea of backing films, mainly as a pretense to seducing the likes of Mae Murray and Eleanor Boardman, it would ultimately be his son who would inspire the mantra “*Howard Hughes Presents*”

It was aboard a long East-bound train ride that Big Howard explained to his son about the conflicting natures that almost genetically ran through the Hughes’s bloodstreams. “The Hughes siblings are a weird mixture of the practical and the flighty, the mechanical and the artistic. My two brothers and my sister became all artsy-fartsy, and I became the engineer, the inventor, the mechanic. In you, Sonny, I believe that both sides of nature exist. You’ll be a great artist of some sort—and I don’t mean a Sunday painter—and you’ll also be a great engineer like your old man. I just know it. I can feel it in you.”

The romantic streak in the Hughes family had come from Jean Amelia Summerlin, a beautiful, delicate, and sensitive woman who loved literature, art, “and all things beautiful.” She wrote poetry, was a talented musician, and read at least one potboiling romantic novel a day.

At the end of the Civil War, she’d married Felix Turner Hughes in the small Missouri town of Memphis. Felix had fought with the Missouri Militia on the side of the Union against the Confederacy. Jean on the other hand denied that she’d been born in Iowa and claimed to have been born in Virginia, site of her ancestors, because she believed that coming from the South “sounded more romantic than being born in the cornfields with pigs.”

It still remains a mystery why this romantic and frequently daydreaming woman married Felix Hughes, whom she later called “the most practical man on earth.” Schoolteacher. Lawyer. American patriot. Stern disciplinarian. The mayor of Keokuk, Iowa, from 1894 to 1896. Later judge of the superior

court in the same town.

Near the end of the 19th century, he conceived the idea of a mile-long dam across the Mississippi River to Illinois. At the time of its completion in 1913, the dam harnessed water power and stopped the flooding that had previously threatened the area. Even *The New York Times* called it “the engineering marvel of the world.”

In time Felix and Jean became parents of a daughter, Greta, born June 4, 1866, a year after the Civil War. She was followed on September 9, 1869 by their oldest son, Howard Robard Hughes, a name that he and, eventually, his own son would carry. A third child, Rupert, was born on January 31, 1872. In some ways, Rupert was the rarest of all, having rested in the womb for eleven months. “I don’t think I wanted to face the world,” Rupert later said. “At least I was born with a full head of hair.”

Another son, named after his father, Felix, was born on October 1, 1874. Yet another son, Reginald, was born in 1876, but he died in 1881. A girl, Jean, named after her mother, was born in 1880 but died a few months later. A final male child, “Baby Hughes,” was born in 1883, but died before he could be named.

As her children were growing up in Iowa, a hot summer day would find the mother, Jean (who was sometimes identified as “Mimi”), sitting in a towering cherry tree among the branches, composing her romantic plots, spinning entire novels in her head. Young Felix and Greta took an interest in music, both studying opera in Paris. Rupert would fulfill his mother’s dreams by pursuing a career as a writer, recording tales of “the glamorous life” in New York and Hollywood.

The oldest boy, Howard Sr., showed no interest in art at all. He was more fascinated by timepieces, which he would take apart to see what made them tick. He’d do the same thing with an automobile, taking it apart piece by piece and then reassembling it.

Early in his life he showed entrepreneurial skill. Since his own stern father, the judge, refused to give his brood an allowance, Howard Sr. earned his pocket money by staging cockfights for the men of the town who liked that sport’s combination of violence and gambling. When he wasn’t doing that, he was getting into brawls with the bullies in Keokuk, Iowa.

In 1895, Howard Hughes, Sr. left Iowa and set out on what he claimed was “my grand adventure in a frontier land of discovery: America itself.”

At the Fessenden School in West Newton, Howard Jr. was alone for the first time, his life brightened by daily letters from Allene that were filled with outpourings of her love. More restrained was a weekly letter from Dudley, pledging “my friendship always.”

After the first ten days at school, a shipment arrived from Houston containing grapefruits the size of small melons, and large blood-red oranges. Howard ate what he wanted and sold the other pieces of citrus to his classmates at a nickel apiece.

He didn’t need the money. Before leaving the Boston area, Big Howard gave in to Little Howard and granted him “unlimited expense money.” To appease his son, Big Howard signed a letter of credit where “the sky’s the limit.” Even among the sons of wealthy men who attended Fessenden, this was an unheard-of concession.

Fellow students reported that young Howard was shy and reclusive, even refusing to attend school dances, although several pretty girls had more or less maneuvered themselves into a position where he might ask them out for a date. One of his fellow classmates claimed that Howard showed no interest whatsoever in girls, even though “that’s all that the rest of us could talk about that year.”

His growing deafness was already becoming a problem, and he asked his instructors to allow him to sit in the front row in spite of his shyness. He blamed his bad hearing on a damaged eardrum caused by a swimming pool accident when he was eight years old. In reality, it may have been congenital. His two uncles, Felix and Rupert, and his grandfather on his father’s side, all suffered from poor hearing.

When Howard wasn’t in class, he was often spotted on the prep school’s nine-hole golf course. Later in life, it was said that his main interest in Katharine Hepburn was not in her “bony physique with no breasts,” but in her great game of golf.

For the first time in his life, Howard paid attention to his school assignments. When the other students slept, he studied his books until the early hours of morning. He found a way to sneak out of his bleak and lonely dormitory room by climbing through a window in the basement of the school gym.

One of the school’s professors found him at three o’clock one morning on the tennis courts. His fists balled in determination, he was shouting at the walls of the gym, “You can make it! I know you can. Just do it!”

Petulantly, he wrote to Allene complaining of the “crushing load of homework that is destroying my health.” Immediately she fired off a letter to the headmaster, F. J. Fessenden, demanding that he ease up on the boy. He wrote her back that “nothing is expected of your son that isn’t expected of any other boy here.”

For the Thanksgiving holidays, Allene demanded that her son come home, but he wrote her that he couldn’t make it all the way back to Texas in so short a time. She wrote back that she and her husband would meet him in New York instead. He then claimed that he was doing poorly in school and wanted to stay on campus and catch up on his studies. Allene reluctantly agreed to that.

Howard left his dormitory early one morning and headed for Boston by himself. He was gone for ten days, notifying the headmaster that he’d been stricken “with some very bad virus” and was under a doctor’s care at a clinic in Boston. He warned Fessenden not to alert his mother, because she became hysterical at the slightest sign of illness and would withdraw him from school. “Finishing the term at Fessenden is more important to me than anything,” Howard wrote, “and I’ll be well soon and back in class.” Although it was against school rules, Fessenden agreed.

The next week Howard showed up in class, looking less nervous than ever and in the prime of health. In fact, he looked as if he’d been on a slow cruise to Bermuda. He was a lot friendlier with his classmates, more outgoing, and more willing to participate in school activities. To thank Fessenden for allowing him to recover without parental interference, he donated \$1,500 for new uniforms and equipment for the basketball team.

Only two or three of his classmates figured out what brought about this remarkable transformation in Howard. Somewhere during his absence from campus, he had acquired a new best friend as a replacement for Dudley.

Even to this day, Victor Sachel remains a complete mystery. Had Howard’s classmates not encountered him with Sachel, his name would not be known. He was described as a young man, perhaps in his mid-twenties, who was extraordinarily good looking with a strong masculine appeal. He was

about as tall as Howard but far more muscular.

When introduced to someone, he usually didn't have anything to say and looked as if he wanted to escape. His only interest in life seemed to revolve around Howard. Sachel had dinner with him every evening, and Howard continued to slip out of his dormitory at night to run away, presumably to have a rendezvous with Sachel, who had taken a small apartment near the school.

What is known is that Howard managed to spend the then staggering sum of \$25,000 from his line of credit during the school term, and not on any purchases for himself. When the school term was over, he left with his same clothes and possessions.

However, Sachel was seen driving around West Newton in a shiny new car, and he always appeared finely dressed in the latest styles—in fact, he was a bit of a dandy.

At the local shops, Howard appeared frequently with Sachel, at one point demanding that a shoe salesman order expensive alligator shoes shipped up from Florida for Sachel.

At Lenny's Steak House, young Howard always demanded that the owner reserve the best steaks for Sachel and himself and rewarded him with frequent ten-dollar bills for doing just that. Steak was the only main course that Sachel and Howard were ever known to eat—never chicken, fish, or pork.

Toward the end of the school term, Sachel seemed to disappear just as mysteriously as he'd arrived. A rumor was spread that Sachel had impregnated a sixteen-year-old girl from a prominent family in West Newton. The speculation was that Sachel had to leave town overnight under threat from the impregnated girl's father.

In the final weeks of school, Howard appeared despondent and took no more interest in his school work. He dropped out of all activities and spent lonely hours in his dormitory room resting on an uncomfortable cot with a thin mattress.

The headmaster wrote Big Howard that "something might be wrong with your boy."

In New York at the time, Big Howard took the train to Boston for a long overdue reunion with his son.

Arriving at Fessenden for the weekend, Big Howard invited his son to New London, Connecticut, to watch the boat races between Yale and his alma mater, Harvard. His son was clearly bored but went along anyway to please his father. Perhaps he feared that Big Howard would confront him about the thousands of dollars spent from his line of credit, but no mention was made of it.

Big Howard was such an avid fan of his alma mater, Harvard, that he promised young Howard anything he wanted if Harvard emerged victorious in the boat race. When the Harvard team won, young Howard immediately presented his father with a demand.

Walking down to the site of the Thames River races, he'd spotted an entrepreneur advertising "sky rides for five bucks" per passenger in a Curtiss Seaplane. Although he'd made a promise to give his son whatever he wanted if Harvard won, Big Howard refused the request to go for a ride, fearing it would endanger the boy's life. The plane looked none too safe. Finally, when young Howard created a scene by breaking down and crying, his father relented.

Buckled in, and piloted by Captain Horace Hudson, who kept the small craft airborne for twelve minutes, father and son flew into the sky. Big Howard later admitted that he had been terrified.

Young Howard wasn't frightened to be up in the clouds at all. When Big Howard gratefully put his feet on solid earth, he was shaking. Clutching his stomach, he vomited. But his son told him, "I was born to fly like the birds. I've never known such a thrill in my life. When I finish school, I'm going to become a great pilot."

That short flight did indeed mark a turning point in the life of Howard Hughes Jr. In the decades to come, no beautiful woman, no handsome man, no business deal, would ever generate as much passion in him as when he was manning the controls of an airplane—big or small.

Howard ended his school year and headed back to Houston to spend the summer with Allene and to reunite with Dudley Sharp.

His school records at Fessenden mysteriously disappeared one day, but the headmaster announced that he had cleared the equivalent of the eighth grade "with distinction." Big Howard told his brother Rupert in Los Angeles that, "I've taken the first step in weaning my son from Allene's tit!"

His classmates at Fessenden were just as baffled by Howard when he graduated as when he'd first enrolled. One of his classmates, Percy Williams, who'd roomed with Howard briefly until the boy demanded his own room, asked him to sign his yearbook. Howard found the page where students were to list their ambitions. He signed *yegg* as his intended profession. That was a slang word at the time meaning thug or gangster.

In that same yearbook, the class prophet wrote, "Howard Hughes Jr. has a big ranch in Texas where he raises toothless cows." Writing in the same yearbook, the class historian said, "Howard Robard Hughes Jr. comes from just where you'd expect: Texas. But we're not certain just where he's going."

Houston 1921

It was a different household that awaited Howard on his return to the blistering heat of Houston. Allene arrived at the railway station in a long, black, chauffeur-driven limousine to pick him up. Although she embraced him warmly, he sensed a change in her mood toward him.

She seemed less desperate, less possessive, less concerned with his well-being. Their nine-month separation had made an enormous difference in their relationship, even though he wasn't certain how.

Dudley Sharp was waiting for him in the living room of the house on Yoakum Drive. Howard embraced his best friend, even though he noticed a chill between them.

He was obviously shocked to see Dudley being invited as a guest into their home. At first he viewed his friend's presence as a major compromise on Allene's part. Perhaps she'd decided that Dudley wasn't such a bad influence after all, and had rescinded her command that her son could no longer associate with him.

Howard wondered about the new relationship between Allene and Dudley. He didn't question either of them about it, but Dudley seemed to have acquired an intimate familiarity with the Hughes household, knowing the layout of the rooms and where everything was better than Howard himself.

He'd obviously spent a lot of time there.

Howard was even more surprised when Dudley showed him upstairs to his newly decorated bedroom. For the first time in his life, Howard was going to get a bedroom of his own with a lock on the door. No more sleeping in the master bedroom with Allene.

As Dudley helped Howard with his luggage, Howard went to the door to lock it. He moved toward Dudley, wanting to embrace and kiss him like he'd done on the day he'd told him good-bye before heading East. Dudley backed away and extricated himself from Howard's embrace.

"What's wrong?" Howard asked.

"That was kid's stuff," Dudley said, seemingly embarrassed. "I've given up shit like that. I'm dating girls now. We were just boys then. We're men now."

Howard must have been stunned at this sudden rejection. As with Ella Rice, the young girl at school, he'd wait long and patiently for his revenge on Dudley.

Los Angeles, 1921

Seemingly without emotion, Howard Jr. stiffly embraced Allene at Houston's railway station. Instead of an embrace, he shook Dudley's hand. Big Howard had already said his good-bye to Allene and was already on board waiting for Little Howard in the family's private rail car.

He was taking his son to Los Angeles to a new life.

Instead of sending Howard to one of the East Coast prep schools, Big Howard had enrolled his boy in the exclusive Thacher School, a boarding school, in Ojai, California. That way he could be closer to Howard since he was spending more time at the offices of Hughes Tool Company in Los Angeles than in Houston.

At his "fantasy home" on Los Feliz Boulevard in Los Angeles, Rupert Hughes awaited the arrival of his brother and his nephew. Unlike the tall, lean, ruggedly handsome Big Howard, Rupert was short and plump. His cherubic features and manner were often compared to those of a pixie.

Such an unlikely man was to become the Hollywood role model for young Howard.

A novelist, screenwriter, and director, Rupert had once written to his arts-conscious mother, Jean Hughes, whom he called "Mimi," that, "My brother has no prospects to speak of. He is already thirty-six years old and has not kept a steady job. The only gold he finds is fool's gold. He's better with a deck of cards like a Mississippi riverboat gambler than he is in striking it rich in the oil fields."

That long-ago observation, however, had become ancient history. As the Santa Fe Zephyr sped westward from Texas to Los Angeles, Big Howard could have bought out Rupert in a minute, even though his chubby little brother was one of the most successful entrepreneurs in the emerging Hollywood.

Only the week before, Rupert had written to his mother, Mimi, with a very different impression. "With that damn drill bit, Big Howard has made me eat my words—chew them up and spit them out. He's rich beyond the wildest dreams of any wildcatter. I'm rich myself. But he's so rich it's vulgar. I predict your oldest boy will become America's first billionaire, whereas dear old me will probably die with no more than fifty-thousand dollars in the bank. When Little Howard inherits all that money one day, I'll become a postscript, the poor uncle of a rich nephew, all my contributions forgotten and eclipsed by HH Sr. and Jr."

In spite of the envy he felt for his brother, Rupert had set out to "live a thousand years and a thousand lives."

He would instill that same philosophy into young Howard.

In New York Rupert had become celebrated for his short stories about the glamorous life of the pre-World War I era. In many ways, he was fulfilling the long-suppressed dreams of his beloved mother Mimi, who spent her entire life fantasizing about "what could never be." Her fondness for romantic novels fueled her fantasy of herself as a heroine being swept away by a dashing knight in shining armor who would arrive on a white stallion. In reality she was growing more and more discontented with her husband, Felix, and they bickered constantly. She confessed to Rupert that she and Felix had not slept together since the death of their last child.

A graduate of Yale, Rupert had become a literary celebrity as early as 1903. He'd survived an ugly divorce in New York from Syracuse-born Agnes Wheeler Hedge. In a story that appeared on the front page of *The New York Times*, she'd accused Rupert of having "a dozen lovers" since the beginning, in 1897, of their six-year marriage. He'd fired back with the very same accusation hurled at her. In 1921 Rupert had remarried, this time to a beautiful actress, Adelaide Manola Bissell, whom young Howard had never met.

For his reunion with his relatives at Los Angeles' Union Station, Rupert arrived in a chauffeur-driven purple limousine, which he'd borrowed from the silent screen star, Francis X. Bushman. Hoping to impress his older brother, Rupert had attired himself in a green suit with a sunflower yellow tie. "To go Hollywood," he'd also purchased a pair of shoes which had been gilded with real gold. His wife, Adelaide, called them "your fairy slippers—all you need is a magic wand."

Getting off the train, Big Howard spotted his younger brother and called to him. But Rupert's eye was immediately riveted to his nephew, whom he hadn't seen in many a year. He was astonished at how tall and handsome the young Howard had become. It was then and there that Rupert decided he was going to make Howard Hughes Jr. the reigning male star of the silent screen.



Loving couple: Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., and Mary Pickford



The tall and dashing young man who appeared at the station with his father was dressed like a romantic airplane pilot. Impulsively Rupert decided that he'd write an aviation picture for Howard and direct it himself.

Even as he rushed in his "fairy slippers" to embrace his brother and his nephew, Rupert had come up with the title of his new flicker: HELL'S ANGELS.

At the dawn of the Twenties, Rupert had become one of Hollywood's most successful writers and one of its most gossiped-about celebrities. The Sunday brunches he hosted at his gabled, Gothic mansion had become legendary, attracting the elite of Hollywood.

The producer, Samuel Goldwyn, had lured Rupert to the West Coast to write the screenplays for silent films. The shrewd Goldwyn had failed with many writers, but not with Rupert. He was pulling in a phenomenal paycheck of \$125,000 a year, far more than he made when he was an editor in a dull job at *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

Rupert continued to urge his brother to invest some of his drill bit revenues "into the flicker business." To impress both his father and his nephew, Rupert had carefully arranged for the biggest names in Hollywood to attend his Sunday brunch the following day. "All the greatest stars, even Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, will be there," Rupert gleefully told both Howards. "All the big producers and directors. Cecil B. DeMille. Goldwyn himself."

On the Saturday night before his party, Rupert called William Desmond Taylor, the director, to make certain that he'd attend. "Wait until you see my nephew," he told the director. "He's more gorgeous than Wallace Reid and a hell of a lot prettier than your boy, Antonio Moreno."

Taylor assured Rupert that he'd be there tomorrow "to get a look at this new piece of male flesh."

Rupert had found an architect who'd designed the entrance to his home in the style of an *Arabian Nights* fantasy. Through the gateway the following Sunday morning paraded a spectacularly dressed bevy of stars, directors, and producers.

Taking Howard by the hand, Rupert led his nephew into the garden for personal introductions to some of the world's most celebrated people. "Think of this as your debutante party," Rupert said.

"I'm no god damn debutante," Howard countered, insulted that his uncle would use a term on him reserved for girls. "I'm a man now!"

"Good to hear that," Rupert said. "Allene's not dressing you up in girl's clothing anymore?"

"How in hell did you learn about that?" Howard asked.

Before the all-knowing Rupert could answer, Howard was being introduced to the most famous couple on earth: the recently married Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, Sr.

In 1918, in Houston, Howard had gone with Dudley to see *Johanna Enlists*, based on a story by Rupert and his co-writer, the also famous Frances

Marion. In this comedy-romance, Pickford had played a young girl living on her father's backwoods farm. The picture had been directed by William Desmond Taylor, to whom Howard had been promised an introduction later in the day.

To young Howard, the Fairbanks duo were a dazzling, golden pair. Both of them had worldwide fame, lots of money, and also physical beauty. They were the true Queen and King of Hollywood.

In Rupert's view, Howard immediately made a serious blunder. "Someday I'm going to be more famous than either of you—and a lot richer."

Taken aback, Pickford was the first to recover. "I'm sure you will," she assured him. "You've got the money and money translates into power. How can you lose?"

"And Mary could have added, you've got the looks, too," Fairbanks said. "Just like my boy, Doug, Jr. I want you to meet him. He's a bit younger than you but mature for his age. I think you two guys will hit it off."

"You *are* a beauty," Pickford told Howard. "Doug worries that his son will go into the movies too. If that happens, and you, too, become a movie star, Doug here will no longer be the screen's most beautiful male animal." Sensing her husband's upset, she hastily added, "Of course, in my eyes Doug will always be the handsomest man on the planet."

After meeting Hollywood's two crowned heads, the introductions were coming so fast and furious for Howard that he couldn't keep the names and faces straight. He'd never heard of some of Rupert's guests. Others, his uncle assured him, were very important even if he didn't know who they were.

"The big thing," Rupert said, "is that *I* know who they are. My paycheck depends on it."

Sometimes as he was moving with young Howard across the garden, Rupert had time to whisper an intimate detail before approaching a celebrity for an introduction. Such was the case with Viola Dana, the beautiful actress whose political views were somewhere to the right of Attila the Hun.

The press at the time protected her and didn't publish any of her more outrageous comments, including her often expressed opinion, "that all the niggers in America should be rounded up and shipped back to Africa where they belong."

Her extreme rightwing views, however, didn't extend to sex. Before approaching her, Rupert whispered to Howard, "So the story goes, she's laid everything in Hollywood except the linoleum."

Howard was surprised when Dana immediately kissed him on the mouth, even extending a flicker of her fast-moving pink tongue. No woman, other than Allene, had ever kissed him on the mouth before. As he later told Rupert, "I liked it a lot. Gave me a hard-on."

Howard towered over the diminutive actress. "Big boy, my lips come up to your belt," Dana said. "That's gonna make it real convenient when I have a few more drinks and get you off."

That was the first come-on Howard had ever received from a film actress. It would be followed in the years to come by literally thousands of roughly equivalent propositions from women.

"Did she mean that?" Howard eagerly asked Rupert just before Dana spotted her latest lover, Buster Keaton, coming into the garden. She turned to Howard for one final kiss on the lips. "See you later, stud."

When she was out of hearing range, Rupert said to Howard, "Viola likes two things—teenage boys like yourself and, strangely enough, comedians. She's carrying on affairs right now with both Keaton and Fatty Arbuckle. Where she finds Fatty's little dickie underneath all that blubber, I don't know."

Rupert's eagle eye was diverted to two men talking in the far corner of his garden near a splashing fountain. "See those men over there?" Rupert asked Howard. "Sam Goldwyn and Cecil B. DeMille. I'm sure you saw *We Can't Have Everything*. Cecil's brother, William de Mille and I wrote that with Cecil directing."

"I saw it," Howard said.

"My soapy mother-love melodrama, *The Old Nest*—Reginald Barker directed it—brought in a million big ones for Sammy baby." As Rupert guided Howard closer to the men, Rupert confided, "Cecil doesn't like to fuck women. He likes to jerk off while sucking a woman's toes."

"That's more than I need to know," Howard whispered as he approached DeMille and Goldwyn. Goldwyn appeared ordinary in a dark blue business suit. The bald but more flamboyant DeMille wore perfectly tailored elephant gray riding breeches and gleaming brown leather boots.



Blanche Sweet

After introductions were made and hands were shaken, both DeMille and Goldwyn showed little interest in Howard. Rupert, however, knew how to interest an audience. He confided to the two impresarios that Big Howard was also a guest, and he was in Hollywood seeking film properties in which to invest.

Suddenly, it was apparent that both DeMille and Goldwyn had "big pictures" in need of financing.

They quickly excused themselves and headed toward Big Howard, who was talking with the actress, Blanche Sweet.

"Sorry for the brush-off," Rupert apologized to Howard. "You've got to prove yourself in Hollywood before you can impress those vultures. But here comes a big director who will give you his undivided attention."

Howard looked across the lawn as a handsome older man approached him with an extended right hand.

“Hello,” he said in an educated and well-modulated voice. “You must be the person Rupert described as the most beautiful boy in Hollywood, where the competition for that title is rough. I’m William Desmond Taylor.”

Tentatively, Howard extended his hand to Taylor who held it for so long, even clasping his left hand over it, that he didn’t think he’d be able to retrieve it any time soon.

New York, 1983

One of the leading ladies of the Nickelodeon era, Chicago-born Blanche Sweet, opened the door to her modestly furnished apartment in the Murray Hill section of New York City. Her lodgings were a very far cry from the mansion that Norma Desmond occupied in *Sunset Blvd.* The year was 1983, and the actress who waited at the door to the apartment in Murray Hill had reached the peak of her film career between 1910 and 1914, arguably making her the first real film star.

Deep into her third drink, she invited this reporter “to hurry up and catch up with *self* so we can be on the same wave length.” She had a habit of speaking of herself as “self or “myself.” A small woman with a dazzling, almost Cupidlike smile, she still possessed “eyes as blue as any sky that ever blanketed southern California,” in the fan magazine words of her long-faded era.

At times she appeared like a China doll of delicate porcelain, not a real woman at all. She was heavily made up and wearing extremely long eyelashes. A militant left-winger, and once a member of the Communist Party, she sat on her frayed sofa beside an autographed picture of Cuba’s Fidel Castro.

“Why would anyone be interested in *myself*?” she asked. “Most of my films are but celluloid turned to dust.” Nonetheless, she began a long recitation of her illustrious career, beginning when she was eighteen-months-old in 1897 and was carried onto the stage in a melodrama called *Blue Jeans*.

“My God, *self* broke into films in 1909, and by 1911, I was playing heroines for D.W. Griffith,” she said. “A great director, a genius really, but a shit. At least he had the good taste to let me succeed Mary Pickford at Biograph. In *The Lonedale Operator*, I virtually invented the cinema’s first independent heroine. But do you think anyone’s honoring my contribution to film today? It’s Chaplin this, Mary Pickford that. As if *self* didn’t exist!” Holding up an empty glass, she commanded, “Make yourself useful and get me another drink, sugar.”

“My God, baby,” she said when her fourth drink was presented, “I’m Mother Courage. I’ve survived it all. Even the god damn San Francisco earthquake of 1906. Yes, even that.”

Her famous temperament flared only when the subject of Howard Hughes, Senior and Junior, came up. “Is that what *self* has become? Some postscript two filthy rich, cold-hearted beasts? Their hearts were as black as the oil they pumped from the ground.”

She recalled in vivid detail the Sunday brunch at Rupert’s house where she’d first met Howard Hughes, Jr. back in 1921.

“Even though my director, Marshall Neilan, was vowing eternal devotion,” Blanche said, “I was making out like a bandit with Howard Sr. He was promising me the world, claiming he was going to produce A-list motion pictures and make me the biggest star in Hollywood. Later I found out the blowhard was using the same shit line on Mae Murray, Eleanor Boardman, and who knows how many others.”

“From time to time, I helped him get his rocks off, but he didn’t finance one of *myself*’s dreams,” Blanche said. “I did get a diamond bracelet and a big ruby ring out of the deal, though. I was forced to hock both of them when I fell on bad days. By 1958 the great Blanche Sweet was a clerk in a god damn department store. So much for screwing around with billionaires.”

She remembered Big Howard bringing “Junior” over to meet her at the Sunday brunch in Rupert’s garden. “God, he was tall for his age. A bit skinny for my tastes but very handsome. If I hadn’t been making it with his dear old dad, *self* would have kidnapped him. I saw that old queen, William Desmond Taylor, standing nearby in the garden making jealous eyes at *myself*.”

Blanche even remembered what she wore. “*Myself* had dressed entirely in white that day—white hat, a white lace veil, white dress, white stockings, and white shoes.”

She recalled that sometime during Rupert’s afternoon brunch, Big Howard asked her if she’d accompany Howard Jr. to a night club that evening. His chauffeur-limousine was already parked outside Rupert’s Arabian Fantasy gate.

“I got into the car and sat between Senior and Junior,” Blanche said. “Junior complimented me on my film, *The Unpardonable Sin*, which I’d made in 1919, with Marshall Neilan, my future husband, directing. It had been based on a novel written by Rupert. Junior then said something rather strange. ‘I always like to see a flicker where a beautiful woman gets debased by German soldiers.’ I think Junior was a bit kinky even back then. Then Big Howard told his driver to take us to the Ambassador Hotel, where he’d rented a suite, probably to escape from the burden of being Rupert’s house guest. Howard Sr. told Howard Jr. and *self* that he’d be gone for about an hour and that we were to wait together in the back seat of the limousine. Big Howard also said that he wanted to check up on an illegal shipment of bourbon. He’d found some bourbon that he said had been aging since 1915, and he seemed hell-bent on cornering the world supply for his future parties. I took out a cigarette,” Blanche recalled. “Mabel Normand had taught me how to smoke. Junior graciously lit it for *myself*. We sat there in silence as I smoked. From the limousine’s bar, Junior poured us both a drink of daddy’s bourbon, even though I thought he was a bit young to be hitting the bottle. After I crushed out my cigarette, he impulsively leaned over and kissed *myself* on my scarlet red mouth. He had no manners or grace at all. A very awkward boy. With his tongue down my throat, he reached inside my low-cut dress and grabbed my left tit and squeezed it. Fortunately for him, I was a wild and reckless *tamale* in those days. You might call me the first women’s libber. As a way of playing along, I grabbed his balls.” She paused, having almost finished her fourth drink. “I couldn’t believe it. I felt something like a sledgehammer in his pants. I’d gone to bed with Big Howard several times, and he was a good lover if you like the missionary position. He was built like a normal male, nothing to write home about. But after groping Junior, I decided that their nicknames were wrong. Big Howard should have been called Little Howard, and Little Howard should have been called Big Howard.”

Blanche admitted that *self* didn’t know what overcame her. She said she unbuttoned Junior’s trousers for a closer inspection. “In a town where men were known for having whoppers, Junior measured right up there with the best of them. I don’t want to provide you with the clinical details, but right there in the back seat of his daddy’s limo, I went down on Howard Hughes Jr.”

“When I finished, he wanted to know if I’d swallowed it,” she said. “He told me that he had a friend in Texas, Dudley, I think it was—who always spat it out and that my way was much better. I figured that this wasn’t his first blow-job, but perhaps the first time a woman had gone down on him. Apparently, he liked it a lot. He returned for some repeat performances, but the kid and I never had intercourse. I think I was the first woman to introduce

Junior to what became one of the great passions of his life—having beautiful women go down on him. It became his lifetime addiction, many other equally beautiful women like *myself* have told me.”

In New York in the 80s, the interview with Blanche Sweet stretched late into the night. Even when she could no longer articulate properly, she still wanted to remember the past, revealing a litany of stories that, as an ensemble, could inspire a virtual rewrite of the social history of Hollywood in the Teens and Twenties.

Finally, during her fond *adieu*, she stood on wobbly legs at the door to her apartment. “Don’t tell me that *self* is going to go down in film history, not as one of the great Griffith actresses, but as the bitch who gave Junior his first blow job from a woman?”

No answer was expected.

She remembered to add something to that night she went on the town with Senior and Junior. “We were at a club somewhere,” Blanche said. “Big Howard was at a distant table talking to someone he knew from Texas. Junior turned to me and said, ‘I guess after what we did in the limo, I’ll have to marry you.’ Isn’t that the cutest thing any boy could say to a woman?”

Blanche Sweet slammed the door, as if that act alone would blot out a troubled past.

Los Angeles, 1921

Howard presumed that Blanche Sweet spent the night with Big Howard at the Ambassador Hotel the following evening. Rupert and his second wife, Adelaide, had been invited to a dinner party at Samuel Goldwyn’s house. Rupert referred to the producer by his original name of “Goldfish.” Big Howard had mysteriously disappeared.

That left Howard Jr. all alone for the evening, but an incoming call from the director, William Desmond Taylor, soon changed all that. Taylor was full of talk about casting Howard as the lead in his next motion picture, and he promised that he’d meet soon with Rupert to write “the perfect script” for Howard’s film debut.

Taylor said that he’d come to Rupert’s house at eight o’clock that night to take him out for a night on the town. “You’re a fully grown man now and don’t need personal supervision any more.”

Before ringing off, Taylor told him, “I hope you don’t mind. I’m bringing along Rod St. Just. He’s a famous photographer of the Hollywood underground—and a lot of fun. With his mannerisms, he’s off-putting at first, but when you get to know him he’s a real swell bloke.”

As Howard would later write to Dudley in Houston, “I felt like a real man getting invited out on the town by an important director who wants to make me a bigtime star. Hollywood is my kind of town. I don’t think I’ll ever live anywhere else. I’ll dread it when I have to go to Ojai to school.”

All of Los Angeles seemed like one vast playground, as he informed Dudley in his letter. “I’ve already seduced my first movie star. Blanche Sweet.”

Right on time, William Desmond Taylor’s chauffeur-driven car arrived to pick up Howard. Sitting in the back seat was Rod St. Just, who let out a whistle when he spotted Howard. “Your reputation has preceded you,” Rod said. “You’re beautiful. I must photograph you.”

Rod St. Just introduced himself as “the world’s greatest still photographer.” A veteran of the boudoirs and back alleys of Hollywood, he specialized in photographing private parties. In addition to that, many stars, both male and female, had posed nude for him, wanting to capture their bodies at the peak of their youth and beauty. Rumor had it that Francis X. Bushman, Mabel Normand, and Rudolph Valentino, among many others, had already faced Rod’s hawkeye and his camera.

Rod was the most effeminate man Howard had ever encountered. Men like that were beaten up and run out of Houston, but Howard seemed strangely amused by the photographer. Rod explained that Taylor had preceded them, asking to be dropped off earlier in the evening at a well-known dive, Fruitfly, a gay bar that flourished in Hollywood in the early Twenties before the police shut it down. On the way there, Rod filled Howard in on all the gossip about William Desmond Taylor. “This lothario is the lover of both Mabel Normand and Mary Miles Minter. He’s even fucking little Mary’s mother, Charlotte Shelby.”

“More power to him.”

“That’s not all he fucks,” Rod said enigmatically.

“What’s this club, Fruitfly?” Howard asked.

“It’s a queer meeting den of guys and gals with strange tastes. Forbidden fruit attracting fruitflies. The men can act as effeminate as they want or the women as manly. In fact, many of the gals arrive dressed in kimonos—the fashion of the moment. The staff of gorgeous boys and girls wheel around drugs-opium, morphine, marijuana—on tea carts. Even heroin if you want it. Ever had drugs?”

“Once back in Houston,” Howard said. “My friend Dudley and I bought some cocaine one night. We got real stupid. I liked it.”

At the time of Howard’s meeting with William Desmond Taylor, the director was one of the most gossiped-about men in Hollywood. He was said to have been a student in Dublin, a Klondike miner, a construction engineer, a British soldier, and a London stage actor. His father, a stern and unforgiving colonel in the British army, had banished his son to a farm in Harper, Kansas, and then accidentally “re-discovered” him on stage in London.

In Hollywood, Taylor had directed *The World Apart*, with Wallace Reid, Tinseltown’s handsomest male actor, moving on to direct both Mary Pickford and her brother Jack, allegedly seducing both of them.

At Fruitfly, a club where only members were allowed inside, a young Mexican boy parked Rod’s car. A doorman led Howard and Rod down a long and dimly lit corridor that smelled strangely of urine. In the outer foyer, after gaining clearance, Rod shelled out fifty dollars for the two of them to enter. No club in America at that time charged such an outrageous cover, but since the Fruitfly “is so special,” in Rod’s words, the manager could get away with “this grand larceny.”

Howard was ushered into the rear, a room so dark he could hardly make out the faces of the patrons until his eyes adjusted. The smoke was like a London fog, but the smell was not of regular tobacco. The aroma was strange to Howard’s nostrils. The place was what he might have conjured up as an opium den.

Rod assured Howard that a lot of famous people were in attendance that night: Jack Pickford, Mabel Normand, Wallace Reid, Tom Ince, the famous

director, and Bobby Harron, the handsome but fading D.W. Griffith star. “I’ve staked out Bobby for the evening,” Rod assured Howard. Howard recalled having seen Bobby play “The Boy” in Griffith’s *Intolerance*.

Rod ushered Howard into one of the private rooms in back where he encountered the august presence of William Desmond Taylor for the second time. Taylor had already launched his evening of debauchery before their arrival. He appeared drunk to Howard but was holding his liquor and/or drugs like the stately British gentleman he was.

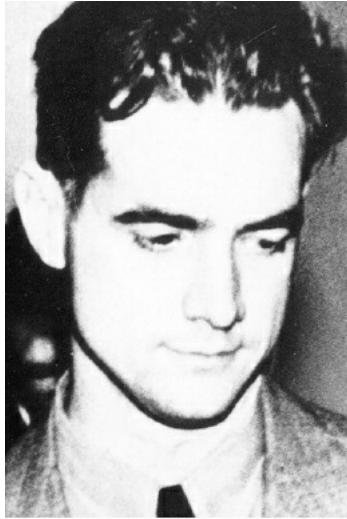
A masculine-looking Chinese woman in a red kimono stood in the corner near a tea cart from which Taylor was making a selection of opium and marijuana cigarettes. Seeing Howard, Taylor beckoned him to enter a room lit by only two red lights. “Come in, my dear boy,” Taylor said. “My oh my, aren’t we the most beautiful sight in Hollywood.”

Soon Howard was seated on floor cushions facing the director. Rod, Taylor, and Howard lit up their marijuana cigarettes in colored paper after the Chinese peddler disappeared.

The dialogue that took place between Taylor and Howard that night was later revealed in the notorious underground memoirs of Rod St. Just, circulated in 1936 in private editions throughout Hollywood.

Taylor reached for Howard’s hand and kissed it the way he might do with Mary Pickford. “My big, strapping, darling man,” Taylor said in a low voice. “My camera will capture your youth and beauty to perfection. I can’t wait until we start filming.”

As Rod recalled, Howard had little to say that night. Taylor did most of the talking. The marijuana had made him mellow.



Howard Hughes Jr.

“I’ve lived a varied and rich life,” he said to Howard, virtually ignoring the presence of Rod. “Since I’m called upon to reproduce real life on film, I draw upon my past experiences. A story can’t be presented on screen in a human, gripping manner unless the director has been in contact with the situation depicted.”

“Surely your life can’t have covered all the plots you’ve got to film?” Howard asked.

“I’ve seen it all,” Taylor assured him. “For instance, I never thought that being marooned for an entire winter in the backwoods of Alaska would be one of the most valuable things that could have happened to me. It was a terrible period for me. I had only sled dogs for company. But it was being alone with those dogs so constantly that gave me a love for animals in my pictures. I learned how to handle them. They say I’m very successful when I use animals in my pictures. If that’s so, it is entirely due to the six months I spent alone with those dogs.”

“I’ve seen two or three of your pictures,” Howard said. “I like the way you focus on the smallest detail. Even a doorknob in one of your pictures becomes fascinating. I’d be honored to star in your next picture.”

At this point, Taylor placed a firm hand on Howard’s leg and didn’t remove it for quite a while, at least not until he needed to light up another marijuana cigarette.

Rod’s drug of choice for the night was cocaine, which he invited Howard to share with him. Howard almost gleefully indulged.

Leaning back with his second marijuana cigarette, this one wrapped in a kind of chartreuse-colored paper, Taylor continued what eventually became more or less of a monologue.

“How would a man act if he were about to be killed by a crazed fool—or in danger of death from any other source?” he asked. “Once in the Klondike my cabin was entered by a man who calmly announced that he was going to kill me. He quoted passages from the Bible as authority. I took the Bible from him and showed him he was wrong—and he forgot all about killing me. But for a moment there I faced death. Some of the stars in my films face death, and I’m able to convey to them the emotions I felt back in the Klondike.”

His hand was back on Howard’s leg, but this time, placed much closer to his crotch. “All the technical assistants in the world won’t help a director if he doesn’t know life as it really is.”

“What are you going to do with me?” Howard asked, as Rod looked on silently like a voyeur. Noticing the placement of the director’s hand, he quickly added, “I mean, on the screen.”

Taylor leaned over to Howard and kissed his right ear, inserting his tongue. “I’m going to do something revolutionary for a flicker. I’m going to photograph you like you were a beautiful girl. I’m going to have the camera caress you—your face, your eyes, your eyelids, that succulent mouth. That gorgeously ripe male body about to explode into full bloom. Up to now, directors have concentrated on only female beauty on the screen. But most of any movie-going audience is female. I want women to enjoy the same excitement in watching a film as a man does, perhaps a man who’s seeing Theda Bara up there vamping for dear life.”

“I won’t go nude,” Howard protested, moving away from Taylor.

In his counterattack, the director grabbed the drugged Howard and crushed him into his strong muscled body, inserting his tongue in Howard's mouth.

After a mild protest, Howard gave in. When Taylor broke away, it was only to lick at Howard's neck and place gentle bites along the curvature of his neck.

Rod couldn't help but notice that Taylor's roving hand had settled on its target for the evening. He was obviously arousing some strong sexual feelings in Howard.

Only once did Howard break away. "Rupert told me that you were a real ladies' man—one of the most notorious in Hollywood."

"Your uncle got that right," Taylor said. "There are two things I adore more than all others on earth. A woman's young vagina and boy's young ass, both of which I eat before fucking. I can't get enough of either, and I like them both equally. Don't you find that in ice cream, it's hard to determine if you like strawberry or peach better? Both are wonderful."

Suddenly, as Rod noted, Taylor had become aware of his presence. "Rod, I want you to go out and chase Bobby Harron the rest of the night. As for young Howard Hughes Jr. here, I have plans for him. I'm going to acquaint him with every erogenous zone in his body."

Rod staggered to his feet and looked at Howard before leaving. The young man seemed in another world, not in control of what was happening to him.

"And lock the door on your way out," Taylor said as a final command.

CHAPTER THREE

Ojai, California, 1921

Set on 200 acres of beautiful landscaping, the Thacher School stood on the site of a failed orange and avocado ranch. Having flopped as a rancher, the stern headmaster, Sherman Day Thacher, was a former quarterback for the Yale football team. At first, he didn't have an opening for Howard. Nor was he impressed with his academic background. But after Hughes Sr. agreed to put up the money for a new gymnasium, Thacher found room for Howard after all.

He was assigned to a sparsely furnished dormitory room, which he shared with three other boys, within a three-story, Spanish Mission-style building. To ease his son's loneliness, Big Howard purchased the finest black stallion he could find in the San Fernando Valley and had it shipped by box car freight to Ojai. Howard immediately fell in love with the horse and, for some reason, named it "Coon." In time, he developed a passion for horseback riding that would rival his devotion to golf. He could be seen early every morning riding through the sagebrush, exploring the lonely ravines filled with scrub oak.

A lackluster student, Howard wanted the term to end before it had even begun. Instead of algebra, he daydreamed of his two ambitions in life: To become a bigtime movie star and to pilot his own private plane.

From Houston, "mother hen" letters started arriving from Allene, reminding Howard to take his Russian mineral oil. She constantly inquired about his health. When he mentioned casually that he'd developed a boil on his left hand, Allene hastily summoned Dr. Chickering once again from the Rockefeller Institute. Arriving in Ojai, the doctor found that Howard's boil had almost healed, so he indulged himself in another vacation at Big Howard's expense.

All of a sudden, the concerned letters from Allene abruptly ended. Howard wrote Dudley to inquire about his mother. Dudley wrote back that Allene was extremely agitated and wasn't sleeping at night. Often, late at night, she could be seen wandering up and down Yoakum Boulevard.

It was weeks later that Howard found out the truth. Allene had learned that Big Howard was keeping Eleanor Boardman in high style at a lavish suite at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. Not only that, but Rupert planned to star her in a film, *Souls for Sale*.

After mulling it over for a month, Allene decided to take the train from Houston to Los Angeles where she planned to arrive unexpectedly at her husband's suite, the way she'd once done in New York.

In Los Angeles, she went directly to Big Howard's suite and was let in by a bellhop. She didn't find her husband there and saw no telltale signs of Eleanor. What Allene didn't know was that Big Howard and Eleanor had gone down to Mexico for a two-week vacation while Rupert stayed in Los Angeles working on the script for her film debut.

Taking advantage of the superior medical facilities in Los Angeles, Allene consulted three specialists, each of whom gave her the same bad news. She was pregnant. It was a tubular pregnancy, the fetus developing outside the uterus. Doctors in Texas had warned her that she could never have another child—and now she found herself in this extremely dangerous condition.

Decades later, Eleanor said that Big Howard learned of his wife's pregnancy when they returned from their vacation in Mexico. He told Eleanor that he hadn't slept with his wife in two years and hadn't a clue as to who the father was.

Because of his own rampant infidelities, Big Howard decided not to confront his wife about the probability of a lover in her life. "Frankly, I'm sort of relieved," he confided to Eleanor. "It takes the heat off of me."

In a bizarre and seemingly erratic change of mood, Allene then decided to leave Los Angeles on a train back to Houston before Big Howard arrived back from his holiday in Mexico with Eleanor.

With his wife safely back in Houston, he felt free to move Eleanor into the suite with him since he didn't expect a return visit.

Little did he know at the time that the Hughes household, dysfunctional as it was, was about to experience a total collapse.

Los Angeles, Winter 1921-22

Sometime after Howard's fifteenth birthday, he started to lead his life at the Thacher School virtually as an adult, coming and going as he wished. Classmates reported that Howard was often missing from school, taking long weekends in Los Angeles and returning with dazzling tales of piloting small airplanes and "near fatal crashes."

It isn't known what compromise the school's headmaster, Thacher, made with either Big Howard or "Junior" himself, but years later, Eleanor Boardman claimed that Big Howard had resigned himself to the fact that his son "was not Harvard material," and more or less gave him free rein to do as he pleased.

One of the most mysterious periods in young Howard's life began in the winter of 1921. Blanche Sweet is the only person who ever spoke convincingly about this period of the boy's life, and even she had to speculate, as she wasn't completely aware of what was going on.

What she did know was that William Desmond Taylor continued to pursue young Howard. Taylor and Rupert came into conflict over a suitable script for Howard's film debut. Taylor was enthusiastically promoting Howard as an ingenue in a script called *The Ideal Boy*, whereas Rupert still wanted to feature Howard as a dashing young pilot in an aviation movie. Naturally Howard opted for the aviation film, although he deferred to Taylor's judgment as well. Howard promised both Rupert and Taylor that he'd star in each of their epics.

It is not known when, but at some point Taylor introduced Hughes to Spanish-born Antonio Moreno (né Antonio Garrido Monteagudo y Moreno), the first Spanish-speaking star in the history of American motion pictures. The Antonio Banderas of his day, he'd been frequently cast, pre-Valentino, as a Latin lover at a time when all Hispanic men on screen were portrayed as scoundrels. Until Moreno burst into view, no hero in films was allowed to be Hispanic. Even in his early pictures, Valentino himself was cast as a villain.

Blanche Sweet, starring in *Judith of Bethulia* in 1913, the first full-length silent film, had met Moreno, who had appeared in the film as an extra, and had become his friend. Although it was rumored that they were lovers, they were not. Blanche claimed that Moreno "was a closeted homosexual and we were just sisters."

William Desmond Taylor had also met Moreno and had become enchanted with the beautiful young man. Taylor learned that Moreno had been discovered on a Spanish beach by two American tourists, Benjamin Curtis and Enrique de Cruzat Zantetti. Charmed and intrigued by the handsome and well-built Spaniard, the two men had brought him to America. Once in New York, Moreno pursued a career—first in the theater, where he was hampered by a Spanish accent, and later in films.

By the time Taylor introduced him to Howard, Moreno had already starred in such early pictures as *Two Daughters of Eve* in 1912, with Lillian Gish, and *So Near, Yet So Far Away* in the same year, starring Mary Pickford.

Blanche later revealed that she'd dined several times with Taylor, Moreno, and Howard. "Everybody was so terribly discreet back in those days, but it was obvious to me that my friends were having a three-way. Considering Howard's age, it would be called child molestation today. But I don't think Howard was being taken advantage of. Let's face it: Years later, Howard became a child molester himself. He was a very determined and ambitious boy back then. I remember him telling me one time that 'above all else, I want to be the most famous man in the world. And I don't care by what means I become famous, as long as the fame comes.'"



Antonio Moreno

He also confided to Blanche that money was of no concern to him. "I'll never have to worry about where my next buck is coming from," the teenager said. "Father has promised me that his tool company will continue to make money for me even if I live to be one-hundred and ten."

Perhaps Taylor made a mistake in introducing his two handsome friends, Moreno and Howard, to each other. In Blanche's view, "Antonio and Howard formed a much closer bond than young Howard had with the older Taylor. Taylor's main appeal involved his continual promises of stardom for Howard," Blanche said. "Perhaps that was enough to intrigue the boy."

At this point in his career, Moreno was being promoted as a male sex symbol, although the term had not come into vogue at the time. Instead of a sex symbol, Moreno was labeled "spicy," which meant the same thing in the vernacular of the day.

Blanche said that when Moreno was not sleeping with Howard, he was sleeping with Ramon Novarro, a former nude Mexican model who was struggling to gain a foothold in motion pictures. Novarro was also having an affair with Valentino.

"I don't know this for a fact," Blanche later recalled, "but I suspect that Taylor was being edged out of the picture. I think Howard, Ramon, and Antonio started sleeping together without Taylor directing the scene. I never really understood the bedtime mathematics with those boys, but there was a lot of fucking and sucking going on. In various combinations, Howard would bring them by my house on weekends. I don't know when he ever attended classes because he was in Los Angeles—or so it seemed—all the time. I was still carrying on with Big Howard, although Eleanor Boardman had already started to ease me out the door ever so gently. It didn't really matter, since I was beginning to fall in love with Mickey Neilan."

At some point, and without Big Howard's knowledge, Junior began to take flying lessons. Moreno—but not Novarro—also wanted to be a pilot, and would go with Howard on his daredevil airplane rides over the local buttermilk clouds.

"Whenever we were together," Blanche said, "all Howard spoke about was flying."

One California pilot, Ralph Seiter, said that he later learned that Howard was taking flying lessons from three different schools at the same time. "He came to me and said he'd never flown before. But the moment I took him up in the air, I knew he was a liar. The kid knew how to fly as well as I did. I felt he was picking my brain. Pretending he didn't know anything so he could learn all my theories about how to fly before disca next pilot. I think he also liked to be complimented about what a quick learner he was, pretending he'd mastered aviation on his first time up. Whatever his reasons, I knew back then that the boy was a natural born aviator. Moreno wasn't any good, though. Once when we were having engine problems, he panicked and threw up in my plane."



Ramon Novarro

Blanche said that as a young man about Hollywood, Howard had not yet evolved into the eccentric that he later became in life. “He was shy and retiring, but I sensed great intelligence there. He tended to hang out with older people, absorbing everything about them like a sponge. Later on, he became notorious for his bad dressing, even wearing dirty sneakers to confront a judge in court. But in those early days he was a neat dresser, showing up at my house in white shirt, tie, and a well-fitted tailored suit made from the best of British fabrics. At the time, Big Howard was the best-dressed man in America, and I think he selected his boy’s suits.”

Sometimes Howard would invite Blanche to go flying with him. A pilot, Glenn Martin, had taken her flying in 1913, and she’d become addicted to it. Miller was a stunt pilot, and Blanche later introduced him to Howard.

“Glenn involved Howard in some very dangerous stunts,” Blanche said. “Glenn was completely reckless. Howard wasn’t afraid at all, but I later learned that both of them were nearly killed one afternoon over the skies of Santa Barbara. Afterwards, neither of them wanted to talk about it.”

Martin later said that one of Howard’s airborne passions was to get on the trail of a train heading East at about sixty miles an hour and race along with it overhead in a single-engine craft. “He was fiercely competitive in the air, even back then,” Martin claimed.

When Blanche moved into her house at Camden Drive and Franklin Boulevard in Beverly Hills, Martin and Howard would fly over her rear garden, dipping the plane’s wings at the sight of her sunning herself nude by her pool. “I didn’t care if I put on a show for them,” she said. “If they wanted a free look, they got one.”

Although she confessed to having an affair with the handsome Glenn Martin, she said that Howard never saw her in the nude “up close and personal” on the ground.

“Oh, he still liked those blow-jobs, and I was willing to administer them, but I swear there was never any intercourse between us. As for vaginal penetration, in that department, I honestly believe Howard was still a virgin, at least with women. He was to make up for it years later, of course.”

The actress recalled that Howard, Jr., would always arrive at her doorstep with an expensive present. “The gifts from Big Howard, however, were always much bigger and grander than those from Howard, Jr., but I continued to see both of them until they found other romantic outlets and I entered into my ill-fated marriage to Mickey Neilan.”

Blanche spoke with regret about not having married Big Howard. “I might have had a chance with him,” she speculated. “That way, Junior and I would have ended up as co-owners of that god damn tool company. I wouldn’t be living in this crummy apartment in New York City, but in a big mansion on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles. The grandest of them all. But what the hell! It’s too late to think about that now. I’ll soon be dead anyway, and it won’t matter any more.”

At her New York apartment in 1983, the aging actress had grown too tired and too drunk to carry on. She invited this reporter back for another night and some final revelations, but cautioned that to gain entrance the following night, two large bottles of Chivas Regal would be the price of admission.

Sometimes Rupert would send a long black limousine to Ojai to haul Howard to Rupert’s home in Los Angeles for one of his Sunday afternoon garden parties. It was at these parties that Howard began meeting key players in the film industry, many of whom would have pivotal, but momentary, roles in his life.

Howard’s life would be altered by tragic events that occurred in February and March of 1922. But when he arrived one January weekend at his uncle’s house, both the house and garden reeked of gaiety. As Howard walked across the garden to greet Blanche, she was in the middle of a story she was relating to Gloria Swanson, Hughes Sr., Mickey Neilan, and Rupert.

Since Cecil B. DeMille had turned down Rupert’s invitation that afternoon, and wasn’t at the party, Blanche was using the occasion to tell embarrassing stories about the director. “I first met Cecil in 1915 when he directed me in *The Captive*. You know, the one about the Balkan War between Turkey and Montenegro. That fool Cecil had real ammunition put into the soldiers’ rifles. One of the actor’s guns went off. The bullet entered the head of an actor in back of him, and blew his brains out. I’ll never forget looking at all that gray matter splattered about. Cecil didn’t seem unduly concerned. ‘It’s one of the hazards of making a film,’ he told me. That is, when his mouth was free from sucking my toes.” She turned to Swanson. “You’ve worked with him. Did he suck on your toes, too?”

Swanson, at least at parties and in public, was more ladylike and well-mannered than Blanche. “Mr. DeMille and I have enjoyed only the finest of professional relationships. You’re a very wicked girl to be telling these stories in front of everybody. Soon they’ll be all over Hollywood.” Lavishly dressed, even though it was still mid-afternoon, the diminutive Swanson withdrew from the circle, heading deeper into the garden.

Big Howard followed her with young Howard behind him.

“Gloria, I want you to meet my boy, Howard, Jr.,” Big Howard said. “I’m right proud of him.”

Swanson looked up at him. “I’m making a film with an actor who I understand is your dearest friend. Antonio Moreno.”

Howard flushed with embarrassment. “I know him.”

“The film is called *My American Wife*,” Swanson said. “I’ve become good friends with another actress working with me, Aileen Pringle. She doesn’t think much of your friend. Claims he’s never had an idea above the waist.”

With that remark, Swanson headed for the living room trailed by Big Howard, who looked hopelessly back at his son as if to signal that this new actress in his life couldn’t be controlled.

A little later, Rupert revealed what Howard Jr. must have suspected all along. Big Howard was having an affair with Little Gloria.

“What about Eleanor Boardman?” Howard asked.

“She and many others are still in the picture.” Rupert told his nephew. “My brother (your father) is quite the ladies’ man.”

Before the end of the party, Rupert had told Howard a lot more.

Swanson had a husband, Herbert K. Somborn, stashed away somewhere. Yet she was sleeping with both Big Howard and the director, Mickey Neilan, on the side. Even so, her press agents had Swanson issuing statements to newspapers “that the marriage contract is the strongest tie in the world even if love goes out the window.”

When he wasn’t with Swanson, Big Howard spent time with either Blanche or Eleanor. There was another complication: Blanche had fallen in love with Mickey Neilan.

“Whatever this Mickey Neilan has,” Howard told Rupert, “you should bottle it. It looks like he’s the biggest competition in town.”

“You’ll have a chance to judge that for yourself,” Rupert said. “He’s been invited today.”

By six o'clock, Mickey showed up drunk and late for Rupert's party. Swanson had already departed, as had Blanche.

After giving his son a warm handshake, Big Howard left for his suite at the Ambassador Hotel. Howard could only ponder what his father's evening would be like.

Howard was also getting ready to leave, when Rupert hurried across the garden to fetch him. "Mickey's here!" he said.

"God's Anointed," Howard said sarcastically.

In the twilight of a fading day, Mickey Neilan staggered across the garden with his hand outstretched.



Rupert Hughes

Mickey looked up at young Howard. "The word around town is that William Desmond Taylor has fallen madly in love with you, tossed Antonio Moreno aside, and is going to cast you as the star of his next film."

Howard was stunned at such a spontaneous drunken comment in front of his uncle and quickly tried to excuse himself.

Realizing belatedly how sensitive the teenage boy was, Mickey desperately tried to make amends.

"I'm a numerologist," he said. "Give me the date of your birth and some other figures and I can predict the future in Hollywood for Howard Hughes Jr."

"Sorry, I've got to go," Howard said, eager to escape from Mickey.

"Surely, you want to know what's going to happen to your future," Mickey said. "Ask Rupert how good I am."

"I don't really believe in that shit, but everything Mickey predicted about me has already come true," Rupert said.

"Okay, I guess, I can wait around a bit," Howard said.

"There's more," Mickey promised. "I want to take you tonight to meet William Randolph Hearst. He's a dear friend. Actually, I'm closer to Marion Davies than I am to Hearst. But she's not in town. Hearst will love you."

Later that evening, in a limousine en route to Hearst's party in Santa Monica, accompanied by Rupert, Blanche Sweet, and Howard Jr., Mickey predicted three things about Howard, based on the numbers that he had supplied: (1) He'd grow up to become the greatest film producer in the world; (2) He'd become America's richest man; and (3) He'd fall in love with a thousand people. Significantly, Mickey said "people" instead of women.

Howard Jr. later told Rupert that he'd been disappointed with Mickey's numerology. "I wanted him to tell me that I was also going to become the world's greatest aviator."

It must have been hard for a teenager like Howard not to have been intimidated by a baron like William Randolph Hearst. He had wealth beyond most kingdoms, and the beach house in Santa Monica was appropriately lavish. But with young Howard, he appeared kindly, genuine, and natural.

The rotund Hearst took time out to greet Howard personally, ushering Rupert, Mickey, and Blanche into his walnut-lined library before releasing them to join the other guests.

Howard had heard all the stories about Hearst's ruthlessness and shrewdness, but in front of his guests he possessed a certain impish boyishness, especially with that high-pitched voice of his. A visit to him was like calling on a king. There was a rumor back then that he "owned most of Mexico," or at least held deeds to vast tracts of land there.

A waiter came in and took drink orders, although Hearst personally interceded and asked him to bring Howard a glass of cold milk. "We have to watch over our growing boy here."

"He's already grown big enough," an already intoxicated Blanche quipped.

Settling down in a large Queen Anne armchair, Hearst dominated the conversation. His tone was very confidential, and it was obvious that he had been pained by the recent rumors that Charlie Chaplin was having an affair with his mistress, Marion Davies.

He seemed to want some kind of revenge against Marion, and was using this invited audience to get it. "Everybody thinks I'm faithful to Marion." His eyes twinkled. "But that is hardly the case. I still have my roving eye, the same eye that attracted me to showgirls in the first place. Once a man has that roving eye, he doesn't get rid of it easily. Even in old age."

"You don't look old at all," Rupert said, trying to flatter him. Actually Hearst did look old. "You appear to have more vim and vigor than men half

your age.”

That remark seemed to impress Hearst. He ordered his servant to put on some music. As Hearst slowly rose to his feet, Rupert and the other guests detected a charming gaucheness in the press baron. To Howard’s utter surprise, he began to dance a wild Charleston that years from that date would have rivaled that of Joan Crawford in *Our Dancing Daughters*.

Hearst invited Howard and the others to join in. Howard declined but Blanche eagerly accepted. Howard seemed entranced watching the two of them dance the Charleston.

When the music ended, WR. collapsed into his armchair, seemingly exhausted. “I’m also a wild tap-dancer,” he said to Howard between breaths. “Do you want me to demonstrate my tap-dancing talents?”

“You’d better not,” Howard said, sipping the cold milk that had been served to him.

As Hearst chatted with his guests, even though they were eager to join the party, Howard, as he later told Rupert, sensed a terrible loneliness in the chief. He couldn’t imagine why he’d be lonely, since he could summon anybody, even the President of the United States, to wherever he was.

“I miss Marion,” he said. “She’s supposed to be in Florida with her sisters but I’ve not been able to get in touch with any of them.”

“I hope there’s nothing wrong,” Mickey said.

Hearst leaned forward in his chair. “There’s plenty wrong! Where in hell is Chaplin? He’s out of town too. I’ve not been able to get in touch with him, either. He’s a disgusting pervert. Some day he’s going to get into big trouble. Maybe end up in jail.”

Bounding out of his chair again, Hearst invited his guests to see some of his recent art acquisitions, including a painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds. He moved closer to Howard and Blanche. “Don’t tell anybody but some of the pieces within my fabled collection are fake. So far, no one has figured out which of them aren’t real, and I’ve had art experts here to dinner.”

“Your dinner parties are fabulous,” Mickey chimed in.

“As soon as Marion returns, I’ll invite you,” Hearst said to Howard, ignoring the drunken Mickey.

Hearst directed his guests to his terrace even though the evening was chilly. Howard gallantly took off his jacket and placed it around Blanche’s nude shoulders.

The sky was still bathed in a pinkish glow left by the recently set sun. “I’m building a castle north of here. I’m going to have my own zoo. There will be tigers, apes, rare birds, reptiles, lions, bears, and orangutans. I plan to stock the land around the castle with ewes, elks, buffaloes, and deer, all of them roaming around more or less in the wild.”

“That sounds fabulous,” Howard said. “I can’t wait to see it.”

“I’ll invite you many times,” Hearst promised.

And so it came to be. Hearst was a man of his word.

In the early morning of February 1, 1922, William Desmond Taylor was shot to death in his fashionable bungalow at 404-B South Alvarado Street in Los Angeles. Details about what took place in that bungalow before the police arrived will never be fully known.

The only source of information that this writer had about the involvement of Howard Jr. and Antonio Moreno in the Taylor murder was Blanche Sweet, and she was not completely in the loop. But she had many well-informed things to say about one of the most famous—and still unsolved—murders in the history of Hollywood.

For several weeks before his death, Taylor had been tantalizing Howard with predictions of future stardom. “If you stay with me, I’ll make you into the biggest male film star in Hollywood. Bigger than Wallace Reid. More alluring than Valentino. You photograph beautifully, far more appealingly than Antonio himself. Your sex appeal is appreciated by both men and women. I don’t know anyone who has ever met you who doesn’t William Desmond Taylor want to take off your trousers. I think your special appeal will be picked up by the camera.”



William Desmond Taylor

Howard giddily shared Taylor’s predictions about his future stardom with Rupert, Blanche, and Moreno.

Several weeks before his murder, Taylor had ordered his favorite photographer, Rod St. Just, to take intimate pictures of Howard. “Photograph him as you would the prettiest girl who ever got off the train in Los Angeles.” St. Just later admitted that Howard agreed to pose nude for Taylor’s private collection. Taylor already possessed nude photos of Ramon Novarro, Moreno, Mary Miles Minter, and Mabel Normand, among others.

A call came into Howard’s dormitory at the Thacher School in Ojai at three o’clock that fatal morning. On the other end of the phone, Moreno told him that Taylor had been fatally shot. From his own home, Moreno had been talking with Taylor on the phone when the bullet was fired.

Moreno told Howard that he had immediately driven to Taylor’s bungalow, where he examined the body in the director’s study, finding him dead. His fear was that someone might have seen him enter the bungalow and would finger him as the assailant. He had to flee. But before he did, as he told

Howard, he removed any incriminating evidence that Taylor had on both of them, including the nude photographs taken by St. Just.

Howard thanked him profusely and told him that he'd leave at once for Los Angeles. When Howard got to Moreno's house, as Blanche later learned, Moreno surrendered the compromising photographs to Howard, along with the uncompleted film script, with Taylor's notations, for Howard's screen debut.

Howard later told Blanche that Moreno "wanted some remuneration for my troubles." Going to his father, Howard asked for ten thousand dollars in cash. He told Big Howard that he'd gotten a young girl in Ojai into trouble and wanted to arrange for an abortion.

As he later reported to Blanche, Big Howard seemed right proud of his son. "I think he viewed my impregnating this imaginary girl as my initiation into manhood," Howard said. "He told me that he, too, had had to arrange a few abortions in his time."

Although no one was ever convicted of William Desmond Taylor's murder, Moreno, according to Blanche Sweet, went to his grave believing that Taylor was murdered that night by a minor Hollywood personality named Charlotte Shelby. Shelby was the domineering mother of ingénue actress Mary Miles Minter, who at the time was rapidly overtaking Mary Pickford as America's cinematic sweetheart. According to Moreno, as related years later to this reporter by Blanche Sweet, Taylor, at the time of his murder, was courting and having sexual relations with both Shelby and her daughter, Mary Miles Minter. On the night of the murder, he broke off his affair with the mother in preparation for his (potentially lucrative) marriage to the daughter.

Adding injury to the mother's insult, after his marriage to the daughter, the director intended to take over the management of Minter's blossoming career, including the control of her highly lucrative purse, effectively cutting Shelby off from the source of her income.

According to Moreno, on the night of the murder, Shelby, after a violent argument with Taylor, disguised herself as a man, returned a few hours later to Taylor's bungalow, and shot him with a revolver. Later, Shelby paid a veteran movie character actor, Carl Stockdale, \$100,000, which she'd stolen from her daughter, to testify in court that he had been playing cards with Shelby at her apartment at the time Taylor was shot. Years later, Stockdale admitted to friends that in direct contradiction with his official testimony, he had been alone at home that night, reading a novel and listening to the radio.

In the wake of the public scrutiny that followed Taylor's murder, the career of Mary Miles Minter was destroyed, even though there was no direct evidence that she had been involved in the actual slaying of her favorite director and husband-to-be. Also ruined in the aftermath of the murder was the career of Mabel Normand, whose earlier affair with William Desmond Taylor was made public as part of the investigation. Ironically, despite the general pain the scandal caused to virtually everyone associated with it, no one was ever officially charged or convicted of Taylor's murder, which continues to be defined even today as one of the most important unsolved mysteries in Hollywood.

Secretly, Howard attended Taylor's funeral, arriving late, standing in the rear, and leaving before the services were over.

A British flag was draped around the open casket, and the February sun shone brightly through the windows, even though the winds that day kept the air chilled. A stray beam of sunlight found its way through a piece of ruby-stained glass in the chancel window. It bathed the bier in a mist of shimmering colored light.

Howard returned early to the back seat of his rented limousine. Curtains blacked him out. After about thirty minutes, after the ceremony ended, he was joined by Blanche Sweet and Antonio Moreno.

The sight and sound of Scottish bagpipers in full regalia emerged from the site of the funeral. Three volleys were fired by a British military squad in honor of Taylor's past service record. Then the bugler placed his instrument to his lips and sounded taps.

Both Moreno and Blanche asked Howard if he planned to continue his plans for a movie career. "While waiting for you in the car, I decided that was a dream to be dreamed," Howard told them. "I don't want to be a star. I'm going to produce films instead. That way, I can be the boss."

En route to the Ambassador Hotel, Howard asked for the lifetime silence of both Blanche Sweet and Antonio Moreno about his own involvement in the life and death of William Desmond Taylor. Both of them agreed to keep quiet about what they knew. Moreno went to his death in 1967 without revealing his own role at the murder site. Blanche, however, remained silent until 1983, when she decided, "What the hell!"

Houston, 1922

At Ojai on the afternoon of March 29, 1922, Howard spent the sunny hours horseback riding with Moreno, who had driven up from Los Angeles to be alone with his friend, and to keep him abreast of all the revelations in the wake of the death of William Desmond Taylor.

The sun was burning brightly in Ojai but was positively scorching the streets of Houston even though it was still only March. Allene had gone shopping with her younger sister, Annette Gano, who had been living with her at the Hughes household on Yoakum Boulevard since 1919. A graduate of Wellesley College, Annette was a tall and imposing woman, who had served as a Red Cross volunteer in France during World War I, distributing coffee and doughnuts to the embattled Yankee soldiers.

The purpose of the sisters' shopping expedition involved ordering Annette's bridal gown. Annette was already thirty-one at the time, which was a bit old back then for a woman to still be in the marriage market. But a Houston doctor, friend, and distant relative of the Hughes family, Frederick Rice Lummis one of several doctors who had attended over the years to the medical needs of either Allene or Sonny, had asked for her hand in marriage. His practice was flourishing, and he was kind and gentle to her. Allene urged her sister to marry him "sooner than later."

Annette was well aware of her sister's sexual involvement with young Dudley Sharp. Although she disapproved, she also went to great care to protect her sister's secret and to keep Big Howard from learning about the involvement. Big Howard, as Annette later learned, knew of his wife's pregnancy, but he never found out that Dudley was her lover. Annette saw that he didn't.

Understandably, Allene never wanted her son to know that she was sexually and emotionally involved with his best friend. Eventually, how ever, Annette revealed the story to Rupert, and he gossiped about it to his friends in Hollywood, which is the only way this liaison ever became known. Otherwise, it would have remained one of the many dark and mu



Howard Hughes Jr.

According to Annette, her sister was in the dressing room of a department store in Houston, trying on a green silk dress from Paris, when she doubled over and clutched at her stomach. She cried out to Annette, “My guts are on fire!”

In her hysteria, Annette ran over to the department store manager, Don R. Riddle, and pleaded with him to summon an ambulance at once. In less than twenty minutes, Allene was seen by customers being carried out of the store on a stretcher. She had begun to hemorrhage.

At the hospital, she was immediately given an emergency examination by Dr. Gavin Hamilton. Seeing her condition and determining that she was pregnant, he immediately ordered a *curettage* – he used the word curettement—a medical procedure that involved the scraping of the uterus.

As Allene was hauled into the operating room, Annette sent a telegram to Big Howard at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. An hour later when Hughes Sr. was delivered the telegram, he kissed Eleanor good-bye and rushed to take the next train to Texas, not even bothering to pack any personal belongings. He decided not to alert his son that his mother might be dying.

Although some accounts place Big Howard at the hospital as his wife went into surgery, such was not the case. He only learned about what had happened to his wife after his train pulled into Houston.

Dr. Hamilton administered gas anesthesia to Allene before performing the emergency surgery. He had determined that her pregnancy was life threatening and had to be terminated. But after the gas entered her system, Allene’s heart stopped beating. Dr. Hamilton abandoned his operation and announced to his assistants that the patient was dead.

Allene’s body had already been delivered to the morgue by the time Big Howard arrived in Texas.

Dr. Hamilton later claimed that Big Howard “was not visibly shaken by the news of Allene’s death at the age of thirty-nine. He was mainly concerned that word not leak out that his wife had been pregnant.”

After his conference with Dr. Hamilton, Big Howard did a strange thing. He sent two telegrams, the first to Rupert in Los Angeles, informing him of Allene’s death.

The other telegram was dispatched to his son at Ojai. In that telegram, Big Howard wrote: “Your mother is gravely ill. Return to Houston at once. Go first to Los Angeles where Rupert will see you off on the train back to Texas. Come at once!! Love, Father.”

Back at the mansion on Yoakum Boulevard, his sister-in-law, Annette, gave Big Howard a letter from Allene. She’d written it a month previously, as if she had a premonition of her upcoming death. In the letter, she wrote that she forgave her husband for his “fondness” for Eleanor Boardman and also forgave him “your many other transgressions.”

She made one final request. Upon her death, she wanted the family home on Yoakum Boulevard to go to her sister, Annette. She also requested that fifty percent of her share in the Hughes Tool Company go to her relatives, with the remaining fifty percent of her shares going to her son, Howard.

Still jolted by the news of his wife’s death and her farewell letter, Big Howard was in for yet another surprise. At seven o’clock Estelle Sharp sent word to him that her son, Dudley, had attempted suicide by slashing his wrists. Dudley had lost a lot of blood, and his young life was in jeopardy.

Having no idea about why Dudley would try to kill himself, Big Howard told Annette that he was going to the hospital to comfort Estelle and that he would remain there until Dr. Hamilton “assures me that the boy is out of danger.”

Still sobbing from the loss of her sister and horrified at this latest tragedy, Annette could not bring herself to tell her brother-in-law why Dudley might have tried to do himself in. All she could manage to say, as Big Howard left his residence, was “Lightning strikes twice.”

Los Angeles, 1922

There are two accounts of what happened next at Ojai. Sherman Thacher, the headmaster at Howard’s school, later claimed that Rupert arrived in the middle of the night in a black limousine and took Howard out of school, demanding that his driver take them at once to his home in Los Angeles.

But later, Rupert stated in an article that appeared in *American Magazine* that he was “merely standing by to comfort Howard when he was driven down from Ojai.” In the magazine interview, Rupert said that he did not, at first, tell Howard “the bitter truth,” but expressed his sympathy and assured him that Allene would recover. He went on to say that he’d booked Howard a first-class seat on the next train to Houston, and that he also reserved the seats both in front and in back of Howard so that he’d have greater privacy.

But the account that Rupert related to his friends and associates in Hollywood differed from what he had told the reporter from *American Magazine*. Rupert told his boss, Samuel Goldwyn, such friends as Eleanor Boardman and Blanche Sweet, and members of the extended Hughes family a somewhat different story. En route to the railway station, Rupert summoned his courage, faced young Howard, and said, “Your father is too heart-broken to tell you the truth, and I’m sorry that the task has fallen to me. I want you to be brave when I tell you what I must. You’re going to find out sooner or later. Allene died on the operating table.”

Rupert later expressed his amazement at Howard’s reaction. Knowing of Howard’s legendary closeness to his mother, Rupert feared that the boy might become hysterical. “There was absolutely no emotion on his face when I told him the news,” Rupert later said. “His face was entirely blank. I couldn’t believe my own eyes. Howard looked stern most of the time. If his expression changed at all, it was because of a faraway look that came into his eyes, like he wasn’t even listening to my words but had entered some state of serenity all his own. I put my hand on his shoulder and even reached out to embrace him. But he pulled away as if stung by my touch.”

On the platform of the rail station, Rupert later maintained that he—not Howard—had been the one fighting back tears. He told Howard good-bye and wished him well. “Once again I tried to embrace the boy, but he preferred to give me a cold handshake instead.”

Up to that point, Howard had not spoken one word since hearing of the news of Allene’s death. Before climbing the metal steps onto the train, Howard stood on the platform and gave Rupert a steely look. “For the first time in my life, I’m free,” Howard said. “No one will ever again tell me what to do.”

Houston, 1922

When he got to Houston, Howard Jr. discovered his father sitting and staring vacantly at the antiques, the crystal, and the Georgian silver in the living room of the Yoakum mansion. Upstairs a servant was packing his bespoke tailored suits and his handmade dress shirts, along with his platinum watches and diamond or ruby rings.

Instead of telling his son that he was sorry that he’d lost his mother, Big Howard said that he was leaving the house because it “held too many memories” of Allene. Even her favorite perfume, jasmine, seemed to linger in the air. Big Howard was a man of his word. In the short time he had left on this earth, he would book the best suite at the Rice Hotel whenever he had business in Houston.

Both Big Howard and Little Howard seemed eager to place Allene’s body in the ground just as soon as possible so that they could resume their private lives once again in Hollywood. Before leaving Houston, Big Howard secured Annette’s promise that she would postpone her marriage to Dr. Frederick Rice Lummis for one year and become a “substitute mother” to look after his son. Dr. Lummis himself only reluctantly agreed to that. Actually, Big Howard had originally demanded that Annette remain single and devote the rest of her life to being a mother to Howard. She thought that demand totally preposterous and adamantly refused.

In their black mourning suits, Big Howard and Little Howard stood with Dr. Lummis and Annette listening to a preacher say the final words over Allene. Only Annette cried at her sister’s too early departure from life.

Dudley was too weak and too devastated to attend the funeral, although his brother, Bedford Sharp, was among the pallbearers who carried the fantastically expensive and intricately carved rosewood coffin—lined in white satin—to its final resting place in the family burial plot at the shaded and immaculately groomed Glenwood Cemetery.

Los Angeles, 1922

Back in Los Angeles, Howard confided to Rupert that he didn’t think his father was mourning the death of Allene, but that he was overcome with guilt for having cheated on her so early and so frequently within the marriage.

Howard returned only briefly to the Thacher School at Ojai. His father wanted him to drop out of school and come to live in Los Angeles. That was what Howard wanted too. Headmaster Thacher argued bitterly with Big Howard, claiming he was “ruining the boy’s life by taking him out of school,” but Big Howard, who had all the money, and most of the power, prevailed.

Early one Saturday morning, Howard told his classmates good-bye, got into the back seat of a sleek black limousine, and headed for a new life in Los Angeles.

It was later revealed that Howard had developed a particularly intimate relationship with Owen McBride, his physics professor at Thacher. The boy often went riding with McBride and was seen having private dinners with him at off-campus restaurants. When Howard checked out of Thacher for the last time, McBride began sobbing hysterically and had to be excused from conducting his classes for almost two weeks.

The limousine deposited Howard at a Spanish colonial-style bungalow on the luxuriant and flowery grounds of Vista Del Arroyo, a plush vacation retreat in Pasadena, often a favorite nest for wealthy polo players. Even though he was married to Mary Pickford at the time, the dashing Douglas Fairbanks Sr. was often seen on the grounds and was said to be carrying on a clandestine affair “with a girl too beautiful.”

In his deluxe suite at the Ambassador Hotel, Big Howard had become the major party-giver in Los Angeles. “Wine, women, and illegal hooch flowed,” Rupert told Nazimova, who maneuvered to get herself invited to “this wholesale debauchery.”

Somehow Big Howard decided that instead of being an actual presence in his son’s life, he would lavish expensive gifts and money on the teenager from afar. Hughes Sr. sent flowers to adorn the bungalow occupied by Annette and Howard. The best of British tailors, with their expensive fabrics in hand, paid house calls at the bungalow to outfit young Howard with the finest wardrobe in Los Angeles, rivaled only by that of Big Howard himself. He also arranged for tailors to make his son outfits for tennis, golf, and horseback riding. Big Howard at one point even ordered three dozen pairs of handmade leather shoes crafted for his son, one pair made in part with pure gold and another pair in a shockingly gaudy alligator green.

Bribing some members of the administration at the California Institute of Technology with a total payout of fifty thousand dollars, Big Howard won a coveted enrollment for his son as an uncredited pupil. “Howard didn’t even have a high school diploma,” Annette later revealed. “But some of the top engineers at Cal Tech were tutoring him. Oh, the power of money!” Many of these engineers reported to Annette that they felt that Howard was a budding genius despite of his lack of formal education.

Ordering his son to come to the Ambassador in his limousine, the boy found Big Howard, assisted by a crew of tuxedo-clad musicians, entertaining Gloria Swanson at a lavish dinner in his private suite. “The champagne flowed and the caviar filled a big crystal bowl,” Howard later told Annette. Although she had been rather rude to him at the time of their first meeting, Swanson was at her most gracious during the dinner.

“All of us wear masks, darling,” she told young Howard. “Our only decision is how we choose to deceive the world.”

“Do I look like I’m wearing a mask?” Howard asked.

“Of course, you’re wearing a mask,” Swanson said. “You’re pretending to be this shy, awkward boy. Very unassuming. But it’s a mask to conceal

your real personality. You are more ambition-crazed than I am. You want fame and glory even more than I do. You want the world worshipping at your feet the same as I do. In fact, you and I are made from the same bolt of lightning. Only I'm more flamboyant on the surface, and you burn with a fiery flame internally."

Howard, as he later told Antonio Moreno and Blanche Sweet, wasn't impressed with Swanson, finding her too florid for his simpler tastes. But his father seemed enthralled with her, in spite of her many other romantic involvements.

On that night, and right in front of Swanson, Big Howard informed his son that he was taking away his allowance. At first the boy started to express his grave disappointment until his father told him that he was replacing the allowance with an unlimited letter of credit. "The town is yours," Big Howard said in front of the gossipy Swanson, who later told "everybody," even Louella Parsons. Howard was so excited at the news that he jumped up and embraced his father, practically lifting him off the floor. That was the only known time, at least in front of a witness, that Howard hugged his father.

Almost as if to "apply gilt to the lily," as Swanson later said, "he told the boy that a long, black Duesenberg limousine was waiting downstairs for him." It turned out that Big Howard had hired three different chauffeurs, outfitting each of them in elephant gray uniforms with large black fedoras. These men were to work on three back-to-back shifts of eight hours each so that Howard would have a limo at his disposal 24 hours a day.

Before his son left in rapture that night, Big Howard confided that he had chartered three railroad cars to take more than a dozen "oil cronies" to the Kentucky Derby. After that, he was traveling by private rail car from Kentucky to New York, where his mammoth yacht was waiting to take him on a sail to the West Indies. Once he toured Jamaica and Havana, he was going to sail through the Panama Canal, returning to Los Angeles in three months.

Back in Pasadena, Annette had summoned Howard's favorite cousin, Kitty Callaway, from Dallas, to come to the bungalow to keep her company since Howard was gone most of the day and night.

Kitty and Howard immediately picked up the thread of their solid friendship, and she often accompanied the boy on chauffeur-driven trips to the movie palaces in Hollywood. Some days, as Annette later reported, "Kitty and Howard saw three flickers in six hours."

Regardless of what his plans were for the evening, Howard nearly always dined by the pool near their bungalow with both Kitty and Annette. Lavish dinners were prepared for Annette and Kitty, with Howard preferring a steak and a plate of very small peas. He consumed the same meal every night. Perhaps taking a cue from his father, Howard often hired out-of-work musicians in Pasadena to serenade them while they dined.

After dinner, Howard would disappear into his black limousine and go off into the Los Angeles night to amuse himself. He never told Kitty or Annette where he was going or what he did, and neither woman asked him, perhaps out of fear. "I am my own man now," Howard told Annette one day, "and I'll go where I please and do what I please."

Shortly after arriving in Pasadena, Annette incurred Howard's wrath, and she didn't want to provoke him again. With her, she'd brought a letter from Allene, which she'd written two months before her death, perhaps sensing that something might go wrong with her delicate condition.

Howard took the letter from her and ripped it to shreds. "Don't ever mention the name of Allenetomeagain!"

One morning a call came in from Rupert, who was filming *Souls for Sale*, starring Eleanor Boardman. Howard was aware that Eleanor was the favorite of his father's mistresses. Rupert invited Howard to come to the set on Monday morning to see how movies were made.

Vastly intrigued, the sixteen-year-old skipped his classes at Cal Tech and set out in his limousine toward Rupert's film studio. His uncle had made the invitation even more intriguing when he said that Charlie Chaplin would be joining them for lunch. The Little Tramp was appearing in a cameo in Rupert's film and had specifically asked to meet young Howard.

Chaplin at the time was the most famous man in the world, and that invitation thrilled him. But Rupert always liked to add "something to sweeten the pot," as he was fond of saying. "Mae Busch plays the second lead, and the third lead is played by the most beautiful girl in all the world. You'll love her. More to the point, she'll go crazy when she sees a handsome young devil like you."

"And who is this stunning woman?" Howard asked.

"The one, the only, Barbara LaMarr."

On the set of *Souls for Sale*, which Rupert was directing, Eleanor was heading an all-star cast with such major players as Mae Busch, Barbara LaMarr, and Richard Dix in secondary roles. Not only that, but he had assembled some of the biggest names of the silent screen—both actors and directors—to appear in cameos. In addition to Chaplin himself, the all-star cast included ZaSu Pitts, Dagmar Godowsky, Bessie Love, June Mathis, Anna Q. Nilsson, Florence Vidor, King Vidor, Patsy Ruth Miller, Erich von Stroheim, and Claire Windsor. The film also had roles for Howard's long-standing friend, Blanche Sweet, and his new numerology-loving acquaintance, Marshall (Mickey) Neilan. Although Mickey had recently married Blanche, he was still romancing Big Howard's mistress, Gloria Swanson. The only person missing at a big luncheon that Rupert had thrown for the cast was the mysterious Barbara LaMarr.

Howard was guest of honor at the luncheon, his major introduction to *le tout* Hollywood. As he wrote Dudley Sharp back in Houston, "For the first time in my life I felt like a man in my own right—not a boy living in my father's shadow."

Rupert had placed his boyishly shy nephew at the head of the table with Eleanor on his left and Chaplin on his right. In years to come, both Chaplin and Howard himself would become known as child molesters because of their fondness for fifteen-year-old girls. Even though Howard was a child himself when he met Chaplin, he immediately bonded with him.

Although Blanche said she was seated eight places away between Fred Niblo and William Haines, and was not privy to what was being said at the head of the table, she recalled decades later that she felt Chaplin was a bit taken by Howard's good looks and striking presence.

"The world didn't know Charlie's secret at the time," Blanche said. "but Charlie Chaplin, the great womanizer, occasionally liked young boys on the side. I must say he had good taste. Whenever Charlie did decide to go for some boy-ass, he picked young ones so beautiful they looked better than us gals. I did see Charlie engaging in animated conversation with both Eleanor and Howard, and occasionally I heard the name Mary Pickford. Chaplin was dining out on stories about Little Mary Sunshine. He was as witty and clever off-screen as he was on. A shit, but a talented one. The highlight of the dinner came when someone from wardrobe brought Chaplin a blonde curly wig and a Little Miss Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm gingham dress. He stood

up, turned from us, and put on the wig and slipped on the dress. Parading around the table, he performed history's most devastating impersonation of Pickford. If she had seen it, I don't think she'd have the courage to ever face a camera again. He captured her silly mannerisms in astonishing detail. As I said, he was a shit but there's never been a star like him."

As amused as he was by Chaplin, Howard seemed to have eyes only for the beautiful Eleanor.

Years later she admitted that "the boy obviously was smitten with me from the very first time he took my hand. When I extended my hand to him, he bowed and kissed it. I was flattered. How many sixteen-year-old American boys do you know who go in for hand-kissing, then and now? I thought at the time that maybe boys are attracted to the same type of woman that lures their dear old dads."

In the comfort of her Montecito home and looking back over the decades, she confessed, "When Charlie was parading around the table as Mary Pickford, I slipped Howard my phone number and told him to call me later in the evening. He was just a kid, but I was a wild and impulsive thing in those days, especially when I got together for a night on the town with my dear gay friend, William Haines. We didn't call boys like Billy gay in those days, however. I heard that Big Howard was two-timing me with the Swanson bitch, and I think I wanted to get even. At any rate, that darling boy said he'd call me later."

Eleanor noted that before the luncheon ended, Chaplin also slipped Howard his phone number. "I didn't know what that was about at the time, although I found out later what The Little Tramp was up to."

Eleanor said that she was amused when her pal, Billy Haines, followed Howard to the men's room after lunch. "Billy had just a small part in the film. He played a character appropriately named Pinkey Don't you love that name for a gay actor? Later Billy confided to me what happened in the men's room."

"He took the urinal next to Howard," Eleanor said, "and was very impressed. 'He looked as big as Chaplin, who was a notorious exhibitionist,' Billy told me. 'In spite of his small stature, there was nothing little about The Little Tramp.'"

"So what did you do?" the outspoken Eleanor asked Billy.

"I looked down at it and then I looked into those brown eyes. I decided to come right out with it. I said to him, 'First, I'd like to suck on that lollipop, then I'd like to spend an hour rimming you, and, finally, I'd like to plow into you for the rest of the night.'"

Billy admitted that Howard didn't seem taken back at all. The actor already knew of Howard's sexual involvement with Antonio Moreno and Ramon Novarro. As he told Eleanor, "I figured that after those two, I had a chance and he wasn't going to punch me out."



William Haines

"What did he say, for God's sake?" Eleanor asked.

"He was okay about my first offer to plunge down on him," Billy said. "He wasn't certain about the second offer, claiming he didn't know what rimming was. And he nixed the idea of me plowing him, claiming he didn't go that route."

In a series of interviews conducted at his beautiful antique-filled home in the 1970s, Billy Haines, in the presence of his longtime lover, Jimmie Shields, said that, "It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship between Howard and me. It would last for two decades, and would be conducted primarily in homosexual hangouts to which Howard became addicted. After we got the obligatory blow-job behind us two weeks later, Howard and I decided we'd become friends—not lovers. I've always been a top and that wasn't Howard's scene. He was more the oral type."

On the third interview, Billy made an astonishing confession over dinner at a restaurant in Los Angeles. "I was the first to tell Howard that his uncle, Miss Rupert, was one of Hollywood's most closeted homosexuals. Howard was shocked and completely unaware of that. I'll always remember a strange look on his face that day when he learned the news. In some way, he seemed delighted at learning what I told him. I also told him that Rupert had given me a number of blow-jobs—in fact, that's how I got the part in *Souls for Sale*, minor though it was. It was as if possessing this tantalizing bit of information about Rupert, Howard suddenly had power over his uncle. I didn't know at the time what Howard was going to do with this secret, although that became much clearer later on."

Back at the urinal in 1922, and after both Billy and Howard had buttoned up, the two young men agreed to get together. As they walked out of what Billy called "the crapper," he recalled seeing Howard's face light up when he saw Eleanor approaching. "Howard confided to me that he had a date with her later that evening," Billy said. "I was astonished since Eleanor and I were confidantes. I knew she was balling Howard's old man. I felt I had to warn the young boy about that—and I did."

"Howard looked at me with those brown eyes that could melt frozen butter," Billy said. "'I'm well aware of that,' he told me, 'and it'll make taking her all the sweeter.'"

Living up to her reputation of making shockingly candid comments, Eleanor always claimed that she was the first woman to have seduced Howard Hughes Jr. “First the father, then the son,” she said in her later years. “At least I kept it in the family.”

She’d heard from Blanche that Howard Jr. and that actress had already had “some hanky-panky in the back seat of a limo, but I don’t think they got beyond the lick-the-lollipop stage.”

Eleanor always remembered her first night “breaking in Howard,” although she hardly recalled it as a passionate experience. “I was seven years older than the boy, but had about two decades more sexual experience. After all, I’d been broken in by Howard’s old man himself.”

With amusement, she called young Howard “the Minuteman.” Smiling, she said, “actually it was more like thirty seconds. Those people who warn women against seducing virginal teenaged boys know what they’re talking about. Howard was embarrassed, and I felt like a fool to be in bed with a young kid. We never repeated the experience, although, amazingly, he developed a crush on me and wanted to. I turned him down.”

She claimed that somehow Big Howard found out about his son’s dalliance with her. “I thought he’d be furious and would threaten to disinherit the boy. Not at all. He actually seemed pleased and encouraged me to launch an affair with his kid. ‘Howard will be very, very rich one day,’ his old man told me. ‘You could do much worse. The boy will grow up to keep some woman in diamonds and ermine.’”

Eleanor said that she later learned why Big Howard was eager to get rid of her. “He’d fallen madly in love with Gloria Swanson, although I didn’t know that at the time. But I got my revenge. After Big Howard rather unceremoniously dumped me, he was given his walking papers by Miss Gloria. Back in those days when it came to men, she had a short attention span.”

“Don’t feel sorry for me,” Eleanor cautioned. “Of course, my marriage to King Vidor, the womanizer, didn’t work out, but so what? I managed to seduce some of the most famous men in the world, including F. Scott Fitzgerald when King and I sailed transatlantic with Zelda and him to Paris. I even carved a notch on my belt for Ernest Hemingway, whom I met in Paris. I struck out with James Joyce—he was blind as a bat anyway—but I seduced Pablo Picasso one night in the south of France. Talk about kinky!”

After making *Souls for Sale*, Eleanor continued to see Rupert, and they would work together again when he directed her in the 1924 picture, *True As Steel*.

Eleanor claimed that “Rupert once told me that young Howard cheated his family out of millions of dollars and was completely ruthless and that he hated both his mother and father, rejoicing in their early deaths. So much for an uncle’s love for his nephew!”

Eleanor said that she remembered encountering Howard one final time at a party that Marion Davies gave in Santa Monica. “He came onto me really strong,” she said, “and frankly I was tempted to give it another try. I’d heard all these stories about his seductions of Hollywood’s most beautiful women, and I assumed he had had a lot more experience since our ill-fated encounter.”

She claimed that he told her he wanted to drive her home but that he had an errand to run first and would be back within an hour.

“I remember sitting there waiting for him for two hours,” she said. “He never came back to the party, and I went home alone. I never saw Howard Hughes again, and I never benefited financially from having known either the father or the son.”

She looked around her living room in Montecito as if she wanted to redesign it. “God damn it, I should have been an architect instead of a movie star. I hate Hollywood!”

Catalina Island, 1922

Beginning in the 1930s, with occasional exceptions that included Cary Grant, to whom he could confide almost anything, Howard never discussed his private life with anybody. But while still a teenager, and “sowing his oats,” as Big Howard put it, the young man shared news about his conquests with any number of people.

As a close friend of Barbara LaMarr’s, Billy Haines was all too eager to hear about Howard’s fateful meeting with the screen goddess. In Billy’s case, he heard both Howard’s version and Barbara’s side, concluding that it was pretty much the same story.

Howard had not met Barbara on the set of *Souls for Sale*, and had gone off with Eleanor instead. Two nights later, after he’d finished having dinner with his “guardians,” Kitty and Annette, beside the pool of his residence at Vista del Arroyo, he remained by the water, contemplating a midnight swim.

As he later told Billy Haines, “a young woman who looked like a goddess came out of one of the bungalows across the courtyard.” As he was to learn later, it was Barbara LaMarr. She wore a white robe, but dropped it around her ankles when she neared the edge of the pool. She was nude. Apparently, she was unaware of Howard’s presence, since he was concealed in shadows.

He recalled how incredibly beautiful the girl was. Her body was perfect enough to be sculpture. Suddenly, she dived into the pool.

Impulsively Howard removed all his clothes and dived in with her. Swimming up close to her, he claimed that he thought she might scream or flee to the edge of the pool and escape.

But she seemed too self-assured for that. She had a tiny waist with voluptuous hips. Instead of fleeing from Howard, she pressed her body against his. He later related to Billy that the moment her breasts pressed against his naked chest, he got an immediate erection under the water. He had to touch and feel her to see if she were real.

Where Howard left off in detail, Barbara later supplied the missing data to Billy. She said that within a half hour she and Howard were in her bungalow, which was being paid for by Douglas Fairbanks Sr. for his private dalliances with the emerging star.

“Howard was the most awkward lover I’ve ever known,” Barbara confided to Billy. “But it was his very boyishness that appealed to me. I decided to take him under my wing and teach him all I knew.”

Since they couldn’t enjoy privacy at Vista Del Arroyo, Howard before dawn proposed to her that he commandeer Big Howard’s yacht and crew and sail with her to Catalina Island.

In those days, Barbara was almost the impulsive kid that Howard was. She was delighted at the idea. Fleeing in Howard’s limo at three o’clock in the morning, she didn’t write a good-bye note to Fairbanks and failed to let Rupert know that she wasn’t going to show up for work on the set. Likewise, Howard didn’t write a good-bye note to either Annette or Kitty.



Barbara LaMarr

Howard easily took command of his father's ocean-going yacht, although he did leave a note informing his father that he had "borrowed" the vessel for two weeks.

It was in the bright dawn of a new day that Howard for the first time saw the depth and beauty of Barbara's eyes. "They were like no other eyes I'd ever seen," he later told Billy. "Green like a river I'd once seen in New England and sprinkled with flecks of purple." That was about as poetic as Howard ever got in describing anything. He almost never was that effusive.

Under black, wavy hair, which hung down to her porcelain-like shoulders, Barbara had skin as smooth as baby flesh.

As Howard got to know her in the days ahead, she told him that her real name was Reathe and that she'd grown up in the Imperial Valley of California. Later, she learned that she had been a foster child. She said she used to daydream about the identity of her real parents, imagining that she had been born some fairy princess who was sent into exile so that a wrongful heir could inherit a kingdom that rightfully belonged to her.

He told her that he would one day come into a kingdom of his own, one of vast riches and power. He promised her that when he took over his father's company, he would lavish jewelry and other precious things on her. "You'll have everything you could possibly desire—and more!"

She related that she dreamed of being swept off her feet one day by a handsome prince on a beautiful white horse. "Something almost like that actually did happen to me." She told him that "the handsomest cowboy who ever lived," a young rancher named Jack Little, spotted her one afternoon and became so mesmerized by her beauty that he began to stalk her, sitting in his saddle on his horse outside her house until two or three o'clock in the morning, rain or shine. "One day he just lifted me up from the ground onto his horse and rode off into the desert with me. Jack and I were soon married. But in only seven months, he came down with pneumonia and died. I was a widow at sixteen."

Once they reached the island, they lived on the yacht and explored Catalina by day. Mostly they stayed in the yacht's master suite making love to each other.

"I had to teach him to bathe with a woman," Barbara told Billy when she returned to Hollywood. "Even how to handle a woman's breasts, especially the delicate nipples. I taught him how to hold back and pleasure a woman with his God given assets, including his tongue. Howard was my eager pupil. Our sex life started without much hope, although he was certainly blessed with the right equipment. But by the time that yacht sailed back to Los Angeles, Howard Hughes Jr. was an accomplished lover. Well, almost. Only time can bring the refinement."

On Catalina Island, Howard could sit for two or three hours with Barbara, not saying a word. He seemed content to listen to the ocean pound against the shore. Sometimes she would light up a cigarette, smoking it only half way before she flicked the butt toward the water's edge as if to express her own scorn of the turbulent water.

She was much more articulate than he was, and confided in him that she was actually a poetess. "In my heart I'll always be a poetess," she told him. "Writing is my passion, even more than sex, although sex is very important to me."

During her early debut in Hollywood, since there was no market for her poetry, she had turned to script and novel writing. She was able to sell her first novel to Fox, who filmed it under the title of *The Mother of His Children*, starring Gladys Brockwell.

Emboldened by her success, she continued to write scripts, and one day she was introduced to Mary Pickford and her love, Douglas Fairbanks Sr. "Mary told me, 'My dear, you are far too beautiful to be working behind the camera. Your vibrant personality and great beauty should be shared with film audiences.'"

Barbara told Howard that Fairbanks didn't make a comment on her beauty but he must have been enthralled with her, because he cast her in his film, *The Nut*. Pleased with her work, he then gave her the coveted role of Milady de Winter in *The Three Musketeers*.

"Somewhere along the way, he fell madly in love with me and installed me in Pasadena," Barbara confided. "When not making love to Mary, he comes to my bungalow and makes love to me."

"Did Ramon Novarro also fall in love with you when you were making *The Prisoner of Zenda*?" Howard provocatively asked, already knowing the answer.

"From what Billy Haines tells me, Ramon is in love with you—not me," she said. "But we're great friends. In the film, each of us competes with the other to see who can be photographed as the most beautiful."

Over dinner that night Barbara shared her dreams with Howard. By then, he'd fallen madly in love. "Theda Bara was the vampire of the early silent films. But I'll be the vamp—modern and American—for the Twenties. Theda was exotic, claiming to have been born in Egypt. Cincinnati was more like it. I believe that our home-grown vamps will be the equal of any foreign vamps—maybe much more alluring."

"You're a vamp!" he told her. "You've stolen my heart. I can't go back to my life. I want to take this yacht and sail with you around the world."

She promised that she'd give up her stardom and accompany him. "There will be no need for marriage," she told him. "Our love will bind us together."

His romantic dream ended in the cold light of a new day when he woke up the following morning and discovered that she had gone. The writer in her

had left him a letter, a copy of which later cropped up within her estate and was widely circulated as part of Hollywood memorabilia.

My Darling Howard,

This has been the most idyllic two weeks of my life, as we hid out from the world.

I'll sail to the romantic ports of the world but only in my imagination. Dreams to be dreamed are more enticing than reality itself.

Your love-making was young and tender, whereas I've only known brutal men before. Lovers intent on satisfying their own passion—not mine. Although it pains my heart to write this, I must confess that I want to sample so many more men in this world, brutal or not. I cannot confine myself to just one man. In my heart I know I have but a short time on this earth. It is my destiny to know many of the world's most beautiful men and to take them as my lovers.

In you, I have met Prince Charming. But I also know that the world is filled with Prince Charmings. In fact, we bring from the lavender wrappings of our memories all of those ideals we have of the man our Prince Charming is to be. We then drape those lavender wrappings over the man before us. I have done that with you. I will always carry the memory of you with me. I know this note will break your heart. Unfortunately, I am fated to break men's hearts. That's why they call me the girl too beautiful. I can't help it!

I will love and treasure you always, even if always is a shorter timeframe than I ever realized. Until I met you, I always thought that rich men were ugly. I believed that those qualities that men possess to make them rich also make them incapable of being loved. I was wrong.

Your devoted angel, Barbara LaMarr

Los Angeles, 1922

Howard was indeed heart-broken and vowed that he'd never give his love to another woman...or man.

When he arrived back at Vista Del Arroyo after an absence of more than two weeks, he confronted a hysterical Kitty and Annette, both of whom feared that he'd been kidnapped.

After consoling them, he knocked on the door of Barbara's bungalow. There was no answer. Later he learned from management that she'd hurriedly moved out, leaving no forwarding address.

Billy Haines tried to distract him by taking him from one wild Hollywood party to another. Howard remained sullen in spite of the temptations thrown at him.

On several occasions, Paul Bern joined Billy and Howard on their rounds of such clubs as That Old Black Magic. Bern had been born a Jew in Germany, emigrating to America in 1909, and living in a tenement flat in Manhattan. Graduating from the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in 1911, he worked on Broadway as an actor for a while, and was also employed by a film company in Toronto. Sometime before 1920, he arrived in Hollywood, where he became a film cutter and a script editor before eventually being appointed as the assistant to Irving Thalberg at MGM.

He was known for developing crushes on some of Hollywood's most beautiful women, although he usually turned to men for sexual satisfaction. Billy told Howard that Bern's penis was "so small it's like that of a stud mouse. He can't have intercourse with a woman. It's physically impossible."

Employed at the time as a scenarist, Bern was well-educated and soft spoken. Even though he was still young, his hairline had already started to recede.

Howard barely tolerated Bern, disliking his pedantic mannerisms. When Bern started going "out on the town" with Barbara and Billy, Howard asked not to be included in their all-night romps. He was still carrying a torch for Barbara and resented Bern for taking her out.

He was especially infuriated to learn from Billy that Bern had proposed marriage to Barbara. When she turned him down at a night club, he retreated to the men's room. It was there that Billy found him, putting his face in a toilet bowl and flushing it several times, trying to drown himself. Billy forced him to get up and called an attendant to dry off the lovesick fool.

Later, Billy told Howard, "I don't think Paul really meant to drown himself. He just wanted to attract Barbara's attention—that's all."

Howard could not reconcile Billy's stories about Bern's impotence with published exploits of his dalliances with some of the industry's major stars such as Mabel Normand.

In time Bern's name would even be linked to fan dancer Sally Rand and Joan Crawford, neither of whom had much tolerance for impotent men.

Billy attempted in vain to explain it: "All those women spend their lives running from wolves. Paul courts their minds—not their bodies. Having been complimented on their tits all their lives, they are flattered that a member of the male species would even recognize that they have a mind."

Howard continued to pump Billy for news about Barbara, since the actor was continuing to party with both Howard and the goddess, only not at the same time. Billy was also friends with actress Elsie Ferguson, who was being seen on screens around the nation in *Sacred and Profane Love*.

He had secured a copy of the rough draft of an article that Elsie was writing about Barbara for a magazine. The article was subsequently revised before printing, but Howard got to read the first version.

In her article, Elsie wrote:

"Barbara LaMarr is a lovely panther—graceful, silky, forever quiescent, yet with a primitive look of warning in the back of her lovely eyes that change colors with her volatile emotions. That look fascinates and attracts, even while it warns of the danger of arousing her and bringing a realization that beneath all this velvety like softness are the claws of a panther. Claws that can kill. The primitive heart of a sleek jungle animal lurks in Barbara LaMarr's heart. It is the secret of her timeless appeal.

"If a man looks into the eyes of Barbara LaMarr, he will lose himself there. Her second husband, Lawrence Converse, testified in court that the first time he met her, he found her beauty so startling that it obliterated from his mind the fact that he was already married. He claimed

emotional amnesia.

“He testified in court that Barbara’s beauty caused a blood clot creating pressure on his brain. To remove the clot, doctors in Los Angeles operated on him. Before he was hauled off to that fatal operating table, his final words were, ‘Tell Barbara that I will love her through eternity.’”

From the set of *Souls for Sale*, Howard received a call one afternoon from Billy, telling him that Barbara had seriously injured herself during filming. Her back was in such great pain that she was carried off the set on a stretcher, screaming in agony.

Doctors at the studio administered drugs which in time proved addictive. In the weeks ahead, and long after her back pain had subsided, Barbara continued to take the drugs. When combined with alcohol, which she consumed in lethal doses, the drugs over a period of months led to a rapidly deteriorating physical condition.

To make matters even worse, the actress began to stay up virtually all night on a round of party-going that was considered appalling even by Hollywood standards.

By the time she’d turned twenty-eight, she was already announcing to the press that she was “world-weary.” Fan magazines had taken to calling her “a modern day Cleopatra.” “I never sleep more than two hours a day,” she told the press. “I have better things to do. Chief among those things to do is taking lovers like roses. That is, by the dozen!”

By 1925, she was suffering from tuberculosis, and could hardly finish her last film, *The Girl from Montmartre*. That winter she left Hollywood, a train taking her fragile body back to her home town of Altadena, California.

There on January 30, 1926, she died. On hearing the news, a saddened Howard sent a thousand American beauty roses. But he turned down Billy’s invitation to go with him to Barbara’s funeral. Among the 40,000 mourners was Louis B. Mayer, who remained enamored of Barbara even in death. When another stunning beauty—this one from Austria—arrived at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Mayer ordered that her name be changed from Hedy Kiesler to Hedy Lamarr in honor of Barbara.

After the funeral, Howard told Billy, “Barbara made thirty films, had four-hundred lovers, including me, and died at the age of twenty-nine. But she lived seven decades of life in three decades. I’ll do the same! I’ll be dead at thirty but what a life I will have lived!”

Three messages came in from Charlie Chaplin, but when Howard returned the calls, The Little Tramp was busy or otherwise occupied on the set. He and Howard never connected, and Howard couldn’t figure out why the actor comedian wanted to see him. “I’m only a kid,” Howard said to Annette. “Maybe he wants you to play in his next movie,” Annette said. Howard assured her that he didn’t do comedy.

A call came in from Douglas Fairbanks Sr. At first Howard feared that he had learned that he’d taken Barbara to Catalina Island. When he eventually got back to Fairbanks Sr. on the phone, it was to hear an invitation to come to Pickfair on Saturday afternoon and play tennis with his son, Douglas Fairbanks Jr. Their tennis pro who’d supervise their games would be Big Bill Tilden, the athlete who dominated the world of tennis in the Twenties.

As tempting as that was, Howard never got around to actually setting a date. He was too busy making plans. Through Big Howard’s manipulations, he’d been accepted at Rice University, in spite of his lack of a high school diploma. Obviously Big Howard had bribed someone in the administration once again.

As the train pulled out of the station at Pasadena, Howard vowed he’d return. On the platform with Annette and Kitty, he stood six feet three inches tall, watching Pasadena fade away. He vowed, “I’ll be back. And when I do, I’m going to become the king of Hollywood.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Houston, 1923

When Annette Gano's year of babysitting for Howard finally came to an end, she began formulating her plans to marry the incredibly patient Dr. Frederick Rice Lummis.. Big Howard had urged her to postpone the marriage and to continue to look after his son, but she refused. In a kind of compromise, however, Annette, after an exchange of cash, acquiesced to Big Howard and agreed to move with her new husband and Howard Jr., into the mansion on Houston's Yoakum Boulevard, with the intention of functioning as guardian and chaperone for Howard during his upcoming term at Rice University.

As an important part of the wedding ceremony, Howard Sr. had promised to take the train to Houston to give the bride, his sister-in-law, away. But on the day of the wedding, he didn't show up.

Howard rarely saw his father, who always had more pressing appointments in Los Angeles, New York, cruising Bahamian waters, or elsewhere. Howard did not hear that any one woman had replaced Eleanor Boardman or Gloria Swanson. According to Uncle Rupert, Big Howard had become a serial “seducer of showgals.”

Howard's boyhood friend, Dudley Sharp, was debating whether to go to Princeton or Cornell. Dudley wanted Howard to go with him to an Ivy League school in the East, but Howard adamantly refused. Annette, however, never believed that Howard was serious about attending Rice.

After Howard Jr.'s return to Houston, he spent most of his time on the golf course of the Houston Country Club. He found a new golfing partner in the unlikely candidate of Superior Court Judge Walter Montieth, a legal figurehead whose advice and friendship would later serve Howard well.

In later years, following his break with Howard, Dudley had some harsh appraisals of his former friend. “He wanted to prove himself as Howard Hughes without the Junior attached. He really resented bearing his father's name, even though Big Howard was the source of his wealth and the man who made incredible things possible for Howard. He hated Houston, and I never found out why he returned in the first place, since he wasn't taking his studies too seriously. He kept telling me that he was going to become even bigger in the world than his dad. I repeatedly asked him in what did he want to excel. All he would say was, ‘I want to become the biggest fish in three of the biggest ponds.’”



Eleanor Boardman

Once, when Howard Sr. returned from one of his mysterious trips, he arrived in a big way. Sailing into Sylvan Beach on his yacht, he rented the entire dance pavilion for Howard, complete with a sixty-piece band. His father had invited all the leading debutantes from Houston to attend. It was his way of launching his son into high society, Texas style.

One of those debutantes was Ella Rice.

Dubbed the “most sought-after debutante in Houston,” the beautiful, dark-haired Ella Rice was the exact opposite of Barbara LaMarr, a promiscuous Jazz Age baby of Hollywood. With her genteel Southern manners and regal bearing, Ella more closely resembled the character of Melanie in the film, *Gone With the Wind*, that would be made in years to come. No one could ever accuse her of being a budding Scarlett O'Hara.

The society matrons of Houston noted that Ella was a “dead ringer” for Howard's late mother, Allene. In the community, Ella stood as a virginal pillar of virtue with gold-plated credentials that got her invited to all the finest homes in Texas, even the governor's mansion. She had been born the grandniece of William Marsh Rice, for whom Rice Institute—later Rice University—was named.

“Ella's family had all the social pedigree that a girl could ever hope for,” said Betty Mayfield, one of her acquaintances. “The only thing they didn't have was the one thing the Hughes family possessed in great abundance—and that was money.”

Although Howard and Ella had first met in school, when Sonny was five years old and Ella an “older woman” of seven, their paths had rarely crossed since that time. Dudley estimated that since school days, Ella had seen Howard no more than six times, all of which were at large parties in Houston. “I doubt if they had exchanged more than a few sentences with each other over the years.”

On the night of Big Howard's bash, Ella was “practically engaged” to James Overton Winston, a strikingly handsome and rather dashing young financier who was known for “setting many a girl's heart fluttering,” in the words of Betty Mayfield.

To borrow again from Margaret Mitchell's yet-to-be-created set of characters, James was Ashley Wilkes, with Howard being more the rogue like Rhett Butler. Big on physical beauty, James was short on cash. When he first met Ella on a blind date arranged by a school friend, he had exactly \$15.67 in his bank account.

At the dance, Howard, looking more handsome than he'd ever looked in his life, in the full bloom of youth, approached Ella and asked her to dance

with him. Even though it was expected in those days that a young woman would always grant one dance to the host of the party, if asked, Ella turned him down. That was not typical of her behavior, as she was known for her impeccable social grace and manners. She stood next to James who extended his hand. At first Howard was reluctant to shake it, but he finally did.

Even James urged Ella to accept Howard's invitation to dance, but she refused. "I've promised all my dances to James," she told Howard. "We're madly in love and plan to get married as soon as James builds up a nest egg."

Perhaps remembering his long-ago rejection on the playground in school, Howard turned and walked away.

An hour later, when Big Howard was talking in the corner with Dudley, his son came over to join them. "I've hauled out the prettiest gals in Texas for you tonight," his father said. "I didn't invite any Dallas gals because everybody in Texas knows the women of Houston are prettier. See any filly you'd like to brand?"

Howard looked across the pavilion. "There is one. *Ella Rice*."

"But she's practically engaged to James," Dudley protested.

"It doesn't matter," Howard said.

Big Howard studied the dancing figure of Ella, as she whirled around the floor with James. "As I live and breathe, and if I didn't know better, I'd swear that Allene had come back to life."

You've got good taste, boy. That Ella gal is the spitting image of your mother."

Big Howard returned home to celebrate Christmas with his son. Instead of staying at the Yoakum mansion, he booked his now familiar suite at the Rice Hotel.

On his first day back, he summoned Howard to the hotel and told him he had some bad news. Rupert's second wife, Howard's Aunt Adelaine, had hanged herself in Haiphong harbor in French Indochina. Accompanied only by her nurse, she was on an around-the-world trip. "When Rupert heard the news," Big Howard said, "he was in bed with this two-bit actress, Elizabeth Dial. She had a part in *Souls for Sale*."

His Aunt Adelaine meant very little to Howard, and he didn't appear to be shaken by the news at all.

But Howard's new uncle, Dr. Lummis caught him later in the evening in what looked like an attempt to hang himself. Howard angrily denied that he was contemplating suicide as his aunt had done. Somewhere he'd read where a bow-knot in a rope could be fixed so that a person would appear to be hanging. But at the last minute, the knot could be untied to prevent strangulation. His uncle ordered Howard never to attempt such a foolish experience again. The brother, Tom Hepburn, of Howard's future girlfriend, Katharine Hepburn, had hanged himself in such a way.

For Christmas dinner at the Rice Hotel, Big Howard invited his son as guest of honor along with Annette and Dr. Lummis, Dudley, and his mother, Estelle. Howard was resentful that his father had also invited Sheryl Steele, a Broadway chorine, to this event.

A big-busted woman with bleached hair, Sheryl was obviously intoxicated even before she arrived at the dinner. Her vulgar manners so shocked Annette that she left the dinner early with her husband.

After they'd gone, Sheryl called them "bluenoses" and claimed that she could now speak more candidly. She advised Estelle to find herself another man before it was too late for her. She told Howard and Dudley that at their age they should sleep with "whores in Niggertown who'd teach them everything they needed to know about women. That way, when you get married one day, both of you studs will really know how to satisfy your wives."

She then announced at table that when she first met Big Howard, she could "feel hot peppers up my thighs."

That comment was a bit much, even for her admirer, Big Howard. He angrily ordered her to return to his suite. Seemingly embarrassed, he rushed through his dessert and excused himself. Before that, however, he signaled the waiter to bring in his expensive Christmas gifts for Dudley and his mother—a gold watch for Dudley and a mink coat for Estelle. To his son, he presented the papers for a new Duesenberg, even though Howard's vehicle at the time was only a year old.

When Big Howard left the table to join Sheryl in his suite, Dudley asked Howard why he'd looked so disappointed getting the new car. "Damn it, if somebody gave me a Duesenberg, I'd be jumping up and down with joy."

Howard's face was a mask of bitterness. "For weeks, I'd been begging my father to buy me my own small plane. I thought I'd broken down his resistance. Guess I'll have to wait until I'm older and can buy my own."

On that resentful and gloomy note, the Christmas dinner at the Rice Hotel came to an end.

Hoping to rescue the holiday season, Dudley and Estelle sent invitations to both Howard and his father, as well as Annette and Dr. Lummis, for a champagne celebration at their home on New Year's Eve. She pointedly didn't invite Sheryl Steele.

Dudley recalled that Big Howard arrived almost two hours late. On his arm, he was accompanied by Sheryl, even though she hadn't been invited. Nonetheless, Estelle graciously received the couple, inviting them into her living room where Howard and Dudley had already finished off two bottles of bootleg champagne. Dr. Lummis and Annette confined their drinking to sipping sherry.

As Annette poured champagne for her newly arrived guests, she couldn't help but notice that the chorine was wearing an exactly similar style of mink coat that Big Howard had presented to her a week before.

Sheryl was also flashing a diamond and ruby ring from Cartier Jewelers in New York and a diamond necklace. Big Howard proudly showed off diamond cufflinks and a wristwatch which he claimed Sheryl had purchased for him. At the time of his death, the bill at Cartier Jewelers for the cufflinks and wrist-watch had never been paid.

Fueled by the champagne, Howard confronted his father once again about the airplane. In front of Dudley and his mother, he said that he could understand why his father didn't want him to own his own plane, but that he wanted him to agree to let him take flying lessons. The flying lessons he'd taken in Los Angeles were apparently unknown to Big Howard.

"Planes will be flying all over this country one day," Howard predicted, "carrying both passengers and cargo from coast to coast."

Big Howard saw no future in commercial aviation. "It's a quick way to die in a crash if that's what you want. If you want to cut short your life, you won't do it while I'm in control. I stupidly agreed to go up in the air with you once. That's the last time I'll do that. You belong with your feet solidly on the ground. Not daydreaming about flying high in the sky."

Sheryl chimed in, "Who'd want to fly anyway? If God had wanted us to fly, we'd been born with wings."

Usually, at least during his early days, Howard was deferential and courtly around women. But he turned with a fury on Sherry and ordered her to

shut up.

That led to a violent confrontation between father and son, Dudley later reported, “I’d never known them to have a dog fight before. This was perhaps their first. It was all about aviation.”

Dudley later said that he was a little too drunk to remember what exact words were exchanged. “Everything that had been swept under the carpet for years was exposed, like Big Howard’s cheating on his wife with actresses and cheap chorus girls. Howard accused him of neglecting him and not being a decent father. Big Howard countered that his son would never amount to anything and was a spoiled little rich brat who turned vicious when he didn’t get his way. “You’ll waste your life as a playboy spending money you didn’t earn.”

Annette later reported that she feared Big Howard was on the verge of striking his son, and she urged her husband to intervene.

“Big Howard was so furious that I felt he wanted to deliver some fatal blow to his son, yet was hesitant to strike him in the face,” Annette later claimed. “Finally, he ordered Sheryl to get up and leave the house. He stormed out after her. But he had one final, chopping blow to his son. He turned to look back at the boy. I’ve never seen such disgust on a man’s face. In front of everybody, he said, ‘How do you think *I* feel? Just like your Uncle Rupert, you’re nothing but a queer!’”

Annette recalled that after Big Howard slammed the door, Howard burst into tears. “Dudley reached up to comfort him and gently escorted him up the steps to his own bedroom, where Howard remained for the next two weeks, refusing to return to the Yoakum mansion.”

During the rest of his time in Houston, Big Howard never called him or returned to the Sharp residence. He told Annette and Estelle that he planned to disinherit the boy unless he changed his ways—and soon.

On January 11, 1924, he began to consult with his lawyers about changing his will.

Houston, 1924

Eager to leave Houston and return to the fleshpots of Los Angeles, Big Howard awoke early on the morning of January 14. He was still troubled by his break with his son, as he’d told Sheryl over champagne the night before, but this particular morning his mind was preoccupied with other thoughts.

As Sheryl languished sleepily in the suite’s luxurious bed, Big Howard admired his physique in a full-length mirror. He was proud that at the age of fifty-four he was still in such good shape and could satisfy the sexual demands of a lusty twenty-year old chorine, who was used to having much younger men make love to her.

Today was his big day for opening up frontiers for his rapidly expanding Toolco, his nickname for the Hughes Tool Company. For lunch, he’d invited six important oil barons from Southern California, where new wells were being drilled almost daily.

After going for a brisk ten-block walk to keep in shape, he told R.C. Kuldell, his right-hand man in Houston, that, “I’ve never felt better in my life.” Before retiring to his suite to write his luncheon speech, he confided several smutty details to Kuldell about his relationship with the chorus girl.

Kuldell went back to Toolco’s office but returned to the Rice Hotel at five minutes to twelve to accompany his boss to the luncheon. A former Army colonel, Kuldell was a tough, weather-beaten man with a reputation for womanizing. Big Howard was completely dependent on him to run his cash cow while he was conducting sales conferences, or gallivanting, in New York, Los Angeles, or The Bahamas.

At his luncheon speech, where he’d ordered the best of Texas prime rib for his honored guests, Big Howard revealed that his new roller bit for 1924 would be self-lubricating, an enormous breakthrough in engineering that would revolutionize the oil industry. To please his guests, he also announced plans for the opening of a Toolco office in San Diego so that the oil barons wouldn’t have to commute all the way to Los Angeles. He also informed the men that Toolco was currently marketing 150 drills in various shapes, sizes, and types, or “species,” as Big Howard called his bits. To inject a little humor into the luncheon, Big Howard made some crude joke that “the tool at Toolco and the tool in my trousers are just great. One earns me a fortune and the other ensures that I’ll have a good time with the money.”

Later Kuldell pronounced the luncheon “the most successful Howard had even given. He already controlled Texas. Now he was going to become the big wheel in Southern California.”

By two-thirty that afternoon, Big Howard had returned alone to his offices in the Humble Building. There, as he sat behind a large oak desk, a gift which his late wife, Allene, had purchased for him, he met privately with S.T. Brown, the sales manager for Toolco.

“My roller bit will dominate oil exploration around the world,” Big Howard predicted to Brown, who would later recall in vivid detail that fateful day. “Southern California will be just another stepping stone for me with new markets opening up all the time. Alaska. Europe. The Middle East. The dinosaurs left a lot of oil in the ground and before I die my roller bit will go after most of it. When I’m laid to rest, the world will have to come up with another energy source, because I don’t plan to leave anything in the ground. Brown, my boy, I’m going to become America’s first billionaire.”

As he looked into his own future, Big Howard became more and more animated, getting up from his desk and pacing furiously around the room as if overcome with how big his future was going to be.

All of a sudden, Big Howard stopped ranting and clutched at his heart, his face convulsed with pain. “His whole head just seemed to turn purple like he was choking,” Brown later revealed. “His neck seemed to swell up real big. After a few seconds, he held onto his desk for support. His legs just seemed to give way. He was in spasms when he hit the floor. I rushed over and loosened his tie but I feared the worst.”

Brown told the Houston police that “loosening some god damn tie wasn’t going to save his life.” He immediately called C.M. Aves, Big Howard’s family doctor. Fortunately, Dr. Aves was nearby and rushed at once to the Humble Building, entering Big Howard’s private office.

Examining the patient on the floor, he could discover no heart beat. “He’s dead!” he announced to Brown. Rising to his feet, the doctor ordered Brown to call the officers of Toolco and to place another emergency call to Annette Lummis. “It’s her job to tell Sonny.”

As an afterthought, Dr. Aves advised that Brown had also better call the Houston police chief. “When men as rich as Howard Hughes die suddenly,” he said, “foul play is always suspected.”

Earlier that day young Howard had told Annette that he’d be playing golf at the Houston Country Club with Judge Walter Montieth. Not wanting to break the bad news to the boy on the phone, Annette decided to drive over to the golf course.

First, she called her husband, Dr. Lummis, to ask him to make funeral arrangements. Her husband already knew of Big Howard’s death, as he’d just received a phone call from Dr. Aves. Hughes’s doctor suspected that the sudden heart attack was a result of an embolism, which is when the normal flow of blood to the heart is impeded by the presence of a foreign object, such as an air bubble, in the blood stream.

At the golf course, Annette interrupted Howard’s game of golf with the judge and told him about his father’s sudden death. She would tell the press that the boy was “overcome with grief and had to be assisted off the course.”

Later, she wrote a different version of that afternoon to Rupert in Los Angeles. “Howard showed no remorse at all,” she claimed. “He actually insisted on finishing his game of golf, even though the judge warned him that such behavior might not be appropriate.”

After the game was over—Howard lost to the judge—he refused to ride back to the Yoakum mansion with Annette. “He went into the clubhouse and placed a call to Frank Andrews, the family attorney.”

“I want to read my father’s will,” he informed Annette before driving off in his 1924 white Duesenberg with its red leather upholstery.

In the office of attorney Frank Andrews, the just orphaned Howard was presented with two wills from Big Howard, one written eleven years previously and the other drafted the week before. In the first will, Big Howard left half his estate to Allene, one-fourth going to his son, and the remaining one-fourth to be divided equally among his parents, Jean (Mimi) and Felix T. Hughes Sr., with their other son, Felix T. Hughes Jr. cut in for part of his parents’ share. Big Howard did not leave any money to his other brother, Rupert. Frank Andrews told young Howard that at the time the will was drawn up, Big Howard had maintained that Rupert was making plenty of money “writing Hollywood junk and could take care of himself.”

In that will, Big Howard stated that, “I desire and request that my son Howard be given as good an education as possible.”

He also suggested that the Houston Land & Trust Company be appointed guardian of his estate until his son turned twenty-one. The *de facto* guardian of Howard was still Annette Lummis, who wanted him to continue at Rice University until he was graduated.

To Howard’s utter dismay, Andrews also read the more recent will, the one that had been drafted following their blow-up at the Sharp house on New Year’s Eve. Howard immediately became embittered when he read the second will, in which Big Howard had diminished his son’s share of the estate to less than half. But he was delighted to see that this second will had neither been signed nor witnessed and was therefore invalid.

In front of Andrews, Howard ripped the second will to shreds. “It’s a piece of shit! How dare he betray me like this and give away what’s rightfully mine.” Andrews later recalled that he was shocked at Howard’s explosion of anger, considering how generous his father had been to him in life.

But that day in Houston, however, Andrews held his tongue. With his best client dead, he was eager to curry favor with the new heir. “My father never asked me what I wanted. He decided what I was to do and then forced me to do it whether I wanted to or not. No one will make me do anything I don’t want to ever again. Both of my parents tried to control me. They can’t control me from the grave.”

Andrews chose not to point out to his new and suddenly rich client that many parents try to direct their children’s lives. He did inquire if Howard planned to resume his education at Rice, as he was certain that Annette and other members of the Hughes clan would want that. “I’ve spent my last day on a college campus,” Howard announced rather arrogantly to the attorney.

Even as funeral preparations were being made, the staff at Andrews’ office was busy tallying up Big Howard’s assets. Appraised for tax purposes, the value of the entire estate came to \$871,518 in property, notes, stocks and bonds. Company assets were appraised at \$750,000 of that amount. This figure was kept deliberately low for tax purposes. Even at the time, the market value of Toolco would have been at least \$8 million—maybe a lot more.

Big Howard had run up personal bills totaling \$258,000, and that amount would have to be deducted from the estate. These bills ranged from \$2 for a Ludwig whistle from the Parker Music Company of Houston to \$515 from James Bell & Son tailors in New York. Howard had charged but not paid for two tuxedos and four black velvet waistcoats.

Big Howard’s funeral was conducted in the library of the Yoakum mansion, with Peter Gray Sears presiding. He was the pastor at Christ Church and had also officiated at Allene’s funeral.

The house was virtually filled with large floral arrangements, most of them sent by Texas oil barons. Even the Houston police sent Lilies of the Valley to drape over the elephant-gray casket studded with gold fittings and lined in crimson satin.

In attendance were Ella Rice and her beau, James Winston. Ella’s mother, Mattie Rice, was related to Annette’s husband, Dr. Lummis, so there was some distant family relationship.

Howard did not follow the mournful funeral procession to Glenwood Cemetery. Once there, Big Howard, the errant and wandering husband, at last was joined to his long-suffering wife in tree-shaded twin graves.

Big Howard and Allene had left behind an emotionally shattered eighteen-year-old, who was haunted by a fear of germs and overly concerned with his health. He told Dudley that he feared an early death such as his parents had experienced.

During the final burial rites at the cemetery, Howard remained alone in his bedroom, playing with his ham radio as he attempted to contact ships at sea, as he had done as a child.

That night when Annette, along with Dr. Lummis, returned to the Yoakum mansion, Howard had disappeared. She assumed that he had gone on a country drive since his car was missing. “He needs to think things out alone,” she told Dr. Lummis.

It was later learned that Howard spent the night in his father’s suite at the Rice Hotel, no doubt in the arms of his father’s former mistress, Sheryl Steele. On a tantalizing note, it was later learned that Howard invited Dudley to join Sheryl and himself on the second night.

After having disappeared for so long, Howard reappeared at the Yoakum mansion with no explanation as to where he’d been or what he’d done. He immediately went into the library, where his father’s burial services had been conducted, and placed an urgent call to Frank Andrews. The attorney later recalled “the fierce determination in the boy’s voice.”

“I don’t want to own seventy-five percent of Toolco,” Howard shouted into the phone. “I want to own one-hundred percent so I’ll not have to report to anyone. I’m leaving for New York tomorrow, and I’m going to London and Paris. When I return, I want you to have bought out my grandparents and my uncle.”

“But you’re still a minor?” Andrews protested.

“Yeah, since you brought that up,” Howard said. “That’s the second problem for you to solve. My golfing partner, Judge Montieth, told me there’s a loophole in Texas law. Investigate that. The judge said there’s a way I can be declared a legal adult even though I’m not twenty-one.”

“I’ve never heard of such a precedent,” Andrews said.

“Find out about it,” Howard ordered. “You can talk confidentially to the judge about this. He’s a very close friend of mine. Maybe some money will have to change hands. The judge wouldn’t be the first of his breed to take some money under the table.” Before ringing off, Howard had a final reminder for his attorney. “Drop the Junior from my name. My old man’s dead. I’m the *Senior* now in the Hughes family.”

The next morning he boarded a Chicago-bound train with Estelle Sharp and her son, Dudley. Once in Chicago, they would change trains for New York. From the port of New York, they would sail to London together.

Once aboard the ship and still in New York harbor, Howard sent a final telegram to Andrews back in Houston. “When I get back to Texas, I want to see some real progres (sic) made on my requests. If I find you haven’t moved forward, please be aware that there are many other lawyers in the great State of Texas who’d just love to have a rich young man like me as a client.”

England, 1924

Estelle, still billing herself as Mrs. Walter Sharp, had impulsively decided that she wanted to go on a trip to London and Paris, staying at all the deluxe hotels. In the wake of his father’s death, when Howard graciously agreed to finance the trip for her and Dudley, she demanded that he, along with her son, be one of her two male escorts. Still disturbed by Big Howard’s death, Annette agreed to the trip, although she had misgivings.

Much of the European jaunt is still cloaked in mystery, although some details have leaked out over the years. Howard booked one stateroom for Estelle and another for Dudley and himself, where they pursued their friendship and romance. Presumably, Estelle knew what was going on, but seemed to have no objections whatsoever. In that sense, she was more of a modern woman than most other daughters of the Edwardian age.

Estelle wrote to Annette that the boys were taking beautifully to crossing the Atlantic and that they dressed up “like fine young gentlemen every night for dinner.” She also noted that Howard and Dudley “were the showstoppers of all the young men aboard, and were eagerly sought out as dancing companions.” She concluded, “What Howard needs right now, more than anything, is to escape from lawyers and greedy, grasping relatives trying to suck blood money from him, money he’s entitled to. Big Howard should have left him in one-hundred percent control and not placed him in financial jeopardy by having to deal with that Hughes clan. They know I sold my interest in the tool company too cheaply, and I fear they are not going to let that happen with Howard. I predict a big family battle ahead. In fact, this battle over the estate will probably break up the Hughes family into warring factions.”

In London, Howard escorted his friends to the theater, swanky night clubs, pubs, cruises on the Thames, whitebait dinners in Greenwich, and even the British Museum. At the latter he decided that in spite of their riches he was not a museum-goer.

Leaving Estelle in the clutches of a handsome young guide, who’d just been graduated from Oxford, he ordered a chauffeur in a limousine to drive Dudley and him to some airfield in East Anglia, the exact location unknown. Dudley later remembered the airfield being somewhere near Cambridge.

After money exchanged hands, Howard persuaded the pilot that he was an ace aviator. The teenager was allowed to fly a small craft over the fens, marshes, and bucolic Constable landscapes of East Anglia and out over the North Sea. Dudley, often terrified, went along for the ride.

One afternoon, after landing and refueling somewhere, Howard flew over the Yorkshire Moors. On their return to London, after having been away for five nights, Howard assured Dudley that flying over a country “is the only way to sightsee.”

Back in London after a farewell dinner at the Café Royale, where Estelle demanded to be seated in Oscar Wilde’s old booth, both Howard and Dudley persuaded her to make their first commercial air flight from London to Paris. Such flights were “the rage of the age.”

Estelle was terrified to make such a journey. But Howard assured her it was not only the fastest way to get there, but the safest. Sensing his determination, she reluctantly agreed to go along, even though predicting “this will be the death of all of us.”

The flight went smoothly in spite of some heavy winds over the English Channel. Estelle later told Annette that she’d never “seen such joy on a boy’s face” as she’d witnessed on Howard’s when he was flying over the Channel. Normally not a talkative person, Howard couldn’t stop talking about the unlimited future of commercial aviation.

Although Howard at that point in his young life didn’t know the means by which he’d achieve his goal, he stated his determination to become a major player in the world of commercial aviation in the years ahead.

“One day,” he predicted to both Estelle and Dudley, as the craft began to swoop down onto Paris, “I’m going to own my own god damn airline.”

Paris, 1924

The trip took a turn for the worse in Paris where Howard had booked two suites at the prestigious Hotel Crillon on the Place de la Concorde in the heart of the city.

The exact details will never be known, since all the participants are dead, but at some point one night at Le Dôme in Montparnasse Dudley confessed that he’d had an affair with Allene in the months preceding her early death.

Perhaps it was that extra bottle of wine he shouldn’t have ordered, but Dudley confessed to his lover and his own mother. The reaction of Estelle to the news is not known. Whatever inner turmoil Howard felt upon hearing the confession wasn’t manifested immediately. It would take many months before his true reaction would be revealed in his rejection of Dudley.

At that moment, Howard, in his stoic way, seemed to show no emotion at all, in spite of what must have been deep personal antagonism at the news, especially since he was sleeping with and making love to the same young man who’d made love to his mother. But such a virtually incestuous tie with Allene was hardly foreign to him.

When this news leaked out in Houston, and became the subject of cruel gossip, many insiders felt that both Howard and Estelle knew about the relationship between Dudley and Allene before Dudley finally admitted it.

“What could Estelle be thinking when she let her boy go and spend night after night in Allene’s house?” asked local gossip, Betty Mayfield. “Allene’s excuse for having Dudley at her home was her fear that someone would break in on her and rape her. She still maintained that myth about the rape from all those army black men, even though everybody, including the Houston police, knew she was a liar about that night.”

When Howard, returning to Houston from his boarding school in California, discovered that Dudley knew his way around the Yoakum mansion better than he did, he had to suspect that there was some intimacy between his mother and his best friend.

“I would see Allene and Dudley out together at restaurants,” Mayfield said. “He was always there to escort her wherever she wanted to go in Big

Howard’s absence, which was most of the time. Everybody was talking about this unnatural relationship between a young boy and an old woman. Just by the way they acted around each other, you could tell that those two were love birds in spite of the difference in their ages.”

The next day in Paris, and in the weeks to come, Howard continued to treat Dudley in the same way he always had, in spite of any personal misgivings he might have had about his best friend. It wasn’t until he got back to Houston that Howard began to make some of his antagonism known, although not in any confrontational way.

Howard never actually promised it, but Dudley assumed that he was the heir apparent to Howard’s “old” buttercup yellow Duesenberg now that Big Howard had presented his son a more luxurious 1924 model. Dudley had even told friends of his that he’d soon be riding around in the swanky vehicle after his return from the Continent.

After having dinner with Estelle every night in Paris, Dudley and Howard would go “on the town,” sampling some of the city’s famous night life. They were enthralled when they attended the Folies Bergère. As two handsome young men, with seemingly endless money to spend, Howard and Dudley were also solicited by both male and female prostitutes.

Their favorite night club was called Caméléon, near Place Clichy. After two o’clock in the morning, the decadent audience was treated to various exhibitions behind closed doors. Guests, providing they put up the francs, could pay for whatever scene they wanted. Sometimes the patrons requested a black man, perhaps from French Algeria, with a blonde German woman. One favorite act at the time was with two sixteen-year-old male twins, performing sixty-nine on each other. Women with women were also requested. On one occasion, Dudley and Howard witnessed an orgy of off-duty French sailors who hired out their services to make extra money performing.

Sometimes dawn would be breaking across Paris as Howard and Dudley walked along the Seine, too filled with excitement to go back to the Crillon.

The world at the time seemed bathed in the same pink light as the early morning landscapes of Paris. Howard talked endlessly about his hopes and dreams when he’d become chief of Toolco.

Without so much as an invitation, Dudley, too, thought he’d be a part of a future as rosy as the sky over Paris that morning, as they hailed a taxi back to their hotel.

When Howard rose from his bed at one o’clock the following afternoon, he reached over for Dudley but found a missing space. On the night table was a note from Dudley, saying that he was accompanying Estelle to the Louvre that afternoon and promising to be back at the hotel at five o’clock.

When Dudley and Estelle returned to the Crillon at the appointed time, they found Howard had done another one of his disappearing acts.

Unknown to Estelle and Dudley, Mickey Neilan had arrived in Paris. Rupert had told him that young Howard was now in charge of Toolco and would soon be coming to Hollywood to make movies. Mickey wanted to get to him before any other producer or director did.

He already knew that Howard was not immune to homosexual liaisons. The womanizing Mickey had plenty of heterosexual credentials. They included Gloria Swanson, who called him “my wild Irish love,” and his new wife, Blanche Sweet, both of whom had fallen madly in love with him. But like so many other Hollywood male players at the time, Mickey always said that he didn’t object to homosexuals making love to him, providing it was from the waist down and that they didn’t “use any weapon more probing than their tongues.”

But since he had never actually courted a homosexual before, he didn’t know how to go about it, other than employing the same technique he used on seducing women such as Swanson. In fact, the way he choreographed his courtship of Howard more or less paralleled his romancing of Swanson in the same city of Paris in 1922.

Howard was astonished to find three vases filled with roses when he woke up and wandered into the living room of his suite. There was a note from Mickey, inviting him to a “wild I party” in a château south of Paris. Without waiting for acceptance, Mickey promised he’d be at the Crillon to pick Howard up at four-thirty that afternoon. That way, they’d have time to arrive at the party before sunset.

Perhaps at that moment, Howard decided to begin his payback to Dudley for that revelation about seducing Allene. Without leaving a note to either Estelle or Dudley, Howard called Mickey’s hotel and accepted the invitation.



Gloria Swanson

Although Howard’s initial impression of a drunken Mickey had not been favorable, he became fascinated by the director during the three short days and longer nights they spent together in Paris. Born to a life of privilege, Howard was intrigued by the rough and tumble existence that Mickey had experienced as a kid.

A school drop-out at the age of eleven when his father died, the boy supported himself and his mother by doing odd jobs. While still a teenager, he worked as a juvenile in a stock company before coming to Hollywood where he was hired as a chauffeur for D.W. Griffith, then a director at Biograph.

Griffith found the charming young man “dashinglly handsome” and cast him in some small parts. By 1913, Mickey was directing his first picture for the American Film Company. In years to come he would drift between directing and acting. In 1917, he directed Mary Pickford in *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* long before anyone ever heard of Shirley Temple. He also had an affair with Pickford, since her marriage to Owen Moore was on the

rocks.

At the time of his Paris rendezvous with Howard, Mickey had directed his wife, Blanche, in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, based loosely on the famous novel by Thomas Hardy. If Howard had any misgivings about running off with Mickey, the husband of his friend, Blanche, he kept them to himself.

Always animated and eager to party, Mickey was distinguished by his curly, sandy-colored hair. He wore glasses but they did not detract from his raw masculinity and sex appeal.

Swanson found him “dashing, brilliant, and a madcap.” Howard knew from personal experiences that Hearst held Mickey in disdain, but that was because he was rumored to be having an affair with his mistress, Marion Davies.

It was said that Mickey had an inner radar that directed him to “the best dames and the best booze.” Mickey always said he didn’t like to indulge in anything that wasn’t either “illegal or immoral.” Young Howard eagerly listened to his advice, especially when he told him, “Don’t give a god damn what the stinking world thinks of you. Follow your own desires and have a great life—and fuck everybody else!”

Fully dressed in tuxedos, Mickey and Howard, on the night following their château party, descended on Maxim’s for three bottles of the best champagne. That was followed by a long dinner at La Rose de France, a long-gone Montmartre restaurant frequented in part by “ladies” who really weren’t that under their gowns. Reportedly, Howard was vastly amused when a bevy of transvestites solicited Mickey and him.

Dinner was followed by a retreat to a jazz club, Blue Note, in Montparnasse. By two o’clock in the morning, Mickey himself had taken the star spotlight, playing New Orleans jazz and the latest Broadway showtune hits. The mixed crowd of homosexuals and heterosexuals adored him and demanded repeated encores. Before dawn they descended on Les Halles for a bowl of the famous French onion soup at Le Pied de Cochon. They were joined by the mink-clad flotsam of the night.

The third night, they didn’t go out at all, but ordered a champagne and caviar supper at Mickey’s hotel suite. Whatever happened between the two men that night will never be known. Years later, Blanche claimed that Mickey was very vague on the details of their final night together in Paris.

Later, when Howard started producing movies, and Mickey came to him with the nucleus of a screenplay, *Everybody’s Acting*, Howard bought it and filmed it.

Back in Hollywood, Mickey told Blanche some of the details of his experiences with Howard in Paris. Years later, she recalled being more amused at the episode than jealous.

One can only speculate what Howard told Estelle and Dudley about his three-day disappearance when he finally returned to his suite at the Hotel Crillon. His going away obviously didn’t cause a permanent break in his friendship, because three days later Estelle, Howard, and Dudley were spotted at a plush casino in the environs of Brussels.

The man who one day would “buy” Las Vegas got his first taste for gambling in Belgium, although in the years ahead he preferred to gamble on life, not at tables.

Starting out cautiously at the roulette table with a five-dollar bet, Howard steadily built up a winning pile of plaques, switching from red to black and back again. Before the night was over, he’d won a staggering ten thousand dollars.

Suddenly, he told Dudley, “I fear Lady Lucky is jilting me.” Cautiously he placed only a five-dollar bet and lost. Once he’d done that, he reached out and swooped up the remaining \$9,995 worth of plaques and cashed them. Estelle was impressed at his self-control.

Taking a ferryboat across the English Channel, the trio arrived in London for two final nights. From London, they took the train to Southampton for their ocean voyage back to New York.

By then, if he already didn’t know it, Howard had learned that “money talks.” He objected to the size of the first-class cabin he’d be sharing with Dudley.

Howard refused the cabin and went directly to the captain. Perhaps the teenage boy bribed him—that’s not known. What is known is that Howard and Dudley were assigned the finest stateroom on board, even though the U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain had to be bumped into the smaller cabin Howard objected to.

From that point on, and for every night of the voyage, Estelle, Howard, and Dudley dined at the captain’s table. As he stood on the deck watching New York harbor come into view, Howard told Dudley and Estelle that “my whole future depends on how clever I can be in the next few months.”

Houston, 1924

Wanting desperately to hold onto his newly minted millionaire clientele, attorney Frank Andrews had been working overtime to force Howard’s grandparents and uncle to sell their stock in Toolco. Felix Sr., then eighty-five, and his wife Jean (Mimi), eighty-two, had moved from the cold winters of Keokuk to Rupert’s sunny estate in Los Angeles. The remaining member of the Toolco stockholders, Felix Jr., had been invited to Los Angeles, but had not yet moved west.

Howard was deeply disappointed to learn that his grandmother, Mimi, had actually laughed at his proposal for a buy-out of her Toolco stock. She said that Howard was “an infant” in the eyes of the law and couldn’t enter into any legal agreement anyway. Besides, his grandmother also claimed that she and her aging husband needed the income derived from Toolco not only to support themselves but to leave a financial legacy to pass on to their remaining children, including Rupert who’d been excluded from Big Howard’s will.

That news was disappointing to Howard, but Andrews had confirmed that under Texas law if a nineteen-year-old minor could convince the court that he was capable of handling his business affairs without adult supervision, he could be declared “legally responsible.” Howard wanted to press for such a hearing, and he also wanted the case to come before his friend and golfing partner, Judge Walter Monteith.

Within one month after his return to Texas, Judge Monteith played a game of golf with Howard—as always, the judge won even though he was a poor player—and had lunch as Howard’s guest at the clubhouse. After lunch, both of them went into the sauna and subsequently enjoyed massages from two expert masseurs. Later they retired into the slumber chamber for rest and relaxation. During this session, which lasted about an hour, the judge quizzed Howard about several details regarding Toolco. Later, Monteith told his legal assistants that “the boy answered every single question put to him.”

Of course, the judge knew nothing about the machinations of running a tool company and wouldn’t have known if Howard’s answers were right or wrong.

Annette objected to Howard’s legal maneuvering but had no real power over him. She told friends in Houston that he was “just possessed to be

declared an adult.”

Los Angeles, 1924

Unable to get his relatives to sell their stock, Howard invited himself to Rupert’s estate in Los Angeles to meet with his grandparents.

Learning of her favorite son’s death, Mimi had donned a black dress that she’d wear for the rest of her life. “Life is so cold and dark,” she told her grandson when he came into the living room to greet her. “I’m so desolate. My life is finished. There is nothing left.”

At first Felix Sr. and Mimi welcomed Howard warmly as part of the family mourning ritual. Later, she told her husband and Rupert that she secretly believed that Howard was relieved to have his father “out of the picture.”

But in the first few days, Mimi befriended Howard and discussed future plans with him, including the continuation of his education. Howard even convinced Mimi to sell her expensive car, claiming that he feared that she’d become too old to drive. Regrettably he pocketed the money generated by the sale of the vehicle and never gave it to her.

It didn’t take long for Mimi and Felix Sr. to become painfully aware of why Howard had come to see them. It wasn’t to mourn the death of his father, but to persuade them to sell their stock to him. At one point the negotiations became so bitter that Mimi agreed to sell her share and that of her husband’s for only ten dollars.

She wasn’t completely serious about the offer but hoped to shame her grandson, not realizing that at the time that he was virtually without shame.

The dispute with his grandparents grew so bitter that Howard finally denounced both of them. “I want you out of my life!” he shouted at them. “Both of you are so old you should have died a long time ago.”

After that outburst, Mimi retreated to her bedroom and announced she didn’t want to see Howard any more. The aging, sensitive, and artistically inclined woman would speak only once more to her grandson, and that would be on the phone. Still rather spry and well versed in the law, Felix Sr. threatened to bring a lawsuit against his grandson.

Matters became even more complicated when Howard’s other uncle, Felix Jr., arrived and immediately demanded \$250,000 for his share of the stock. In the midst of a divorce, Felix Jr. was eager to acquire a lot of cash—and soon. Negotiations between Felix Jr. and Howard became so hostile that Felix Jr. slapped the boy’s face real hard, knocking him down. Not known for violence, Howard did not strike him back.

As for Rupert, who’d been cut out of everything, he was secretly negotiating to have himself declared Howard’s guardian. Although he had no business experience with the tool company, he plotted to take over the assets of the company until Howard turned twenty-one.

Even though appalled by Rupert’s manipulations behind the scenes, Howard maintained the pretense of a great loving trust for Rupert. With no sincerity at all, Howard told Rupert, “With my father out of the way, you’ve become the Big Guy in my life.” Rupert fell for this flattery. Actually, Howard was like a hungry cat waiting to devour an overweight rodent.

Suddenly, Howard was going to the Los Angeles Athletic Club for workouts and steambaths with Rupert, for long drives along the southern California coast, and for late night dinners. At one point Rupert rented them a house in Santa Monica for an escape from the pressures and prying eyes of Hollywood. Rupert did not invite either of his parents or his live-in girlfriend, Elizabeth Dial, on any of these holiday breaks.

Having learned of Rupert’s homosexual streak, Howard was determined to take advantage of it.

Many Hollywood writers, including Mart Martin, have known that Rupert seduced the teenage boy at one point, although details are sparse. It probably occurred at the Santa Monica beach house. Martin, in fact, lists Howard’s first sexual experience as being with Rupert, to whom he is said to have lost his virginity at the age of fifteen. Martin and the other writers were almost on target, except for the fact that Howard was eighteen at the time, and he didn’t lose his virginity to Rupert, having surrendered it several years prior to that.

Back in Houston, Dudley and Estelle learned only bits and pieces of what was happening in Los Angeles. What is known is that once Rupert had performed oral sex on Howard on several occasions, the teenager then used that molestation to blackmail his paternal uncle.

Howard knew that Rupert had great influence over Mimi. Threatened with exposure of his own secret streak of homosexuality, Rupert, although furious, gave in to Howard’s demands. After several long sessions with his parents, Rupert finally forced Mimi to cave in, albeit with great reluctance. Her husband went along with her.

With Rupert appearing to have taken Howard’s side, Mimi agreed to accept \$75,000 for her share and that of Felix Sr. for their stock. Felix Jr. held out and got his first asking price of \$250,000. His uncle told Howard, “It is my first and final offer. If you don’t give me the money, and even if Mimi and Dad sell to you, I’ll still be one of the shareholders of Toolco, and I’ll make your life living hell if you don’t cough up the money.”

On May 28, 1924, Toolco became Howard’s exclusive property when Frank Andrews informed him that he now controlled one-hundred percent of the stock. The total cost of the buy-out had been \$325,000.

To raise that kind of money, Howard had to drain Toolco of all its operating capital. But it was a gamble he was willing to chance.

Considering the millions the tool company would make in the years ahead, this sellout price was viewed even at the time as “highway robbery,” in Mimi’s bitter words.

Her last words to her grandson came in a phone call he’d placed to her. Detesting the atmosphere at Rupert’s mansion, Howard had moved on and was occupying the same suite at the Ambassador Hotel where his father had had dalliances with Eleanor Boardman and Gloria Swanson. With Billy Haines and other Hollywood friends, Howard was entertaining as lavishly as Big Howard once did.

“You’re too irresponsible to run my son’s company,” Mimi charged over the phone.

“Just you wait and see,” Howard angrily countered. “I’m a responsible adult! In fact, I’m returning to Houston to run the company. I’m going to settle down and get married.”

“Just who are you marrying?” she asked.

“Ella Rice,” he said before slamming down the phone forever on the old woman.

Rupert had to go to New York on a picture deal. Even though he’d been instrumental in forcing Mimi to agree to the buy-out, Rupert was still bitter as reflected in his letter to “Blessed Mimi,” which he’d written from New York’s Biltmore Hotel.

I never in my life heard of such bald robbery as he attempted and carried out. It was an astounding display of grasping—dishonorable

ungenerous selfishness. He actually robbed you and Felix of what Howard willed you. He pretended to be generous to his darling Mimi and offered you as a gift about a quarter of what your own son wished you to have. When he yielded he yielded only to compulsion, yielded with the worst possible grace, lied flatly again and again and altogether behaved outrageously. He is a miser and a selfish little beast.

*Your loving son,
Rupert*

Although Howard never wanted anything to do with Mimi and his grandfather, or Felix Jr. for that matter, and although he despised Rupert, he still maintained a cordial relationship with his uncle.

“Why don’t you tell the son of a bitch to go fuck himself?” Dudley suggested in a letter from Houston.

“Not yet,” Howard said. “That day will come. In the meantime, I’m going into the movie business and dear old cocksucking Uncle Rupert will be very useful to me.”

In time, when he no longer needed him, Howard would also drop Rupert and even refuse to attend his funeral. His grandparents would never forgive him, especially Mimi. Shortly before her own death, she spoke of her “bitterness toward *that* boy.” Signing her own Last Will and Testament right before she died in 1928, she left her estate to be divided among Rupert and Felix Jr. She wrote, “I mention the name of my grandson, Howard R. Hughes Jr., to show that I have not forgotten him and that I purposely have not given him anything in this my Last Will and Testament.”

Houston, 1924

Even though he wasn’t legally an adult, Howard nonetheless assumed charge of Toolco in the summer of 1924. At the company, he made an astonishing confession to Frank Andrews. “It was my father’s business—not mine,” Howard told his attorney. “The only interest I have in Toolco is how much money I can make from it every month. I’m going to pursue far bigger games than my father ever did, only I need financing. I want you to meet with the managers of the company about how much money I can expect to haul in every month. After all, it’s *my* company and *my* money. I can do what I want with it now.”

Howard didn’t waste a day after legally becoming nineteen, appearing in Superior Court on December 26, 1924, the first business day after Christmas.

The nineteen-year-old came before his friend, Judge Montieth, who declared Howard “legally an adult” two years before he turned twenty-one. The judge had only one admonition for Howard. He suggested that he return to his studies at Rice University.

Howard promised the judge that he would enroll at Princeton University during the next semester, attending classes with his best friend, Dudley.

He had no intention of keeping that promise.

Later, as Betty Mayfield claimed, “It was rumored throughout Houston society that Montieth accepted ten thousand dollars in cash from the boy. Others claimed he took as much as twenty five thousand under the table.”

Once the judge’s decree had come through, Howard never again invited Montieth for a game of golf in spite of repeated calls from the judge, who could not understand the sudden rejection since Howard had been granted everything he’d asked for in court.

Howard had accomplished what no other teenager in America—or adult for that matter—had ever done. He’d sowed the seed by which he would turn himself into America’s first homegrown billionaire.

With his relatives safely emasculated, he could now turn his attention to winning the hand of Ella Rice in marriage.

But, first, he had to eliminate James Winston as his competition.

Houston, 1925

For thirty-two years, Noah Dietrich ran Hughes’s vast industrial empire, and was—to some degree—one of Howard’s confidants. He knew far more about his client’s personal adventures than he related in *Howard: The Amazing Mr. Hughes*, published in 1972. Of course, Howard and several key players were still alive at the time of publication, and Dietrich showed great restraint in his rather short volume, at times not even giving the name of the party, such as actress Billie Dove, that he was writing about.

Dietrich’s spin on the Ella Rice/Howard Hughes marriage was so simplistic that it was ridiculous. Dietrich claimed that Howard won Ella’s hand by feigning illness. According to the story, Howard’s doctor called Ella, informing her that his patient was in a coma and kept calling out her name.

Dropping everything, Ella was said to have rushed to the stricken Howard’s bedside where the teenage millionaire then experienced a miraculous recovery. In the next sentence, Dietrich has Ella and Howard married within three weeks.

No woman as smart and as sophisticated as Ella Rice would have fallen for such a ploy. Nor would she have abandoned “the man of my dreams,” James Winston, because an acquaintance of hers, Howard, was sick. Actually, Howard wasn’t sick at all.

The actual story, as best as can be pieced together, is far more complicated than the Dietrich version. Over the years Dudley and others have shed more light on what actually happened.

In Dudley’s version, Howard set out to woo James away from Ella. Of course, the way to do that was with money. It is not know how Howard got in touch with James, but soon the handsome young man was seen driving Howard’s buttercup yellow Duesenberg around Houston, much to the chagrin of Dudley, who had wanted the vehicle for himself.

Just as Howard used to disappear for long weekends with Dudley, he now took James as his companion. Ella was furious at James for deserting her, and at first she didn’t fully comprehend the unlikely relationship of James and Howard. “They are rivals for my hand,” Ella protested to Annette, who was far more knowledgeable about such matters than Ella. However, Annette, at least at the beginning, did not intervene.

Eventually the inevitable showdown came between James and Ella, with Howard present. It was at the Yoakum mansion. James confronted Ella and

told her he was not a rich man and could not provide for her. “He actually urged me to marry Howard instead of him,” Ella later confided to Annette, who wrote Rupert with all the details.

Infuriated, Ella denounced James. From her bedroom on the second floor, Annette could hear Ella screaming at James in the foyer of the Hughes home. “He’s bought you like he buys everybody else,” she shouted at him. Normally she rarely raised her voice. She told James she never wanted to see him again. Turning on Howard, she also denounced him for corrupting James. Before storming out of the house, Ella told Howard she never wanted to see him again either.

This was hardly a prelude to marriage, but Howard was very persistent and won Ella over in a very short time. Dudley claimed it was easy getting rid of James. “A seduction, a yellow Duesenberg, and twenty-five thousand dollars did the trick.”

Disillusioned with her former beau, Ella was very vulnerable when she finally agreed to marry Howard. Howard implored Annette to try to persuade Ella to go through with the marriage. In those days, as now, women often married for money, or “for home and hearth,” wanting security more than romance.

The most persuasive argument came from Libby Rice Farish, Ella’s older sister, who was “pushing forty.” Libby pointed out that Howard Hughes Jr. was the most desirable and sought after bachelor in the State of Texas. She predicted that Howard and Ella, a male beauty and a female beauty, would no doubt produce a remarkable son who one day would become President of the United States.

Ella did agree to start dating Howard. It can never be fully understood, but his boyish charm eventually broke down her barriers. “When Howard wanted to woo someone,” Estelle Sharp said, “he could be formidable, even at an early age. To be tall, dark, and handsome, and to shower a young girl with flowers, expensive presents, even jewelry, and offer to make her the Queen of Hollywood sharing his throne as the King of Hollywood, was pretty heady stuff in those days. At one point, I think Howard even threatened to slit his wrists if Ella didn’t give in.”

Behind the scenes, Ella’s mother, Mattie Rice, may have been Howard’s best secret weapon. At that time, Mattie had tremendous influence over her daughter. Although the Rice family was influential, Ella’s branch was the poor relations. Mattie wanted wealth and prestige for her daughter. Annette had already persuaded “Aunt Mattie” that she couldn’t send Howard to Los Angeles “with all those vampire movie people ready to rob him blind.”

The *coup de grâce* came when Howard showed up at Aunt Mattie’s door and showed her a will he’d drawn up. In the will he left, among other bequests, ten thousand dollars to Dudley Sharp. But “to my wife,” he’d written even before the marriage, “Ella Rice Hughes, I bequeath the sum of five hundred thousand dollars in first class, high grade securities, to be delivered to her by my Executors as soon after my death as can conveniently be arranged.” He also granted his wife-to-be a lifetime annuity of \$50,000 a year.

The wedding was announced for the evening of June 1, 1925 since Ella claimed, “I’ve always dreamed of a June wedding.” Significantly, Howard’s ten-page will that contained the provisions for Ella noted above was signed on May 30, 1925.

The night before the wedding Ella lost her nerve and protested to her mother that she “didn’t love Howard and couldn’t go through with the wedding.”

“My darling dear,” Mattie told her, “how many women who have been married in the State of Texas actually went to their honeymoon bed in love with their husbands? If love for a man is to come, it will come only after many years of facing the joy and the pain of lifetogether. What matters is that as Mrs.Howrd Hughes Jr., you’ regoing to be in a position to help your family.With this marriage,our rich relatives will no longer look down their noses on us. We’ll be walking taller and prouder than any other family in Houston.”

June 1 dawned steamy and hot, the kind of day in Texas where all you could do was sit on the front porch with a gasping hound dog, drink lemonade, and fan yourself. Dudley was dressed in a white linen suit. As he recalled years later, “I had to change my underwear three times before the day was over. My drawers were soaking wet and were clinging to my crotch.”

A local florist, William J. Billings, said, “I think we had to round up every flower in Texas for these nuptials. You’d think the President of the United States had been assassinated.”

Ella’s older sister, Libby, had married William S. Farish, chairman and founder of Standard Oil, and the wedding was held at their stylish mansion on Remington Lane, one of Houston’s most fashionable addresses.

“There were so many garlands of flowers and feathery ropes of blossoms that it looked like a May Day parade gone haywire,” Billings said.

When he later arrived in Hollywood, Howard joked with Billy Haines. “I was so fucking nervous I had to get sucked off by Dudley to calm my nerves before the ceremony.”

A vision in apple-green chiffon and her grandmother’s creamy antique lace, Libby was matron of honor. Dudley was Howard’s best man.

Tout Houston showed up in all their finery. Missing from the ceremony were Rupert and Howard’s grandparents.

Libby had learned of the wedding march played at the nuptials of Britain’s Queen Victoria when she wed her “beloved” Albert, and had demanded that the orchestra she’d hired play the same march.

Even though the day had dawned hot and bright, threatening clouds suddenly appeared in the sky as the wedding march began, followed by thunder and lightning. Perhaps symbolic of the marriage, an ominous storm roared over the barren Texas plains toward the city of Houston.

Officiating at the ceremony was the Rev. Peter Gray Sears, who had presided over the funerals of both of Howard’s parents.

A visible sigh rose from the women in the audience when Howard in a cream-colored linen suit and a navy blue tie appeared. “I’d never seen him look so handsome,” Dudley said. “All the women who attended movies were raving about how glorious Wallace Reid looked on screen. But Howard had any movie star beat in those days.”

Maybelle Webb, a reporter for *The Houston Chronicle*, went rhapsodic in print about the beautiful bride and her white chiffon gown with lace the color of flowers in a potpourri. “Her tulle veil was held in place by a cap of rose point lace and creamy seed pearls, adjusted with just-picked orange blossoms and white gardenias that smelled of enchanted gardens. In her porcelain arms she held a bridal shower of Lilies of the Valley.”

After the wedding, and before embracing Dudley in private, Howard confided, “I feel I’ve married a stranger. You should never have let me go through with the ceremony. Ella will never mean as much to me as you do.”

En Route to Chicago, 1925

On the train ride to Chicago, as their private rail car crossed the great American plains, the newly married Ella Rice Hughes lost her virginity to Howard.

The details of that night will never be known except for one tantalizing clue.

On the beach in Southampton, Long Island, on his honeymoon, Howard wrote Dudley a letter of distress. “The marriage is a disaster! Ella and I are not sexually compatible.”

CHAPTER FIVE

Los Angeles, 1925

Word of the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Howard R. Hughes, Jr., of Houston, Texas, at Union Station in Los Angeles spread like the wildfires that often deforested the Hollywood Hills.

Like touring royalty, they were seen along the streets as they drove to the Ambassador Hotel in their open Phaeton, a luxury model that was usually associated with film gods and goddesses. A pair of Rolls-Royce Silver Clouds, one for each of them, had already been shipped from New York.

Two hotel limos from the Ambassador had to be sent to collect their Parisian leather trunks filled with expensive clothing. At the beginning of his marriage, and in contrast to his sloppy dress in later life, Howard set out to become America's best dressed man, following in the elegant footsteps of Big Howard.

The gardens of the Ambassador smelled of orange blossoms and gardenias when Howard and Ella arrived at the entrance. At first, some of the other guests thought they were movie stars. Even before being shown to their suite by a bevy of well-tailored bellboys, Howard received messages from Douglas Fairbanks Sr., Charles Chaplin, and Marion Davies, the mistress of William Randolph Hearst, each asking him to call.

From the Vanderbilt Hotel in New York, Howard had sent a telegram notifying the manager of the Ambassador to cancel his reservation of the honeymoon suite for Ella and himself. In Los Angeles, he preferred a suite with separate bedrooms instead.

The first person Howard telephoned in Hollywood was Billy Haines. The actor asked, "Are you a staid old married man now or can we go out on the town and raise hell?"

"I'm smothering," Howard confided in him. "After that god damn honeymoon, I've decided my marriage is going to be in name only. Let's go out tonight and have fun."

Leaving Ella to her own devices in the Ambassador suite, Howard went night clubbing with Billy and his friends, not returning to the room until eight o'clock the next morning. At this early stage in his life, Howard had developed a taste for transvestite night clubs. Apparently, Ella asked her new husband where he'd been all night. But her question was met with such hostility that she was afraid to inquire about his comings and goings from that day forth.

The night before, she'd written a bitter note to Annette in Houston, complaining about her marriage to Howard. "It was as much a mistake for him as it was for me. We have absolutely nothing in common. Nonetheless, I'm determined to make a go of it. I won't be the only woman in America enduring a loveless, sexless marriage."

When he awoke that afternoon, Howard began interviewing personnel who'd answered his advertisement for an executive assistant. The most promising was Noah Dietrich, a tough-minded accountant who knew the oil business and was viewed as a genius about corporate financing. With revenues from Toolco coming in at the then astonishing rate of five thousand dollars a day, Howard needed someone to manage his money and to collect enough cash to finance his dreams in Hollywood.

A former prize fighter, Dietrich was only thirty-six years old. During the interview Howard asked Dietrich complicated questions. How does a battleship find its target? How does an internal combustion engine work? Finally, the most important question of the day, what did Dietrich think about investing in motion pictures?

Dietrich's response to that was so negative that it almost ended his association with Howard before it begun. "Investing in Hollywood is the fastest way a sucker can be parted with his money."

Howard made Dietrich wait for three weeks before he called him again, offering him the job of business manager of his empire at a salary often thousand dollars a year.

The next day he rented an adjoining suite for Dietrich at the Ambassador. In his memoirs, Dietrich discreetly recalled that Howard and Ella were sharing "a bedroom with twin beds." In truth, they were sharing a suite with two different bedrooms.

In the immediate years ahead, a smart manager like Dietrich could have made Howard a billionaire long before he actually became one. But instead he had to divert a constant stream of funds from the tool company to finance whatever reckless scheme Howard thought up that day.

Following the demands of his young new boss, Dietrich operated with an almost military precision in doing what he was asked to. One of Howard's demands involved the development of a steam-powered automobile that could travel from Los Angeles to San Francisco on a single tank of water.

At Cal Tech, engineers, after many a month, actually came up with such a vehicle. The car, Dietrich informed Howard, would cost a buyer more than half a million dollars, maybe a lot more.

Howard took only one drive with Dietrich in the five-passenger open touring vehicle before discovering its fatal flaw. If any of the vehicle's radial tubing was punctured during a crash, the passengers would be scalded to death. Howard commanded that the steam-powered vehicle be returned to the factory where he ordered it sold as junk, "the type Louis B. Mayer used to sell before he became a Hollywood big shot."

As junk, the half-million dollar vehicle brought twenty-one dollars.

In his first few years with Howard, Dietrich, following the orders of his boss, managed to lose five million dollars speculating on worthless Wall Street stocks.

Accepting Douglas Fairbanks Senior's invitation to Pickfair, Howard was happy to meet Doug's son, Fairbanks Jr., who was four years younger than Howard. Once both young men discovered they were saxophone players, the friendship was sealed.

Mary Pickford, Howard soon learned, didn't really like her stepson all that much. But whenever she invited the teenager to one of her dinners at Pickfair, she graciously included Howard as well, although never extending an invitation to Ella.

One night at Pickfair, Howard might be seated next to the Duchess of Alba or perhaps Henry Ford and his wife, Clara. He might even turn around at

table and find himself staring into the ugly but mischievous face of Albert Einstein. The queen of Siam might be in the bathroom refreshing herself, or else Howard found himself in the steam room sitting buck naked with the likes of the Duke of Windsor, wondering if small penises were a genetic flaw in the British royal family.

Both young Doug and Howard were thrilled when they learned that Bill Tilden, the greatest tennis player of all time, would arrive the following afternoon to teach them the secrets of the game.

The next day, Doug Jr. showed up on the courts looking like a prepubescent Ganymede in clinging blue seersucker briefs. Until that day Howard had seen players wear only white. Tilden focused most of his attention on young Doug instead of Howard “I couldn’t help but notice the glimmer in Tilden’s eye,” Howard later told Billy Haines.

“No wonder,” Billy said. “Tilden’s a child molester.”



Douglas Fairbanks Jr.

Fairbanks Sr. later came out to the court, and Tilden beat “d’Artagnan’s musketeer” so badly he retreated back into the house to join Pickford.

That night Howard, along with Doug, was invited to dinner at Pickfair. After a lavish meal, over which Mary Pickford presided, the guests retired to the living room for parlor games. Howard was finding that he had very little to say to Lord and Lady Mountbatten, and almost nothing to say to the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland.

Suddenly Fairbanks Sr. flew into a rage at his Japanese valet. He screamed, shouted and denounced the servant in front of his stunned guests. Grabbing the lightweight valet by the heels, Fairbanks picked him up and swung him into the air, as the boy spun around Fairbanks’ head.

Lady Mountbatten regarded it with cold-faced detachment, perhaps assuming that this is how American movie stars behave at home. The Duchess of Sutherland screamed in fright. But when Fairbanks finally let the boy come out of orbit, seemingly unharmed, the other guests were told he was a trained acrobat and that it was only a stunt to amuse them.

The following week, Howard arrived for his regular tennis game with Doug, only to find Fairbanks, Sr. beating up on Tilden who lay sprawled on the court, not fighting back or even putting up the slightest resistance. Howard raced to pull Fairbanks off the tennis pro. “Get that pansy asshole off my grounds,” Fairbanks yelled at Howard. “*Now*” He turned in anger and disgust, heading back to the house. Fairbanks was one of the first in Hollywood to use the word “pansy” to refer to a homosexual. The word would not come into general usage until 1929.

Without saying anything or even looking back, Tilden picked himself up from the courts and headed for his car.

Howard invited Doug, Jr., for a drive in his silver Rolls. Seeing them head out, Fairbanks came down from the porch and raced over. He leaned into the car and pointed a finger at his son. “Just let me catch you doing that one more time, and you won’t have a weenie to play with. I’ll cut it off.” He slapped Howard’s arm. “Thanks, kid. At least there’s someone in Hollywood who can be trusted with my son.”

Howard said nothing, but drove Doug in silence, delivering him to the home of his mother, Beth Sully Fairbanks.

Before getting out of the car, Doug invited Howard to visit him on location in Arizona where he was going to shoot Zane Grey’s *Wild Horse Mesa*.

“I play Billie Dove’s kid brother,” he told Howard. “She’s the most beautiful woman in the world, and I’m madly in love with her. But she’s married.”

Before driving on, Howard gave the younger boy some advice. “Never let a husband stand in the way of a love affair.”

When Howard agreed to meet Chaplin for dinner, he expected that The Little Tramp would have invited at least a dozen other guests. Not so. Chaplin was sitting alone at a choice table for two in the elegant restaurant at the Ambassador Hotel.

At first Howard suspected that there might be an attempt to seduce him, since Billy Haines had already told him about Chaplin’s fondness for teenage boys and girls. “But you’re a bit long in the tooth for Chaplin,” Billy had told Howard. “Usually he doesn’t like his meat aged.”

Nervous as he was, Howard was immediately put at ease by Chaplin’s grace, intellect, wit, and charm, all of which he possessed in abundance.

With cunning instinct, Howard knew not to tell Chaplin how much he loved his films. The entire world had seen all of Chaplin’s movies, and he was probably tired of hearing that. At first Howard was astounded to find that the most important film star on earth didn’t have a retinue of bodyguards and studio chiefs following him around.

Howard later reported the entire evening in great detail to Billy.

“Being the star that he was, Chaplin immediately took over the conversation,” Howard later said. Stars, he’d already learned, were rarely interested in anybody other than the face staring back at them in the mirror.

Chaplin surveyed the dining room, many of its tables filled with the great stars of the silent era. “This whole place is like wandering around in one of your dreams,” he said. “It was built on a dream and has become a dream factory. One day all the beauty that’s here will be swept away.”

“Before it disappears, I want in on the action,” Howard said.

“Tell me you want to be a producer, maybe even a director—but not an actor,” Chaplin said.

“I’m no actor,” Howard said. “I’ve had offers. But I’m not outgoing enough.”

“With your good looks, of course, you’d be a natural cast as a handsome leading man,” Chaplin said. “Many male stars today are like wooden figures. Take Norman Kerry, for example. When he isn’t panting after Valentino or getting drunk, he appears in films. All he has to do is stand still and let his leading lady do all the emoting.” He sighed and waved limply in the direction of Norma Talmadge’s table. “If only the man who originally developed Hollywood could see it now.”

“I don’t know how this place got started,” Howard said.

“Back in 1883 a real-estate developer, Horace Henderson Wilcox, owned all this land. It was a ranch eight miles northwest of Los Angeles. He wanted to subdivide the land and create a Utopia here. A place where Methodism reigned. He was dead set against alcohol. Anybody who drank liquor was barred from Hollywood. Can you imagine? The way Wilcox saw it, Hollywood was to be a Christian community dedicated to clean living.”

“It’s just as well Horace can’t see it now.”

With a twinkle in his eye, Chaplin sampled his blood-rare steak. Howard moved more timidly toward his, and then called the waiter back and rejected the green peas as too large. He demanded that the waiter return with a bowl of only the smallest peas in the kitchen.

While he ate, Chaplin didn’t say much. Howard was the same way. After devouring his steak, Chaplin signaled the waiter to remove the plate at once. He couldn’t stand to sit at a table with a dirty plate. Again, he surveyed the room. “The whole world knows who I am. I’m famous in some places that have never heard of Jesus Christ. I’ve become so famous that it’s getting harder and harder for me to lead a private life.”

“You must be pursued by fans wherever you go.”

“They give me no peace,” Chaplin said. “I dislike the press intensely. What I want the world to have is on the screen. I don’t feel I owe my fans the intimate details of my private life.”

“Look what details about the divorce of Francis X. Bushman did for his career,” Howard said. “America doesn’t like its screen heroes to be wife-beaters.”

“Francis had it coming,” Chaplin said. “He’s such an exhibitionist. He’s always at the athletic club walking around nude showing off his stuff. I’m told that Elmo Lincoln has something even bigger. What a lot of people don’t know is that ‘The Little Fellow’ isn’t so little. Most of my growth went to my dick. After Lincoln and Bushman, I take third prize. A lot of young women I bed complain about my size but I plunge in anyway.”

Howard was mildly surprised at the sudden turn in the conversation. Sex was the last thing he’d associate with the screen image of Charles Chaplin.

“Let’s skip dessert and have our real treat upstairs in a suite I’ve reserved,” Chaplin implored.

“I like you a lot,” Howard said. “But I don’t see you and me as a romantic couple.”

Chaplin laughed. “No, no dear boy, you read me wrong. I’ve had this public dinner with you in front of Hollywood—no doubt they’ll think I’m giving you advice about breaking into motion pictures. Our dining together masks my real plans for the evening. I already have a stunning creature waiting for me upstairs. Not only that, but I have a surprise for you as well.”

“I’m not sure I want to go along with this,” Howard said.

With his canny sense of people, Chaplin delivered the line that would capture Howard’s attention. “She was your father’s most glamorous mistress.”

In the second best suite at the Ambassador Hotel—Howard and Ella already occupied the finest one—Chaplin opened the door for Howard. There on a satin sofa sat America’s most famous mistress, the blonde-haired film actress and ex-Follies girl, Marion Davies. She did not get up to greet Howard, but extended her hand to him, a hand-kissing custom he found awkward and would soon abandon. Chaplin planted a wet kiss on Marion’s beestung, scarlet-painted lips.

Howard looked around for his surprise, finding no other woman. Chaplin was content to skip dessert, letting Marion be his warm tart for the evening. But Howard actually requested the missing dessert. Marion wanted dessert, too.

Both the actress and the young Texas millionaire quickly agreed that ice cream was their favorite treat. “I can eat more ice cream than any man or woman in Los Angeles,” Marion boasted. “I’m still eating when the other suckers turn green.” Howard preferred banana, but she vetoed that, claiming that the best ice cream in the world was made with blood-red California oranges.

“You mean, orange sherbet?” Howard asked.

“No, baby, real oranges for ice cream,” Marion told him. “The chef at the Ambassador makes it specially for me. You’ve got to try it. It’s like pussy, baby. Once a man tries it, he can’t get enough of it.”

In later life, Howard would have another girl friend addicted to orange ice cream: Miss Ava Gardner, a tarheel from North Carolina.

The following day, Howard would report to Billy Haines about his “historic night at the Ambassador.” Davies would give a highly edited report to W.R. Hearst, claiming that she and her sister had encountered Howard having dinner in the hotel restaurant.

As Marion was to tell Louella Parsons the following day, “I found Howard big, awkward, overgrown, a real country boy who’s almost too polite and a little hard of hearing. I liked him a lot. I’m going to see to it that W. R. invites him to all our parties at San Simeon.”

“When I do invite you to San Simeon,” Marion told Howard, “I prefer you to keep this little rendezvous I’m having with Charlie a secret.”

“The boy’s very discreet,” Chaplin assured his mistress.

“Please don’t think I’m a whore,” the intoxicated Marion said, pouring herself some more bootleg gin. “Charlie and I have this harmless flirtation. After all, I have to have some fun in my life. I’m young and living with a man thirty-four years my senior. He’s away from me a lot, and he has no intention of divorcing his Catholic wife. She was a chorus gal like me before she got all grand.”

“I’m not one to judge,” Howard hastily added. “I’m not devoted to my bride either.”

“Kindred spirits,” Chaplin added.

“All the men in Hollywood are afraid to get near me,” Marion complained. “They dare not risk the wrath of W.R. and what his newspapers could do to their careers. One actor had a kissing scene with me. He was so afraid of angering W.R. that his knees were shaking. After he’d kissed me like a Presbyterian deacon, he went whoosh when the director yelled cut. W.R. has spies everywhere.”

“But why isn’t Charlie afraid?” Howard asked.

“With Charlie, the danger is part of the attraction,” Marion claimed. “Besides, Charlie is too big a fish in Hollywood for W.R. to fry.”

Later, Chaplin and Marion told hilarious stories about the filming of her movie, *Zander the Great*, in which she’d starred. “I play an orphan gal, and

I had to get in the cage with this god damn lion. There was a protective wall of glass, but I was so afraid I nearly pissed my pants. Louis B. Mayer wanted me to get so close that it looked like I was kissing the beast. The director promised me the lion was toothless. But when it smelled me, it roared, and I saw big fangs. I went crazy, trying to crawl out of that cage screaming bloody murder. I just knew he was going to eat me for lunch.”

“I wasn’t in the picture, but I happened to arrive on her set that day,” Chaplin said. “I quickly agreed to fill in for her. Marion took me to her dressing room, and I put on one of her dresses and a blonde wig. I did the scene with the lion in two takes, with Marion coming in only for the close-ups.”

There was a sudden knock on the door. The agile Chaplin rose to his feet to answer the rap. Throwing open the double doors, he announced, “Lady and young gentleman, may I present the screen’s leading vamp of yesterday, Miss Theda Bara.”

At first taken back, Howard soon realized that it wasn’t Theda Bara at all, but the leading screen vamp of the 1920s, Miss Gloria Swanson, who had dumped Big Howard as her lover. She was dressed up, however, as Theda Bara.

“My young man,” she said, walking toward Howard. “We meet again.”

Long before she became a living caricature of *Sunset Blvd.*’s Norma Desmond during the last two decades of her life, a younger Swanson was more fun loving, and, in Marion’s words, a prankster at heart. That’s why she’d readily agreed to dress up like Theda Bara to greet Howard.

The four of them, each to become a Hollywood legend in the decades ahead, spent an enjoyable hour drinking and telling outrageous stories.

Both Chaplin and Swanson recalled their first meeting at Essanay, a leading film studio in the days of the early silents. “I remember my first day there,” Chaplin said. “Miss Louella Parsons was head of the scenario department. I was very rude to her when she gave me a script. I told her I write my own scenarios. Later I was trying to find a pretty young girl to cast as the lead in my first film there. They sent me an actress who had no reaction at all. I turned her down.” He moved his hand toward Swanson as if directing her to take over the story. “May I present that young girl tonight. Still young. And even more beautiful. Miss Gloria Swanson.”

Swanson laughed, displaying Chiclet white teeth. “I was deliberately bad that day because I didn’t want to get cast in a slapstick comedy with Charlie. Of course, he would have stolen the picture from me.”

At some point in the evening, Chaplin took a drunken Marion by the hand and directed her into one of the bedrooms, after bidding good night to Swanson and Howard.

By the time Chaplin woke up the next morning to go to the studio—Marion was still sleeping—he discovered a note from Swanson and Howard in the living room.

“One hell of an evening,” Howard wrote. Swanson added an enigmatic postscript. “Little Howard has now become Big Howard.”

The following evening at the Tiger Club with Billy, Howard related in vivid detail his evening with this Hollywood trio. In spite of Billy’s prodding, he never revealed if he’d bedded Swanson or not.

Years later, Billy recalled, “That evening, Howard’s face looked more boyish than ever. He was like a little boy who’d brought home a report card with all A’s.”

“Billy,” Howard said, “I’ve been accepted by Hollywood royalty. Charlie Chaplin. Gloria Swanson. Marion Davies. Even old man Hearst likes me, or so Marion claims. I’m one of them, and I didn’t have to work my way up to the top. Invitations to Pickfair. To San Simeon. I’m on my way. Only problem is, I’ve got to get rid of Ella and send her back to Texas. I can’t go back to the Ambassador every night and face the guilt she’s piling on me. God took away my parents, but I’ve saddled myself with another burden.”

Noah Dietrich, Howard’s business guru, was much kinder in his memoirs than he needed to be. He remembered that “before he had married Ella,” his employer had begun to audition a series of beautiful young women, some of them teenagers. Actually, this custom of Howard’s was to last for decades, and it began to occur shortly *after* his marriage to the Texas debutante.



Ella Rice Hughes

Howard hired a local procurer, known only as “Jimmy the Greek,” to station himself during the day at Union Station in Los Angeles. Once there, he was instructed to seek out only the shapeliest of the new female arrivals, most of them traveling west by train with dreams of becoming the next Norma

Talmadge, Constance Bennett, Mae Murray, Pola Negri, or Gloria Swanson.

But before she spent a night with Howard, Jimmy saw to it that the young woman picked up at the station was delivered to a spa where she was thoroughly scrubbed, her skin cleaned, her nails manicured, her hair styled, and her body subjected to endless steam baths to “drain out any impurities,” as Howard put it.

Even at this early age, he had become adept at oral sex, and he wanted his women immaculately groomed and sweet smelling. Although in time he wouldn’t bathe as frequently as he should, and was rather unaware of his own body odor, he could not tolerate “a woman who smells,” as he told Jimmy the Greek. Jimmy didn’t just work for Howard, but also procured for Francis X. Bushman, Samuel Goldwyn, Mack Sennett, Tom Mix, and Sessue Hayakawa, the latter preferring young men instead of young women.

Jimmy the Greek wasn’t the only one on his payroll. Howard also hired Hal Connon as his late-night driver. During the day, Connon, a pug-nose former prize fighter, also drove for the Los Angeles Police Department. In his memoirs, Dietrich discreetly calls Connon “Bruce Davis,” so as not to identify him.

Connon’s job was to deliver young women to a room at the Ambassador Hotel. Unknown to Ella in the Hughes family suite, Howard kept a spare room on the ground floor in which he’d entertain the young women selected by Jimmy the Greek. Chaplin maintained similar quarters for the same purposes. Howard did not always approve of his procurer’s selection for the night, and sometimes quickly sent the woman on her way. During Howard’s sessions with the women, which never lasted long, Connon was always waiting behind the wheel of a limousine to cart her off into the night after Howard was finished.

One particular favorite was red-haired “Toffee” Fairmont, who admitted to Howard that that wasn’t her real name but the *nom deplume* she planned to use when she became “the next Laura La Plante.” The honey blonde with a rather large bust claimed that she had been raised as the daughter of “aristocratic” tobacco planters near Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Judging by her speech and manners, Howard concluded she was Southern white trash. But she was good at giving and receiving oral sex, and she was extremely clean.

It isn’t known what happened, but one night Howard and Toffee became embroiled in a bitter dispute. Apparently, he requested that she engage in an act she called “perverted,” which of course, was something other than oral sex.

Although nude, she grabbed a black mink coat he’d given her earlier that evening, wrapped it around her body, and fled down the hallway, out onto the grounds and into the parking lot where Connon waited in the limousine. She demanded to be taken back to her apartment at once.

Even though blinding rain was coming down, and Connon warned her how dangerous driving conditions were, she insisted that he leave at once. If not, she threatened to call the police and expose Howard in the press.

Driving through almost hurricane-force winds, Connon, who had been drinking bootleg hooch while waiting for Toffee, skidded at the intersection of Beverly Street and First Street. He slammed into a telephone pole. In the back seat at the time of the accident, Toffee was thrown through the front window and died instantly, her throat cut on the shattered glass.

When two Los Angeles patrolmen arrived on the scene, they found Connon lying unconscious on the ground. Apparently, the impact had knocked him from the driver’s seat. Toffee lay sprawled on the hood, dead, her black mink coat open to reveal her nude body underneath.

Since he was “one of our own,” the Los Angeles police believed Connon’s story that he had seduced the girl in a motel and was driving her home. When asked where her clothes were, and how he could afford to buy her a mink coat on his salary, he must have answered something convincingly, but his response was not recorded.

The case was ruled an accidental death, and no charges were filed, in spite of the fact that Connon was driving drunk.

When Dietrich reported the incident to Howard the next day, he appeared unconcerned, telling his right-hand man to handle it in whatever way he thought best.

No pay-off was offered to Connon at the time. However, two weeks later, when he consumed a quart of illegal bourbon one night, and in a drunken rage slashed his wife’s right arm with a knife, he was arrested, booked, and jailed. Instead of calling a lawyer, Connon called Dietrich, pleading with him to intervene with Howard to get the charges dropped. The next morning when Connon’s wife had “calmed down,” she was reluctant to press charges.

Dietrich secured his release and even found a job for Connon that paid fifty dollars a week. That wasn’t enough. Connon soon began cajoling Dietrich, demanding a thousand dollars in cash. Dietrich called Howard, who agreed to pay it. A month later, Connon demanded five thousand dollars.

“You deal with it, Noah,” Howard said.

Dietrich claimed that he called Connon into his office and warned him that he could have him back in jail on a blackmail charge. “This time you might get five years—even more,” Dietrich warned.

Connon soon learned that he wasn’t going to get any more money. Dietrich did agree that he would give him a ticket to Kansas City, Missouri, where Connon’s parents lived on the outskirts on a farm. Dietrich provided a “nest egg” of five hundred dollars for Connon to purchase a caterpillar tractor. It was suggested that the formerpolice drivertakeup farming like his parents, earning extra money by renting out his tractor to other farmers. Connon was never heard of again.

This would be one of dozens of attempts to blackmail Howard in the years ahead. He would not always get off so easily, and in at least one case, a considerable fortune would exchange hands.

On the grounds of the Wilshire Country Club golf course, Howard had ordered a film crew to shoot his game of golf under the pretense that he thought that by watching himself in action he could improve his playing.



Ralph Graves

As he was about to hit the ball, he looked up as a handsome, strapping young man, muscle bound like a boxer, walked across the greens to shake his hand. Normally, Howard avoided hand-shaking if at all possible, but he warmly clasped the hand of matinee idol Ralph Graves, a close friend of Big Howard's and a fellow Houstonian.

The two young men stood seemingly checking each other out. Standing only an inch shorter than Howard, Ralph was a charming Ohio-born actor who'd been in Hollywood since 1917, working with D.W. Griffith, Lillian Gish, Mack Sennett, and Gloria Swanson.

Big Howard had been especially fond of Ralph, and had at one time placed him on Toolco's payroll when the actor was out of work. Ralph, however, was never required to perform any services for Toolco.

Ralph had often attended Big Howard's wild parties at the Ambassador Hotel. Howard remembered his father telling him, "Some day after I'm gone, and only if it's economically feasible, I want you to help out Ralph Graves if he ever needs anything. He's a talented and a faithful friend. Two rare combinations."

Over lunch at the country club, Ralph did indeed need something. He pitched a script he'd written, in which he wanted to star and direct. "I fear I won't always look as sexy as I do today," Ralph told Howard. "I'd better take up directing."

No one had ever pitched a movie plot to Howard before, and he was fascinated by Ralph's scenario about a Bowery bum who adopts a baby. "It'll make a hell of a movie," Ralph assured Howard, claiming he could bring in the entire film for forty thousand dollars.

Before the afternoon ended, Ralph had his check for forty thousand dollars and a dinner date to go night-clubbing with Howard. Howard had a previous date with Billy Haines but called to cancel.

"Right from the first, Howard and Graves hit it off," Billy recalled years later. "Frankly, I think Ralph was just hustling Howard the way he'd done with other big shots in the movies, but I kept my wisecracking mouth shut for once in my life."

During the entire time that *Swell Hogan* was being shot, Howard spent all his evenings with Ralph and never with Ella, much to her bitter annoyance. As part of their initial agreement, Ralph allowed Howard to sit on the sidelines watching how movies were made. Of almost anyone connected with *Swell Hogan*, Howard asked highly technical questions, but didn't interfere in production, the way he'd do in so many of his future films.

Before shooting ended, expenditures had mushroomed to eighty thousand dollars. Howard kept supplying the checks, ten thousand dollars at a time.

Louella Parsons had called Ralph's screen personality "up and at 'em," although the actor demonstrated little of that emotion on film. His speaking voice was flat and colorless but that didn't matter since talking pictures had yet to burst onto the American screen.

At long last, production on *Swell Hogan* came to an end, and Howard requested that he see it alone in a studio screening room. After the first showing, he asked the projectionist to show it again and again, finally leaving the studio at six o'clock the following morning.

With no experience in film, Howard the following afternoon attempted to save the movie by re-editing it with the help of a highly skilled film editor whose name is lost to history. Hollywood rumor has it that she was Dorothy Arzner, a strong-willed former waitress, ambulance driver, and stenographer, who later became the most prominent female film director in the studio system of the 1920s and 1930s, directing such stars as Howard's future girlfriend, Katharine Hepburn. Arzner later became one of the poster girls of the lesbian movement. In spite of the talent of this woman, whose cutting of the 1922 Valentino film, *Blood and Sand*, was hailed as brilliant, *Swell Hogan* could not be rescued.

In its newly edited version, Howard invited Rupert to come to the studio to see it. After sitting impatiently through the film, his uncle gave an immediate review. "It's nothing. No plot. No build up. No character development. The acting stinks. Destroy the film. If anybody sees it, you and that homo, Graves, will be the laughing stock of Hollywood. Before leaving the studio, Rupert warned Howard, "If you continue to make films, you'll squander the fortune my brother left you."

The next day Howard ordered the projectionist to destroy all footage, and *Swell Hogan*, regrettably is lost to Hollywood history. "I've spent enough on this shitty film," Howard told the projectionist. Amazingly, he was to spend even more. Noah Dietrich later found out that Howard had heard that producer Harry Cohn planned to use the sets of *Swell Hogan*, paid for by Howard, for another film he was going to shoot. Using sets left over from a previous film was common practice in those days.

Howard was determined that Cohn wasn't going to benefit from his misfortune. For three thousand dollars, Howard had all the sets destroyed at Universal Service Studios, where *Swell Hogan* had been shot.

Not surprisingly, the collapse of *Swell Hogan* came at the same time as the collapse of Howard's friendship with Ralph. Ralph Graves survived the bad press on *Swell Hogan*, and continued to work in the film industry, in spite of having no acting talent, ending up in farewell performances in the 1949 version of *Batman and Robin* and also, made in the same year, *Joe Palooka in the Counterpunch*.

Interviewed at his Santa Barbara home in the early 1970s, Ralph Graves was deep into alcoholism, consuming more vodka in an afternoon than an average drinker could down in an entire week. Yet he was still able to articulate.

Even though he still called gay men “fairies,” he also outed himself before that term became fashionable. Claiming he was “essentially a man for the ladies,” he did admit that he’d had affairs with such notables as W. Somerset Maugham and Noël Coward.

Months later, in an interview with veteran reporter Anthony Slide, author of *Silent Players*, Ralph admitted to having had a homosexual affair with Mack Sennett in the early 1920s. “Mabel Normand was nowhere in sight when Mack and I lived together for two years. He wanted me every night. A lot of those famous womanizers of Hollywood in the Twenties and Thirties, including Mack, did it as a cover-up of their true feelings.”

That remark led to the inevitable questions about Howard Hughes. “His reputation is that he bedded a lot of the most beautiful gals in Hollywood. It’s also known to a few hundred people in the industry that he also bedded a lot of beautiful guys, too, including me. From the very beginning, I knew Howard was a homo. I was a great friend of the boy’s father since I too was a Houstonian. Papa Hughes was definitely no fairy—I can swear by that. But he knew his son was a cocksucker.”

Continuing to drink, Ralph admitted, “I hustled the kid, calling him the sucker with the money. I got him to finance *Swell Hogan*. It was a bomb. I brought the picture in for about fifty thousand dollars and pocketed another thirty for myself. I deserved it. Hell, I was the director and the star. If it had been a hit, Howard and I would have gone on to make other films together.”

On a parting note, Ralph said, “One more thing about baby-faced Howard with the brown eyes. Even though I fucked him in more ways than one, he was quite gentlemanly about the end of our affair. He called my acting and directing in *Swell Hogan* ludicrous, but as a parting gift, he sent me a brand new Duesenberg. I never saw him again.”

Ralph Graves died in obscurity on February 18, 1977, no doubt from drinking himself into the grave.

Los Angeles, 1925

In 1925 even the wildest of imaginations could not have predicted that the rather barren and badly equipped Mines Field in Inglewood would one day become the Los Angeles International Airport. It was here that Howard went every weekend to meet J.B. Alexander, one of California’s most skilled pilots, who gave Howard flying lessons in his newly purchased Waco aircraft. Alexander at one point told Noah Dietrich that Howard “can fly better than I can, but if he still wants to keep spending money on lessons, it’s fine by me.” Howard was paying Alexander one hundred dollars a day, although the pilot would have gladly done it for a twenty dollar bill.

Accompanied by his new friend, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Howard attended the U.S. National Air Show one Sunday, watching daring army pilots perform death-defying stunts. One cocky pilot flew past the grandstand at an altitude of fifty feet—upside down. Many of the spectators screamed in horror.

Later Howard was introduced to the pilots, including the German ace, Ernst Udell, and the handsome, young American aviator, Charles A. Lindbergh. The meeting of Howard Hughes Jr. and Charles Lindbergh, both of whom were destined to become the most famous aviators of the 20th century, went off uneventfully. “Lindy” extended his hand to Howard, who didn’t shake it, complaining he’d injured his wrist. Actually, he was afraid of germs. Lindy just turned and walked away. Little did Howard know at the time that he would become more jealous of Charles A. Lindbergh than he would be of any other man on the planet.

Arizona, 1925

In his Waco, Howard flew to Arizona to visit Douglas Fairbanks Jr. on the set of his latest film, *Wild Horse Mesa*. It once again teamed him with the beautiful Billie Dove, on whom Doug had developed a very serious crush. Not revealing it to Doug, Howard had also developed a crush on Billie. The actress was married at the time to the director of the film, the handsome but dreaded Irwin Willat, who over the years became known for his psychotic outbursts.

On the set, Doug offered to introduce Howard to Billie and her husband, but he declined, preferring to view her from afar, not knowing at the time what important roles both Willat and Billie would play in his immediate future.

Bunking together in a dreary motor court, Doug confessed his “fear of flying” to Howard, telling of a traumatic experience he’d had while filming *The Air Mail*, which also starred Billie Dove, along with Warner Baxter in the male lead.

Only fourteen at the time, but looking mature for his age, Doug was called upon by the director, who was also Willat, to make a parachute jump from a mail plane. Although a stunt man could have been used, Doug bravely insisted on doing the daring feat himself.



Billie Dove

With a camera attached to the side of the pilot’s cockpit, the flier was instructed to clamp the joystick between his knees while he hand-cranked the camera to film Doug’s jump. Fighting fear at every dangerous step, Doug made it through howling winds to the tip of the wing. Once there, he became paralyzed with fear and began to sob hysterically. “Thinking I was going to die, I crawled back inch by inch into the cockpit, still crying my eyes out,” Doug said. “Willat was stone silent when we landed and called for my double. ‘Your father takes incredible risks in the making of his films,’ Willat told me. ‘You’re nothing but a coward!’”



Married: Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.
and Joan Crawford

Even though he was the movie’s director, Willat never spoke to Doug again for the rest of the filming, but relayed instructions to him through an assistant. “He must have hated it when I was assigned to him again,” Doug said.

Howard didn’t meet Billie Dove, but he was introduced to Zane Grey. *Wild Horse Mesa* was adapted for the screen from one of his novels, the best-selling books ever written about the old American West. Doug posed with Grey, Howard did not. He was more concerned with escaping temperatures that rose that day to 103 degrees F.

The next afternoon in the vicinity of the Painted Desert, Howard and Doug watched six young Navajo braves, clad only in breechclouts, with their waist-length black hair waving in the desert wind, race each other. It was a memorable sight and should have been captured on film, but wasn’t.

Doug was mesmerized by the young braves going through a ritual their ancestors had performed long before the Europeans arrived to conquer the continent.

Howard was so impressed with the Navajos riding bareback that he vowed on the spot to make a Western one day.
And so he would.

Before flying back to Los Angeles, Howard had promised to be with Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., as soon as he returned from location. But Howard never called him again. An invitation was waiting from Rupert that would lead to Howard meeting a new male friend who would make him forget all about Doug.

In his highly selective memoirs, *The Salad Days*, Doug mentions Howard but gives no indication of their brief emotional involvement. (As regards the reams of material that Doug left out of his memoirs, Brownell Davidson, a literary critic, defined *The Salad Days* as "the hors d'oeuvres, but not the

main course.”)

In his book, Doug states that he never invited Howard to one of the many parties that he and Joan hosted, and always resented Howard's "money will buy anything" attitude. One of the anecdotes related within the autobiography recites how, on a movie set, Doug learned that Howard had asked a third party if he could "get a date with Joan Crawford," even though she was married at the time to Doug. Doug claims that Howard, in his quiet Texas drawl, boasted that if she accepted, he might offer Joan a "very big present." Howard wasn't talking mink coats and jewelry this time, but was referring to the size of his penis.

Even after Joan Crawford had divorced Doug and was "dating and marrying other men," she would continually refuse Howard's requests for a date. When Billy Haines, her closest friend, asked why, she bluntly replied, "I adore homosexuals, but not in my bed after midnight."

Tired of the Ambassador Hotel and feeling cramped in the suite he shared with Ella, Howard ordered Dietrich to find a house to rent. Ella wanted to move to Pasadena, "where all the good and decent people live," but Howard refused.

As Dietrich searched for an acceptable house, Howard forged ahead with the formation of a movie corporation. Since he felt he was spending far too much money setting up corporations "and making lawyers rich," he took an existing subsidiary of Toolco (Caddo Rock Drill Company, which was based in Louisiana) and converted that into Caddo Productions. After Dietrich had set that up, Howard announced that he was now officially a motion picture producer and would start interviewing stars and reviewing scripts.

Dietrich recalled that Howard was constantly getting into trouble with starlets, and that he kept his newly hired Los Angeles lawyer, Neil McCarthy, "busy putting out brushfires." The attorney was usually able to buy off these beautiful young women with a mink coat, perhaps sable, definitely some jewelry—diamonds or rubies, or a combination of both—and cash. "It was a town where money talked," Dietrich later said, "and at Toolco the green stuff sprouted up every day, with Howard controlling one hundred percent of the stock."

With his wife stashed in a hotel suite, Howard in quick succession embarked on three separate affairs—two with women who were among the most beautiful to appear on the silver screen in the Twenties, and the third with a young actor slated to become one of the biggest names in the history of Hollywood.

Before finding another man in his life to replace Doug, Howard first discovered a woman who had already been hailed in Hollywood—the feisty but incredibly lovely Madge Bellamy, a fellow Texan with brunette hair and big brown eyes, who was six years his senior. He met her at Pickfair.

She'd made her stage debut at the age of nine playing a slave in *Aida* in a production staged in Denver. Her debut led to the arrest of the theater manager who was charged with violating child labor laws.

Arriving in Hollywood, she immediately earned a reputation as an actress who refused to "put out" for a role. She made that clear when Howard at the Pickfair dinner table started to flirt with her. "I'll go out with Madge Bellamy you, Mr. Hughes, but like a girl with a boy on a date—not as an actress trying to get a part in your next film."



Madge Bellamy

When Howard first met her, Madge had scored her biggest hit in the 1922 silent film, *Lorna Doone*, which is perhaps the only reason she's still remembered today—that and for her appearance in John Ford's *The Iron Horse*.

Mary Pickford had personally chosen her to co-star with her brother, Jack, in the 1923 *Garrison's Finish*. Pickford and Madge were said to be sharing beauty secrets with each other and were frequently seen together when Fairbanks Sr. was engaged in various affairs with other stars. Pickford and Madge were, in fact, so close that Howard suspected lesbianism, which didn't bother him at all.

At the dinner table at Pickfair, Madge entertained the guests by telling them why she'd turned down the role of Esther in the MGM epic, *Ben-Hur*. "Too many horses," she informed an astonished Louis B. Mayer.

On their first date together, Madge seriously infuriated Howard with a remark for which he never forgave her. "I've heard you've already had *Ben-Hur*," she said, a reference to a brief affair he had had with Ramon Novarro. "Why not sample the actress who turned down the picture?"

She was the first actress to note Howard's paranoia, which would grow worse year by year. "He wouldn't sit out on my side porch overlooking the garden because he feared spies might be lurking there. He wouldn't talk personal things on the phone, because he said someone might be listening in. Several times when he was driving, he took a lot of diversionary tactics trying to shake off some car he said that was following us. I thought he was a bit crazy. Later on, I found out that men were actually following him around, although for what purpose I hadn't a clue. Maybe industrial spies. Perhaps Ella Rice had hired them for all I know. Howard was still a baby when I met him—a kid, really—but he had more problems than any middle-aged adult

should have been saddled with.”

Interviewed decades later when she was running a junkyard, having squandered all her money, Madge asked, “What red-blooded gal wouldn’t have fallen for Howard Hughes? He was boyishly handsome—no, not that—he was gorgeous. He used to come over late at night to visit me at my *palazzo*.” Amid her piles of rusting metal, Madge in a blonde curly wig evoked Bette Davis as she appeared in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane*?

At the peak of her career, and long before falling on bad days, Madge lived in a building in Los Angeles known as “The Cedars,” a *faux* replica of a Castilian castle.

“Our romance lasted for all of three weeks, maybe not even that long,” Madge said. “He was breathing hot and heavy for me, but then, all of a sudden, I couldn’t get him on the phone. Only later did I learn that that gold-digging bitch, Constance Bennett, had dug her scarlet-painted claws into him.”

After Howard jilted her, Madge married a stockbroker, Logan Metcalf, in 1928, but four days later she demanded a divorce. “After Howard, Logan felt like a pin prick. I couldn’t feel anything.”

Logan Metcalf, at the time of her inaugural meeting with Howard, loomed in her future. But on the evening of her first meeting with Howard, she amused dinner guests at Pickfair with equivalent outrageous comments.

It’s fortunate that Madge never married Howard after his divorce from Ella. Madge’s reaction to lovers who strayed was violent. In 1943 she made headlines around the world when she shot her millionaire lover, A. Stanwood Murphy, for jilting her. The two-timing Murphy survived his gunshot wound, and Madge got only five days in prison before she was placed on probation.

She died at the age of 89 on January 24, 1990 in Upland, California, having never completed her memoirs, first entitled *I Was Madge Bellamy* and later renamed *Darling of the Twenties*.

At the age of 87, Madge gave her final interview. “I always avoided romantic mush all my life and maybe missed out on the ultimate human experience. But then I’ve always been my own person, and how many of the bastards and floozies who sold themselves in Hollywood can say that?”

Houston, 1925

Howard put Ella back on the train to Houston in the fall of 1925. His excuse was that she was needed to prepare the Yoakum mansion in time for the Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s holidays. Actually, he didn’t care about any of those holidays. Instead, he perceived her presence in his life as too inhibiting.

Ella protested, but Howard won out in the end. Loaded with thirty-two trunks filled with the latest Paris *couture*, along with an assortment of furs, Ella arrived back in Houston and was welcomed home by Annette and Dr. Lummis.

The moment Ella walked into the Yoakum household, she realized that everything was in perfect shape. Howard’s staff of servants had seen to that. There was nothing for her to do.

After only four nights, Ella left the gloomy house and went to stay with her sister, Libby Farish, in the posh residential section of River Oaks. Libby was well aware that Houstonian society was gossiping that Howard planned to divorce his wife. But as she made the social rounds, Ella held her head high. No one actually confronted her with these rumors.

At the approach of Thanksgiving, and still no Howard, Ella began to send telegrams, pleading with him to come back to Texas. He didn’t actually answer any of these urgent messages, ordering Dietrich to draft a response. “What do you want me to say?” the bewildered Dietrich asked. “Oh, make up something,” Howard said impatiently before heading out the door.

Thanksgiving came and went, and Ella still had no word from Howard. By December 21, she sent two cables. In one, she wrote: “I miss you something awful. Please come back. We’ll make this marriage work.”

Howard didn’t even give that telegram to Dietrich for a response.

Facing Christmas Eve without Howard, Ella sent another urgent telegram. “Can’t understand why I haven’t heard from you. Am counting on you leaving L.A. tomorrow.”

When Christmas Eve came and still no word from Howard, Ella sent him birthday wishes, not knowing he’d been born in September. “I’m thinking of you every minute. Happy Birthday!”

Howard not only didn’t send Ella a Christmas gift, he forgot to have Dietrich deposit money into her bank account, which meant that she not only didn’t have funds to give the servants presents, but she couldn’t even pay their salaries.

Finally, on the day after Christmas, Howard cabled, “Still busy. No chance of leaving.”

Ella didn’t respond to Howard’s latest delay, but his stern aunt, Annette, blasted off a reply. She could be very blunt and to the point. “You have a wife in Houston who needs you. Get home immediately!”

That did the trick. Howard sent word that he’d be arriving in Houston in time for New Year’s. Unknown to Ella, he’d be accompanied by Dietrich and a new set of golf clubs, a gift from Constance Bennett.

As Dietrich would later recall, Howard hardly spoke to Ella when he arrived at the Yoakum mansion. “After all that time had passed, he didn’t even embrace her,” Dietrich said, “and she looked stunning. Beautifully dressed and made up. Any man would be proud to possess her.”

Ella had accepted invitations for them to attend a number of end-of-the-year society parties, to which she asked Howard to accompany her. “He didn’t say no, but he didn’t say yes either,” Dietrich said. He suspected that Ella wanted to arrive with Howard on her arm to show Houstonians that her marriage was still intact.

Annette later claimed that Howard never went to one party. When Ella did go, she was accompanied by her sister.

Avoiding the Toolco offices, Howard spent every day at the Houston Country Club.

“Howard’s return to Houston wasn’t a conjugal visit,” Dietrich claimed. Howard had a bed placed in the same wood-paneled library where his father’s funeral services had been conducted. He also ordered a locksmith to put a lock on the door. Howard was given the only key. Even the servants weren’t allowed in to clean the room.

Billy Haines had made three friends while appearing in *Sally, Irene and Mary*: Joan Crawford, whom he'd nicknamed "Cranberry," the beautiful Constance Bennett, and the film's director, Edmund Goulding. Billy was eager to share all three of "my new delights" with Howard.

Only Crawford balked, perhaps having already heard rumors about Doug Fairbanks Jr. (her future husband) and Howard. Goulding was most eager to invite Howard to one of his parties, the most notorious in Hollywood. Constance Bennett pronounced Howard "the man of my dreams" before even meeting the rich Texan.

Constance and Billy Haines eventually become lifelong friends. Constance bluntly told the homosexual actor: "I want to marry a millionaire, and Howard Hughes, Jr. is the one." When Billy said, "He's already married," she informed him, "Darling, everybody's married at some time or the other, even me. Marriage means nothing. A contract meant to be broken. Otherwise, why would there be divorce courts? Now, be a lamb and set up a meeting with this cowboy. I'll house-break him."



Constance Bennett

At least a year older than Howard (Constance would never admit her real age), she was a sophisticated New Yorker. She was the oldest of three daughters of Richard Bennett, an old-fashioned stage trouper whose acting style was often compared to John Barrymore's. Constance's sister, Joan Bennett, would eventually eclipse her older sister's fame as a movie star.

Spoiled and headstrong, Constance specialized in glamour, with her strong jaw—inherited from her father—her high cheekbones, and large eyes called "china blue" in the fan magazines. Arguably, she was the best dressed woman in Hollywood—a real fashion plate, characterized by her marcelled blonde bob.

At the time Howard met her, she'd just completed nine films, all within one year, and was at the peak of her career. In ways that evoked the character she'd played in *Sally, Irene and Mary*, Constance was seeking a sugar daddy. But he didn't have to be old, like most sugar daddies. A millionaire her own age would do just fine.

Howard didn't have to pursue Constance. She chased after him. Soon they were seen at all the major parties in Hollywood. When anyone asked Howard where his wife was, he always claimed she was indisposed that evening. Actually, she was in fine health, sitting alone at the Ambassador Hotel with a closet filled with the latest Parisian fashions, begging Howard to take her out. He had allowed her to return to Los Angeles in January of 1926.

To explain why he was out with Constance, he said that he was considering putting her under contract to be the star of his next three films. Secretly, he would have preferred to be with Billie Dove, instead of Constance, but Billie would have to wait for a more opportune time.

On their first date, Howard took Constance to an afternoon tea dance at the Cocolanut Grove, right at the Ambassador Hotel where he lived. These dances were legendary for attracting Hollywood's most voracious wolves, promising movie contracts to the most shapely of the young hopefuls, male and female, who showed up here waiting to be discovered.

A long, leisurely dinner followed at the Brown Derby Restaurant, across from the Ambassador. Lines of autograph seekers waited patiently for hours to assault their favorites for signatures. When Howard showed up with Constance, "the dream of all shopgirls," a position she'd eventually have to relinquish to her rival, Joan Crawford, a near-riot ensued.

At the time, none of those screaming girls knew who Howard Hughes was, and he was pushed aside. He later told Edmund Goulding, "One fat monster of a girl actually pushed me, shouting, 'Get out of my way—you're a nobody!'"

The very fact that Howard would escort Constance to such a swank and highly visible eatery as the Brown Derby was proof enough that he didn't even care about his marriage to Ella anymore. He did have some rationale, however, for being seen with almost any Hollywood beauty, married or not. He was the head of a new film production studio, and he planned to make movies and cast beautiful women in the roles. All his "dates," at least according to Howard, were "for business purposes only."

Howard related the story of Constance's seduction of him to Billy. Significantly, he called it her seduction of him instead of his seduction of her.

Dietrich had looked at almost thirty rental properties in the Greater Los Angeles area before deciding on an elegant mansion in the Hollywood Hills that he thought would be suitable for Ella and Howard.

That afternoon he'd given Howard the key after Howard had announced that he wanted to inspect the property after dark, because the nighttime view over the city was spectacular. But instead of his wife, he invited Constance to look at the property with him.

Howard was notorious for always losing his keys. Back in Houston, Annette Lummis remembered having to pay for glass in French doors every week. Forgetting his key, Howard would frequently break the windows of the doors to gain entrance.

At the Hollywood mansion, he realized that he had once again forgotten the appropriate key. Picking up a rock from the flower garden, he smashed his way into the property. Taking Constance Bennett by the hand, he entered the large living room where the oak antiques were covered in white

sheeting. With the full moon streaming in, the property had a ghostly look.

Howard took Constance in his arms and kissed her deeply. He managed to remove her silk gown and all of her lingerie while still fully clothed himself. “Take off every stitch!” she ordered. He removed his clothing and stood tall, gangly and naked before her.

“The wristwatch, too,” she commanded. Dudley had given him the wrist-watch in Paris and he’d worn it ever since, even though some men at the time considered wristwatches on men effeminate.

As he mounted her, she sunk her teeth into his lower lip as his weight came down on her.

“Fuck Gilbert Roland out of me!” she shouted.

He knew he was hard of hearing, but her words baffled him. Who...? Wha...?

“My last lover, you bastard! Ride me cowboy, or else I’ll tear that big thing off you.” She clawed into his back, drawing blood, locking her legs around him. Fearing her teeth would sink into his throat, he locked his chin against his chest.

“I rode her from one end of the room and back again,” he later confided to Billy. “If I hadn’t, I truly believe that she would have killed me.”

When it was over, she said, “I came again and again. No one has ever given me so many orgasms.”

“What are you talking about?” he demanded to know. “Only men can have an orgasm.”

“Don’t they teach you little boys anything down in Texas?” she asked, rising from the floor and standing by the large windows overlooking the garden, as the moon illuminated her ravished body. “You’re still a greenhorn, boy.” She burst into laughter.

He was humiliated.

Incidentally, Howard never rented the house of seduction. He turned it down, telling Dietrich, “It’s too gloomy.”

Feeling he’d been mocked during his lovemaking with Constance, Howard set out to improve his technique and to learn more about women. Barbara LaMarr obviously hadn’t taught him everything he needed to know.

He approached the subject scientifically, the way he’d go about equipping an airplane for an around-the-world flight in years to come.

He wisely figured out that the best place to improve his technique was Maude’s House. The unofficial name of this bordello, with its red-velvet upholstery, four-poster beds draped in lace, and scarlet-colored wallpaper, was “The House of a Thousand and One Delights.”

Many of the top male stars of the era went there secretly. Maude, a large, buxom lesbian, had a specialty: she hired young women who were look-alikes of the leading stars of silent pictures: Marion Davies, Gloria Swanson, Pola Negri, Mae Murray, Colleen Moore, Eleanor Boardman, and, yes, Constance Bennett.

An obvious choice for Howard would have been the Constance Bennett carbon copy. But he delayed seducing her until he’d learned all the tricks that could be taught him from the other “inmates.” By the time he bedded “Constance Bennett,” he was a more skilled lover. After that, the real Constance Bennett began to tell her friends that Howard’s love-making had improved considerably, crediting herself as the cause of that.

During their brief courtship, the stunningly beautiful Constance and the strikingly handsome Howard were true Jazz Age Babies, hitting the hot spots and dancing the nights away at Montmartre or the Cocoanut Grove. Louella Parsons and others spread the word that Howard would soon announce his divorce from Ella Rice to marry Constance, who proudly showed off jewelry Howard had given her. Rupert cautioned Howard that he had to be more discreet, because he was giving Ella dangerous ammunition to use against him in their eventual divorce.

Howard told Rupert, Noah Dietrich, Billy Haines and others, that he had no intention of divorcing Ella. “A wife’s a pain in the ass,” he always said, “but I find it convenient to have one stashed away somewhere.”

His obvious reason in saying that was because a bona-fide wife protected him from gold-diggers, of which Constance was the major prospector. Constance urged him to file for divorce. Or, as she put it to her sister, Joan Bennett, “I told him to pay the Texas cow off and send her back to the Houston stockyards.”

At one point during their whirlwind romance, Constance and Howard attended an orgy. When Edmund Goulding had directed Constance in *Sally, Irene and Mary*, she’d learned that Goulding invited both men and women to participate in his all-night debaucheries, which had become one of the leading scandals of Hollywood.

Paul Bern, various movie stars such as John Gilbert, and the best-looking men and women at various studios—especially MGM—attended these orgies where women with women could be seen making love—men with men, even women and men. Bern himself never participated, as he was always the voyeur. That night Constance and Howard were also voyeurs, attending the sex romp like “sightseers.”

The host of the all-night orgy, Edmund Goulding, was born near London, the son of a butcher, in the twilight of the Victorian era. In addition to being a director, he was also an actor, playwright, novelist, singer, composer, and screenwriter. On the night Constance, with Howard on her arm, arrived at Goulding’s spacious house, he was dressed as a stern British nanny. At these events, Goulding was always willing to deliver corporal punishment for those in need of his services. He was fond of saying, “You don’t sodomize an ass until you’ve spanked it red.”

In Hollywood, Goulding was known as a great woman’s director before the advent of George Cukor, who eventually would strip him of the title. During a chat with Constance and Howard, Goulding said, “On the screen I specialize in tasteful, cultured dramas. Off-screen, my specialties are promiscuity and voyeurism.” Appraising Howard from head to toe, he said, “I hear you’re going to become a producer. Before you buy any other furniture for your new office, purchase a casting couch. And, remember, a boy or girl can’t be too young. Not too long ago fourteen-year-old boys were taking a bride and heading West to tame the wilderness.”

Goulding introduced John Barrymore to Howard. Although it was not his usual custom, Howard lost his steely self-control and shook the hand of The Great Profile. As he later said laughingly to Goulding and Constance, “It was better than shaking something else.” At the time, Barrymore was completely nude. He had nothing to say to Howard, his attention diverted to two beautiful young starlets on Goulding’s lavish sofa.

When Constance went “to powder my nose,” Howard encountered his sometimes friend, Ramon Novarro. This former nude model at a Los Angeles art school informed Howard that he was going to allow himself to be auctioned off that night in the nude. “Wait till Louis B. Mayer hears what his *Ben-Hur* is up to,” Howard told him.

“I want the world to see my body,” Novarro said. “After all, I’m prettier than any woman in Hollywood. One reviewer said that I’m too beautiful to be taken seriously.”

“That’s not a compliment,” Howard warned him.

“My hour has come,” Novarro said. “I represent sexual ambiguity on the screen.”

Later in the evening when Novarro’s nude body was auctioned off, bidding was low. Secretly, through Goulding, Howard raised the ante to five hundred dollars, which brought loud clapping from the audience. Later, Novarro was terribly disappointed when the highest bidder did not come forward to claim his body. Not knowing that Howard had been the actual bidder, Novarro complained to him. In response, Howard replied, “Oh, Ramon, put on your clothes and go home.”

At these orgies, Goulding supplied the handsome hunks, rounded up at various studios, but Mickey Neilan often rounded up most of the beautiful young women. “Mickey didn’t mind putting on a show at these parties,” Billy Haines recalled. “He was a real exhibitionist, like Barrymore and Ramon. A true rake like the type who flourished in the 18th century. He would often say to a starlet, ‘Wouldn’t you like to find out about the secret weapon that drives Gloria Swanson and Blanche Sweet crazy?’”

Howard was delighted to encounter Mickey again, whom he hadn’t seen since Paris, in spite of the director’s attempts to get in touch with Howard through Noah Dietrich.

In this most unlikely of settings, as Howard sat with a clothed Mickey watching two young starlets make love, the director pitched his latest screen treatment. Maybe Howard’s judgment was clouded, or else he was too diverted by the scene taking place only feet from him, but before the two women approached a “thunderous orgasm,” Howard purchased the script of *Everybody’s Acting*, agreeing to hire Mickey as director.

A week or two after the orgy, Adela Rogers St. Johns, the columnist, knew all the details about it, as she had a pipeline to every sewer in Hollywood. Goulding’s orgies were events she could never report on, however. Through one of her contacts, the exact source not remembered, St. Johns learned what to her was an even more tantalizing bit of information about Howard. Somehow she found out that he was visiting Maude’s at least four times a week, where he would request the services of “Constance Bennett.”

Encountering the real Constance at a party thrown by Norma Talmadge, St. Johns could not keep this juicy tidbit to herself. The journalist told the movie queen the truth about Howard.

“Constance went almost insane,” St. Johns recalled from her nursing home in Arroyo Grande, California, decades later.

That same night as the Talmadge party, which Howard for some reason did not attend, Constance confronted him later when he paid a midnight visit to her residence. Although he wasn’t there, Dietrich later reported that it turned into “the battle of the century.”

Enraged, Constance threw a vase at Howard, injuring the left side of his face. This was eerily reminiscent of a violent future assault Howard would suffer from another movie queen: Ava Gardner.

“When you could have had me, you turned to a fucking substitute,” Constance is alleged to have screamed at Howard.

It was all too much for her. She left Howard that night, but didn’t give up her pursuit of a gold-plated millionaire.

Only weeks later, she found what she’d been looking for in the person of Phillip Plant, heir to a steamship and railroad fortune. During their brief marriage, Constance became “the darling of Continental society.” Howard made attempts to resume their relationship, but she rebuffed him.

Later, trapped in a loveless marriage, Constance divorced Plant but not until “he left me with a fortune—I’m fixed for life,” as she told St. Johns. Returning to pictures, she pursued another married rich man, Joseph Kennedy, when he wasn’t dating Gloria Swanson. When Swanson was with Kennedy, Constance went after her husband, Henri Marquis de la Falaise de la Coudray, and eventually won this dubious gigolo prize.

As for Howard, he still paid visits to Maude’s. But one night he dumped “Constance Bennett” for a much hotter number. Maude assured Howard, “I’ve tried this filly out myself.” She ushered Howard into her best private room, where on the bed lay the woman of his dreams and the actress called “the world’s most beautiful.”

It was “Miss Billie Dove” herself, or at least in Howard’s appraisal, “the best damn look-alike I’ve ever seen. My God, it has to be Billie’s twin sister.”

For the cast of his comedy, *Everybody’s Acting*, Mickey Neilan assembled a rather lackluster cast: Betty Bronson, Ford Sterling, Louise Dresser, and Henry B. Walthall.

The plot spun around five bachelors, all of them actors, who adopt an orphaned baby girl who grows into a beautiful young woman as played by Betty Bronson. For his services, Howard paid Mickey \$20,000, and the film was budgeted at \$150,000, eventually making a \$75,000 profit when it was released by Adolph Zukor and Jesse Lasky under the banner of Paramount.

A deal with Louis B. Mayer was out of the question, because the MGM chief hated Mickey’s guts, ever since he’d loudly said, “Oh, shit!” in the middle of Mayer’s lengthy speech to studio workers. Along with most of the cast of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, Mickey had stormed out of the auditorium that day, loudly proclaiming, “I’ve got a picture to make.” Mayer never forgave him and had even gone so far as to call Howard, warning him not to hire Mickey. As a harbinger of what was to come in his future battles with the Hollywood elite, Howard slammed down the phone on the powerful studio czar.

Unlike his behavior during the filming of his later movies, Howard did not interfere in production, adopting a hands-off policy instead. “But he watched us like a bird of prey about to devour a fat canary,” Betty Bronson later recalled in her retirement in Altadena, California. “He was taking in every move on the set with a clinical eye. I know that all the ladies in Hollywood were crazy about him, but I found him frightening. It wasn’t like he was just learning about filmmaking. It was like he was stealing Mickey’s directorial brains for himself.”

Critics dismissed *Everybody’s Acting* as a piece of insignificant fluff, but Howard was content that it made a profit, which he gleefully reported to Rupert. His uncle neither condemned the film, nor congratulated Howard. Obviously jealous of his nephew, Rupert was far more interested in touting his own success. At some point he invited Howard to the studio where *The Winning of Barbara Worth*, directed by Henry King, was being shot. Rupert’s official position, as later listed in the credits for that movie, was “titler.”

“I want you to see how a real movie is made!” Rupert told his nephew.

In marked contrast to the low-budget nature of Howard’s film, the western, *The Winning of Barbara Worth*, had been acquired by Samuel Goldwyn

for \$125,000. As a novel, written by Harold Bell Wright, it had sold an astonishing three million copies. It was the epic tale of the reclamation of the Imperial Valley by harnessing the Colorado River.

Most of the film was to be shot on location in what was becoming the town of Barbara Worth, Nevada, in the midst of Black Rock Desert, where daytime temperatures hovered around 100 degrees F. On one occasion, the thermometer reached 130 degrees F, although temperatures dropped to freezing that night.

The female star of the film was Vilma Banky, Samuel Goldwyn's exotic hothouse flower, who spoke in a grating blend of pidgin English and "back street Budapest." When she didn't open her mouth, she vied with Billie Dove for the title of most beautiful actress on the silver screen.

The director, Henry King, was shooting interiors in the studio as outdoor sets were being completed in Nevada. Rupert excused himself to talk to King.

At that point, Howard spotted Rod St. Just, his photographer friend. Rod was racing with two cups of coffee to a dressing room and invited Howard to come along with him "to meet my new discovery."

Within the privacy of the dressing room, an extraordinarily handsome young man of twenty-four stood up, towering one inch over Howard, and extended his broad hand. "Name's Frank Cooper. But these Hollywood boys have changed it to Gary Cooper. I recognize you from your pictures in the paper. You're Howard Hughes, that rich guy from Texas."

As Rod could obviously see, Howard was a bit mesmerized by this rugged young actor who wore blue jeans but no shirt. He had chiseled if irregular features under a mop of dark brown hair and was decidedly macho before that term had come into vogue. Soft-spoken, he was trim and leggy. His piercing blue eyes bore in on Howard's brown ones. As Rod later noted, "Howard held Gary's hand a little longer than most. Hell, what am I saying. It was a triumph to get Howard to shake anybody's hand. So I assumed Howard didn't mind getting germs from Gary."

Howard looked on as Rod, who was also a make-up artist, took a tube of lipstick and painted a scarlet Cupid's bow mouth on Gary.

Such a mouth would have been more appropriate on MGM screen goddess Mae Murray, and even then it had become old-fashioned, mocked by many directors, especially Erich von Stroheim. Rod then applied heavy eye shadow to Gary, before taking a tube of hair cream and plastering down his dark brown hair like some Valentino clone.



"Hey, what are you doing to this man of the Old West?" Howard asked, not disguising his horror.

"The studio wants me to make him look like Valentino," Gary said. "He's dead and the studios are looking for a replacement for a new round of Sheik roles."

Howard told Rod how ridiculous that was. Nonetheless, Howard accompanied Gary and Rod to the site of the photo shoot. Assuming a Valentino mask, Gary posed with half-drooping eyelids.

During the shoot, Gary informed Howard that he'd been cast as a dispatch rider, Abe Lee, in the Barbara Worth film. The role had originally been awarded to actor Harold Goodwin, but he couldn't make it, having been delayed in the filming of *The Honeymoon Express*, directed by Ernst Lubitsch.

The producer, Samuel Goldwyn, had been reluctant to give the role to an inexperienced actor like Gary. But the Montana-born actor won the part by default.

"I told Henry King I'd give my left ball for the part," Gary said. "He told me he'd give me the part and let me hang on to my balls at the same time." He winked at Howard. "King seems to think I'll need both my balls in Hollywood."

Rod told Howard that the plot calls for him to die in Ronald Colman's arms. "I told that British fluff that if he decides to kiss me, no tongue!" Gary said with a smile. He confessed, "I'd much rather do the scene with Vilma Banky I think I've fallen in love with her."

"Forget it!" Rod warned him. "I've told you she's a lesbian."

"I could convert her," Gary boasted. "I've already slept with her husband-to-be. Why not the wife?"

Howard looked astonished. "Who is this husband to be?"

"Rod La Rocque," Rod said. "Yes, Hollywood has two Rods. But he's a star and makes all the money."

"You'll meet the other Rod later," Gary said.

"Only if I have to," Howard replied.

After the shoot, Rupert appeared with Frances Marion, the resident screenwriter on the set of *Barbara Worth*. Drawing a salary of three thousand dollars a week, she was the highest paid screenwriter in Hollywood and the most famous. Noticing Gary, she remarked to Howard. "That's my kind of man. He could walk through a market and start all the melons vibrating."

After they'd gone, Howard stood alone on the set. On the way back to the dressing room, Gary stopped by and handed him a piece of paper with his telephone number on it. "I'm free tonight. I've made this screen test and I want you to see it. It cost me sixty-five dollars. Every last plug nickel I had."

"I'm not free tonight, but I'll cancel what I had planned. I'd like to see your screen test."

When Gary had gone to the dressing room, Rod came up to Howard, who reported the invitation.

"Go for it!" Rod urged. "You're in for the biggest surprise of your life. Gary's called The Montana Mule."

“I don’t know,” Howard said cautiously. “Our bodies are too similar. It might not work.”

“You won’t find a better lover or any male in Hollywood more beautiful.”

“Perhaps,” Howard said, still unsure. “I don’t know if we’ll hit it off.”

“Gary is utterly charming,” Rod said. “And he’ll drop his pants for anybody in Hollywood, male or female, who he thinks is loaded. That Montana cowpoke loves money, and especially loves people who are rich. Go for it and call me tomorrow and tell me every detail, regardless of how sordid.”

Rod St. Just would eventually arrive at some conclusions about the relationship of Howard Hughes and Gary Cooper based on what both parties told him: Over dinner at the Ship Café, Howard learned that Rod La Rocque had been supporting Gary financially, but that they had conflicted recently because La Rocque had refused to buy him a car, which Gary badly needed.

According to Gary, as related to Rod St. Just, the upcoming union between Rod La Rocque and Vilma Banky would be purely a marriage of convenience. After the wedding, La Rocque would discreetly continue to date boys, and Vilma would be free to pursue her lesbian lady friends.

Howard had made it a point to review a copy of Gary's one-minute screen test. Over dinner, Howard congratulated Gary on how well he photographed, which was true, but later, he complained to Rod St. Just that the screen test was "dull and dreary, and he's wearing too many cosmetics."

The short movie clip shows Gary riding a tired steed down the wide main street of a western town, eerily evoking a setting from his future classic, *High Noon*. Gary quickly dismounts by jumping off the horse. He then removes his ten-gallon Stetson and wipes his brow, as his face turns to the camera, his mouth widening into a shit-eating grin. He turns to let the camera capture first his left and then his right profile.

Gary Cooper eventually became known throughout America as a man of few words, but over dinner at the Ship Café, Howard found him talkative and amusing. Gary told him that he'd appeared briefly with Lightnin', the Super Dog, in *Lightnin' Wins*. At the time, Lightnin' was the screen rival of Rin-Tin-Tin. Howard also learned that originally Gary wanted to be a cartoonist, not an actor. At one time, to earn badly needed money, he worked as a baby photographer, going around his home town of Helena, Montana, in the dead of a frigid winter, asking housewives if he could take pictures "of their brats."

Gary's inaugural movie roles weren't particularly auspicious: When he appeared briefly in a by now largely-forgotten film, *Tricks*, the director said he looked like a string bean and made him wear five extra shirts so he wouldn't look so skinny. In another flick, he had to catch cowboy star Tom Mix as he fell off a horse. The following week, on another picture, he got to pet Rin-Tin-Tin.

According to Rod St Just, Gary met Rod La Rocque one night while both he and La Rocque were cruising a pick-up park in downtown Los Angeles. In a description by Gary that was later reported by Rod St Just, "You not only get to bring a guy home for sex, but you get to experience the thrill that he might murder you at any minute."

Rod St Just later complained that neither of the players ever related many details about what happened on the night of Howard's first date with Gary Cooper. "But then some very interesting things happened very suddenly. In almost no time at all, Gary told Rod La Rocque that he didn't need any more of his money. Then he moved into an apartment that had been arranged and paid for by Howard through Noah Dietrich. Then, Gary got his car, a brand-new roadster the color of butternut squash that Howard said reminded him of the color of the plains of Montana. Soon after retrieving the car, Gary disappeared for a few days, revealing later that he'd stayed at a beach house in Santa Monica that Howard had rented for the week."

As the years passed, both Gary and Howard would each have many other lovers, mainly women. But according to Rod St Just, a bond was formed between them at that beach house in Santa Monica that would last for another three years until suddenly they seemed to tire of each other.

Dozens of biographies and books on Hollywood have taken note of the persistent rumors that Gary Cooper had a sugar daddy during his lean early days in Hollywood. Some rumors claimed that Gary's benefactor was a shipbuilder with a mansion outside San Diego. Other rumors credited him with being an important movie producer, or perhaps a famous actor of the silent screen, with suspicion centering on John Gilbert. It was even gossiped about that Gary Cooper's man of mystery was a prince of one of the royal families of Europe, exiled to America because of his homosexuality.

But based on what both Howard and Gary had told him, Rod St. Just and a few other Hollywood insiders would arrive at the conclusion that Gary's benefactor was younger than Gary himself.

It was Howard Hughes, Jr.

CHAPTER SIX

Los Angeles, 1927

At last Noah Dietrich came up with a home that Howard found suitable. It was a mansion at 211 Muirfield Drive in the exclusive Hancock Park section of Los Angeles. Ella continued to hold out for Pasadena, “where my true friends are,” but Howard turned a deaf ear to her request. That deaf ear was both symbolic and real, since he had noted even more deterioration in his hearing during the previous months.

The thing that most appealed to Howard was that the house abutted the Wilshire Country Club. Regardless of his schedule, he was still determined to become the world’s greatest golfer. “His playing was fantastic,” Dietrich later recalled. “I mean, he was really good. But regardless of how well he played, he always heard of a championship golfer who was even better. Howard was just too distracted to put in the training needed to become the world’s leading golfer.”

A widow, Eva K.J. Fudger, wanted a thousand dollars a month rent—a staggering sum in those days—for the house. When Hughes showed up at her door, looking disheveled and unshaven from having been up all night, she was horrified. She later told Dietrich that his client looked like a hobo.

She’d never heard of Howard and his tool company. Before she’d trust him to live in her house with its antiques and art objects, she demanded that he pay her six-thousand dollars in advance, thinking that he would not be able to come up with the money. He did and moved in with Ella as the widow moved out.

Much later, Howard would order Dietrich to purchase the Spanish mission style house. The widow wanted \$115,000 for the house and \$35,000 for the furnishings. When Dietrich pleaded for more time to negotiate, Howard demanded that he wanted the house now. Even though Dietrich protested, he agreed to carry out the commands of his boss. “That widow made a killing,” Dietrich said. Years later, when Howard sold the house, it brought only \$60,000.

Ella told her friends that she wanted to have an heir for the Hughes fortune. She hoped that the birth of a son would rein in Howard. But when Howard locked himself off in a separate wing, and never came to her brocaded chamber, she knew how impossible that would be.

For his own private quarters, Howard chose the elegant study that opened onto the gardens in back. The room had a private entrance so he could come and go without any of the servants in the main house seeing him. Ella took the master bedroom on the second floor.

Howard almost never spoke to Ella during her stay at Muirfield. If she gave a dinner party for her friends from Pasadena, he would deliberately occupy himself that night in another part of town. Sometimes she would go out on the golf course to see if he were all right, but he’d order her off the greens, charging that “you’re ruining my game.”

Dietrich estimated that Howard took Ella out only three times after they moved into Muirfield. Each occasion was to a Hollywood party.

A popular actor of the time, Ben Lyon, invited “Mr. and Mrs. Howard R. Hughes Jr.,” and was amazed when the invitation to his Santa Monica beach house was accepted. Lyon, a soft-spoken and handsome actor from Atlanta, Georgia, was four years older than Howard and had been appearing in films since 1918. Within three short years, he would marry and form a lifelong association with one of the leading vamps of the silent screen, Bebe Daniels.

But when Howard met Ben, he was playing the field. Howard was impressed with his rumored list of seductions, such legendary names of stage and screen as Jeanne Eagels, Pola Negri, Gloria Swanson, and Big Howard’s former mistress, Eleanor Boardman. He also was said to have had affairs with Howard’s former flames, Blanche Sweet and Barbara LaMarr. At the time Howard met him, Ben was having an affair with Mary Astor—“a terrific actress. You’ve just got to cast her as the lead in your next film.”

Amazingly, Howard took the advice of his new acquaintance. At the time Howard met Ben, he was starring in *For the Love of Mike*, which turned out to be Claudette Colbert’s only silent movie.

“I had been wanting to get cast in one of Howard’s films—and I would eventually—so I invited him to my party hoping to suck up,” Ben recalled years later when he was appearing in London. “I didn’t think he would show up at my Santa Monica beach house, but, surprise of surprise, he did. I think he was impressed with my reputation as the Lothario of Hollywood.”

Ben claimed, “We hit it off beautifully right from the beginning. His wife, Ella, was very shy and retiring. She appeared well-mannered and well brought up, and she was definitely the best dressed woman there, with the most expensive jewelry, although there were a lot of big stars in attendance, like Aileen Pringle, May McAvoy, and Lois Wilson. I’d invited Billie Dove, but she canceled on me at the last minute. Otherwise, Howard would have met Billie Dove long before he actually did.”

“If I recall, and I do, Howard spent most of the evening talking to me,” Ben said. “We became fast friends. When I married Bebe in June of 1930, Howard was one of the ushers. Can you imagine? It was probably the only time Howard was a damn usher in his entire life. If I’d been smart, I would have made him my best man.”

“My friendship with Howard began the very next day,” Ben said. “He called me and invited me for a game of golf at the Wilshire Country Club. Later we had lunch. Then he took me over to a small house he’d rented a block from his mansion in Hancock Park. He called it Angelo, and I soon figured out it was a lovers’ hideaway. Howard just bluntly asked me if I could arrange a few private parties for him at Angelo. In those days, I had more girls than I could shake a stick at, and I gladly volunteered. I guess you might say I became a pimp for him. I thought he’d be great for my career.”

In Howard’s first weeks at Angelo, it wasn’t a parade of Hollywood beauties seen going in and out of Angelo, but a tall and lean actor, Gary Cooper. He was making an aerial picture called *Wings*, and he wanted Howard to come and look at it being shot, since he was so interested in aviation.

Not knowing at the time that it would change his life, Howard accepted the invitation to visit the set of *Wings*.

Wings billed itself as “a drama of the skies,” and it became the first ever Oscar winner for best picture. A Paramount release, it starred Clara Bow, with whom Gary Cooper had launched a tumultuous affair. The co-stars were two “incredibly handsome” actors, Richard Arlen and Charles (Buddy) Rogers, who would go on to marry Mary Pickford.

In the film, Buddy and Richard vie for the hand of the same young woman, as played by Jobyna Ralston. Richard won out in real life, as he married her after the picture was wrapped.

Clara Bow was cast as the girl-next-door who joins the medical corps as an ambulance driver. She hated the part, claiming it was “a man’s picture

and I'm just the whipped cream on top of the pie."

Gary had given Howard a copy of the script, which he'd read. He wasn't impressed, finding the human drama "sudsy." He told Gary that he really was interested in seeing how the director would stage the scenes of aerial combat.

Howard Hughes was an original, but if he had a role model for the next two or three years, it was William Wellman, the twenty-nine-year old rookie director of the two-million dollar epic, the most expensive picture Paramount had ever made. "Wild Bill," as he was called, was a Hollywood maverick.

In 1917, he'd joined the French Foreign Legion, where he'd learned to fly, becoming an ace fighter pilot with the celebrated Lafayette Flying Corps. He survived a near-fatal airplane crash with injuries that left the limp he'd have for the rest of his life. As the years went by, he exaggerated that limp, claiming that it attracted women to his bed.

Making only \$250 a week, the director had to marshal a cast and equipment that included 3,500 army personnel, 165 planes, and 65 pilots.

In 1970 in Los Angeles, five years before his death of leukemia, Wellman recalled his first meeting with Howard. "God damn it, I wasn't able to direct when he was on the set. He shot questions at me—really informed questions—with such rapid fire that he tested the breadth of my knowledge about flying. At one point, he even pleaded with me to cast him as one of the pilot extras. Fool that I was, I turned him down. Maybe that's why he didn't ask me to direct his *own epic, Hell's Angels*."

Wellman always took credit for the discovery of Gary Cooper. With a slight smirk on his face, he'd always say, "Actually Howard was the first man to discover Coop's hidden talents!"

He was directing Clara Bow around the time she became celebrated as "The *It* Girl." "Clara had *It*," Wellman said, "but Coop was definitely the *It* boy. He was like catnip to both men and women. I think he was born with *It*. In time, Gable with his big ears would have *It*. In spite of his lisp, Bogie had *It*. It takes chemistry and *It* to become a top star and make millions."

"On the other hand," Wellman continued, "Howard Hughes didn't have *It*. Handsome as the Devil and richer than God, this Texan lacked personality. With Howard, it was *Me! Me! Me!* He never gave of himself to anybody else, male or female. I felt he just expected me to teach him how to make a film about aviation. He seemed to think it was his divine right. I should have charged the fucker for my time!"

On the set of *Wings*, Gary went to enjoy a breakfast of beer and pretzels. Wellman then introduced Howard to Richard Arlen, who had been a pilot for the Canadian Royal Flying Corps during World War I.

Suddenly, just as they started to talk about flying, Brooklyn-born Clara Bow herself appeared. Wellman made the introductions, but Howard's eye was diverted to the menagerie of animals behind her. A fat black maid was trying to restrain seven chow dogs and a frisky monkey, each of the animals dyed a flaming red to match Clara's own hair.

Only when the animals settled down did Howard take in Clara Bow herself, whom the press was proclaiming both "the bee's knees" and "the cat's pajamas."

What he saw was a sexy tart with bobbed hair, saucer-like eyes, perky lips, and a personality so vivacious it made him nervous. "I hear you can take the snap out of a gal's garters," this jazz-age baby said to Howard.

"I understand we have something in common Miss Bow," Howard said. He obviously wasn't going to reveal that what they had in common was Gary Cooper.

"And what might that be?" Clara asked. "Certainly not bank accounts."

"We share the same attorney, Neil McCarthy," he said.

"Yeah, I just got a big bill from him," she said, "and don't know how I'm gonna pay it."

He looked her up and down, as if appraising livestock. "I'm sure you'll find a way. Neil told me that he got Paramount in your contract to relinquish its non-negotiable morals clause. Good thinking in your case!" He turned and walked away.

Wellman claimed that Clara was so furious she practically spat at Howard's back.

Taking all this turmoil in was a minor actress, Hedda Hopper, appearing in an uncredited part in *Wings*. She was storing up ammunition for the day when she'd become the second leading gossip maven of Hollywood.

Later in the day, Clara would tell her, "Gary's hung like a horse and he can go all night. I've named him Studs."

Gary's part in the picture lasted less than two minutes. He played veteran flier Cadet White, a tough flight instructor who is lecturing two green air cadets, Buddy and Richard. Gary dresses them down, telling them they need to show more guts if they want to fly the way he does. He appears in dusty infantry shoes, leggings, beat-up khakis, and leather flying helmet.

He's handed a Cadbury chocolate candy bar and takes a bite of it but tosses the remainder aside before gallantly leaving for a test flight. On the mission, he is killed. Wellman dramatically focuses the eye of the camera on the unfinished piece of candy.

Later Gary claimed that he was picking his nose during the scene and pleaded with Wellman to reshoot it. The director refused, claiming it was a perfect take. Later, Gary told Howard, "My fucking career is ruined."

Even after Gary was no longer needed on the picture, Howard remained fascinated by the filming of *Wings*, which took a full year to shoot in an era when a picture was often made in less than three weeks.

Without an invitation, Howard flew to Kelly Field, outside San Antonio, Texas, to watch the film being made. He learned that the War Department had lent millions of dollars worth of equipment and uniforms.

"Had I known the bastard was a spy," Wellman later said, "picking up valuable data for his own picture, I would have kicked him off my set."

Howard was mesmerized to see cameras attached to each plane to catch the action and was especially impressed that Wellman demanded clouds for the aerial combat scenes. Once, he waited eighteen days in a row for fluffy clouds to appear. In the months to come, Howard would wait much longer for those clouds during the shooting of *Hell's Angels*.

While sitting around waiting, the actors had plenty of time on their hands during their stay at the St. Anthony Hotel in San Antonio.



James Hall and Ben Lyon in
Hell's Angels

In his memoirs, Wellman claimed that the hotel “became the Armageddon of a magnificent sexual Donnybrook.” He noted that by the time their hotel stay was over, a total of nine months, every one of the elevator operators was pregnant—“each and every one.”

He also claimed that Clara did her part to keep the actors and crew entertained, enjoying dalliances not only with Richard and Buddy, but with director Victor Fleming, who was shooting a Western nearby. “And there must have been at least a dozen others,” Wellman recalled in an interview. “Clara’s excuse was that it took a dozen men to satisfy her now that Gary was out of the picture.”

When at last *Wings* was released, Gary generated more fan mail than either Richard or Buddy. The actor himself was modest about his performance, claiming, “Some critics thought I gave my best performance as a piece of chocolate.”

Back in Hollywood, Howard vowed that he would make a much more dramatic—and hell of a lot better—picture about aviators in aerial combat. He ordered Noah Dietrich to start rounding up all the World War I footage that he could, depicting aerial combat. Locked away in his study at Muirfield, Howard would play this newsreel footage over and over. He told Dietrich, “I’m going to make the greatest aviation movie of all time, using my own money—and you’re going to help me finance it with profits from Toolco.”

“How much?” Dietrich asked.

“At least two million,” Howard said.

“When Howard said two million,” Dietrich recalled, “I knew that I could just double that figure” and get a more realistic account of the actual funds that would be needed.

In the meantime, Howard’s Caddo Productions was going ahead with the job of churning out movies.

News reached Howard that the famous Moldova-born director, Lewis Milestone, was leaving Hollywood for self-imposed exile in Europe. The hot-tempered, feisty director had recently been fined \$200,000 by the California courts in the wake of a lawsuit with Warner Brothers, which he had lost.

After learning that he had filed for bankruptcy Howard decided that here was a golden opportunity to snare a major director at a reasonable price. Within the week, he’d met with Milestone and had signed him to a three-year contract with Caddo pictures. The director’s launch film was *Two Arabian Knights*.

An adventure comedy about World War I, it was a rip-off of director Raoul Walsh’s highly successful *What Price Glory?*, which in 1926 had co-starred Victor McLaglen and Edmund Lowe as the memorable Sergeant Flagg and Captain Quirt. Howard even went so far as to hire James T. O’Donohue, one of the scenarists on *What Price Glory?*, to work on the script. Milestone “looked like he’d been run over with a steam-roller” when Howard presented him with a budget of \$500,000 in a day when even first-class films were made for far less.

For the two battling American soldiers, Milestone cast the “incredibly handsome” William Boyd—later to become famous and rich playing Hopalong Cassidy—as Private W. Dangerfield Phelps. For his “almost poetically ugly” cohort—Milestone’s words—the director cast German-born Louis Wolheim as Sergeant Peter McGaffney.

Years later, Milestone would once again cast Wolheim, this time as one of the stars of his legendary *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Wolheim died tragically shortly after the release of what was to become a classic film.



Louis Wolheim and William Boyd in *Two Arabian Knights*

Escaping from a German prison, the American doughboys disguise themselves as Arabs and book passage on a ship sailing for Jaffa. The beautiful Mary Astor is improbably cast as Mirza, an Arab girl. Both men fall in love with her, and, as it turns out, she is the daughter of the Emir of Jaffa, a role played by Michael Vavitch. A *pre-Frankenstein* Boris Karloff was cast as the purser.

With its completely improbable plot, *Two Arabian Knights* ended up with an Academy Award at the first-ever ceremonies held in the Blossom Room of the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel on May 16, 1929. Milestone beat out Chaplin and won for best director for a comedy. Director Frank Borzage won for best director for drama because of his stewardship of *Seventh Heaven*. That was the only time there were two awards for director, one for comedy and the other for drama. In the future, these two categories would be combined into only one Oscar.

Although writer Ben Hecht still dubbed Howard “the sucker with the money,” *Two Arabian Knights* went on to make more than \$650,000. Howard was elated at this triumph over Rupert, who, in spite of all his films, had never won an Academy Award. “I’m no longer the rich kid playing around with movies,” Howard told his uncle.

Later he confided to Milestone, “It was only because Rupert predicted my failure that I stayed in the business—just to show him.” At this point in their relationship, Howard and his uncle were barely on speaking terms. The fight over Big Howard’s estate had left permanent scars.

During the making of the film, Howard did not interfere with Milestone’s direction but was a shadowy and silent presence on the set, hawk-eying every move the director made. Continuing that pattern, Howard did not interfere with Milestone’s final cut of the film.

When he was finished, Milestone drove to Lake Arrowhead for some much needed rest and relaxation. Someone whose identity is unknown then confronted Milestone with the news that Howard was at the studio recutting his film. Abandoning his vacation, Milestone drove back to Los Angeles where he came raging back into the studio to find that Howard, with film all around him, was indeed re-editing *Two Arabian Knights*.

As co-producer John W. Considine Jr., later said, “You could hear Milestone’s screams all the way back in the Ukraine.”

In a “calm-down-Milly-ride,” Howard invited the director for a spin in his Stanley Steamer. Milestone later recalled, “That god damn Texas fool went a hundred miles an hour with me no longer screaming about cutting the film, but with me begging for my life. Finally, I promised to calm down.”

“Hughes came to an abrupt stop and nearly threw me through the windshield,” Milestone claimed. “He carefully explained that my version of the film had already been shipped to New York for distribution. He said he was taking apart the film and going over it carefully because he wanted to learn how the final version of a movie was put together. It was a self-taught classroom—nothing more.”

With the success of *Two Arabian Knights*, Howard launched production plans for “the mother of all pictures,” to be known as *Hell’s Angels*. Since it would take so long for this picture about World War I aviators, evocative of *Wings*, to come to the screen, he would also produce other films in the meantime.

Howard would later deny it, but Rupert practically on his deathbed was still claiming that the original idea and plot for the picture was his. The proposed scenario had been pitched to Howard when Rupert at the time was promoting the handsome young Texan as a potential matinee idol.

For the rest of his life, Rupert would proclaim that *Hell’s Angels* was the “picture my bastard nephew stole from me with the same cold heart he robbed my parents of my brother’s bequest to them.”

There is a trio of films that won the Academy Award that cannot be viewed today, including *Two Arabian Knights*. Two of them (*The Way of All Flesh*—best actor—and *The Patriot*—best screenplay) are believed to have been lost, probably forever. *Two Arabian Knights*, however, does exist and is owned by the Howard Hughes Estate, which has not made it available. It is said to be housed “in a hidden location,” gathering dust.

Woodland Hills, California, 1985

Mary Astor in her autobiographical *My Story* is a bit off in recalling Howard’s film career, writing that *Two Arabian Knights* was his first venture into film-making. Because Howard was earning a reputation as a seducer of beautiful women, word quickly spread along Hollywood and Vine that Howard and Mary Astor were having a torrid affair. As a WAMPAS Baby Star and beauty contest winner at the age of fourteen, Mary would have certainly qualified as an ample sexual challenge for Howard.

In 1985, at the Motion Picture Country Home in Woodland Hills, California, Mary flatly denied those long-ago rumors. “It was the affair that never happened,” she claimed. In failing health and suffering a heart condition, she was a lonely, forgotten star, refusing to see fans and giving almost no interviews except through “divine intervention” or on the recommendation of old friends.

“Actually, I wasn’t dazzled by Hughes at all,” Mary said. “I heard that he found me a cool cucumber. Behind his back I called him *Faunt* as in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, because every day he showed up on the set in another outfit. Each one looked as if it still had the price tag on it. Years later, future lady friends such as Ava Gardner would ridicule his sloppy wardrobe. But when I knew him, he was still a dandy with a fondness for argyle socks if I remember.”

“If Howard had given me the eye, I might have said yes,” Mary said. “I was a bit wild in those days. Actually, I was very much in love with Ken.” Her reference was to director Kenneth Hawks. She would marry him in 1928, a union that ended in his death in an airplane crash three years later. Kenneth was the brother of Howard Hawks, who would direct future pictures for Howard.

“Rumors about my so-called affair with Hughes quickly died down,” Mary said. “A juicier story was making the rounds. Instead of shacking up with poor me, Hughes was hopping on Hopalong, although we didn’t call William Boyd that in those days.”

Apparently, Howard had misjudged Mary. She turned out to be a woman of violent passions with a high sex drive. Before meeting Howard, she’d already been clutched to the manly breasts of Douglas Fairbanks Sr. and John Barrymore, both on and off the screen.

Of *Two Arabian Knights*, she mostly remembered being “half-drunk, half-frozen, and half-nauseated” by the taste and smell of oil and salt water during scenes shot in San Pedro Harbor. She ridiculed Hughes as a producer, citing an example of his coming onto an indoor movie set and asking, “Where’s the fourth wall?”

Howard watched in dismay in 1936 when Mary became involved in a court battle with her second husband, Dr. Franklyn Thorpe, over the custody of her daughter. As evidence that she was an unfit mother, he introduced her private diary.

In it, she revealed many details about her affairs, none more notable than with the married George S. Kaufman. Snippets of the diary were released to the press. One passage, referring to Kaufman, read:

It was wonderful to fuck the sweet afternoon away. I don't know where George got his staying power. He must have cum three times in an hour.

She also wrote of other lovers including Clark Gable and Ronald Colman.

The diary was eventually impounded by the court and kept locked until 1952, when the courts ordered that it be burned. The public never got to read the full revelations.

“If I still kept a diary Humphrey Bogart would have definitely made it,” she said, alluding to a brief affair she had with him during the making of *The Maltese Falcon* in 1941, in which she played the cool, ruthless, and beautiful Brigit O’Shaughnessy opposite Bogie’s Sam Spade. “He called me Baby long before Bacall. He always related to me like I had no clothes on.”

She had kind memories of Howard during the humiliation and exposure she suffered with her diary. “He called me and, to my surprise, volunteered his help if I needed him, and that included money.”

In the retirement home, Mary had survived alcoholism, three divorces, an attempted suicide, and a national sex scandal. And she was still here.

In saying good-bye, she said she’d be remembered for these immortal lines, which in time were used by dozens of other actresses:

There are five stages in the life of an actress: Who s Mary Astor? Get me Mary Astor. Get me a Mary Astor type. Get me a young Mary Astor. Who s Mary Astor?

Los Angeles, 1927

Right before his involvement with a woman destined to become the world’s most famous platinum blonde, Jean Harlow, another blond entered Howard’s life.

William Boyd.

Howard told both Billy Haines and Rod St. Just that he found Boyd “very, very handsome.” The actor had already been discovered and cast in films by Cecil B. DeMille long before he played the lead in *Two Arabian Knights*.

Before he rode off into the sunset as Hopalong Cassidy, William Boyd was considered “a hell-raising sex maniac in Hollywood,” Adela Rogers St. Johns said privately, not in print.



William Boyd

His fellow co-star, Louis Wolheim, long before he played the lead in *Two Arabian Knights*, once confided, “Bill was basically heterosexual. Although he preferred women, he wasn’t averse to letting a man service him if he felt it would advance his career. He takes sex wherever he finds it. He and Gary Cooper have a lot in common.”

One of five children, Boyd had run away from home at the age of seventeen and had supported himself as best he could in jobs that required “more brawn than brains.” Sometimes that was as a nude model or even a male prostitute for both men and women.

DeMille was fond of quoting Boyd on his past. According to the director, the actor once told him, “If you’ve got a broad chest, blond hair, a big cock, and are devastatingly handsome, you can always find something, ‘cause a pretty boy never has to go hungry.”

Intriguingly, and there is no more information available, Boyd confided to his intimates that he used to “perform” at private parties for one hundred dollars a night.

When Howard first met Boyd, the actor was ten years older than he was, but his interest was piqued. The first weekend he had free, he invited Boyd for a sail to Catalina Island.

Only some of the details of that trip have been revealed. But somewhere in the reddish light of a fading Catalina sun on a long-ago afternoon, Howard had a close encounter with his golden boy with hair so blond it was almost gray.

Their idyllic time together—an off-the-record weekend—might have gone unnoticed except for one event. Howard invited Boyd to go with him to one of Richard Arlen’s notorious all-nude male parties being held that same weekend at a secluded cove.

These parties hosted by the handsome bisexual actor were not a secret, but gossiped about among the innermost circles. Depending on the weekend, guests included Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Gary Cooper, Joel McCrea, Billy Haines, Buddy Rogers, Ramon Novarro, Edmund Goulding, and such lesser known actors as Kenneth MacKenna and Anderson Lawler.

Many future writers would label Howard “the bashful billionaire.” Actually, he wasn’t that shy and had little concern about showing off his body. He was, in fact, rather proud of his endowment, and would spend virtually the last twenty years of his life in the nude.

Howard’s infamous weekend on Catalina Island only became known all over Hollywood because somehow, somehow, a photographer managed to

take nude pictures of the guests, including Howard and Boyd.

“Within the week,” Rod St. Just recalled, “copies of those photographs were bringing top dollar in Hollywood. Many of the stills exist today in private collections. I just wish I had taken them. The studios worked overtime trying to suppress the incident.”

Rod claimed that he personally bought the negatives to the pictures of Boyd and Howard. “Howard gave me ten thousand dollars but told me to start negotiating at two thousand. I had to part with all the money before I could buy the negatives. Photographs of Cooper and some other stars were practically sold on Hollywood & Vine. I think every queen in Hollywood who wanted pictures got them.”

Many of these photographs later appeared in “underground” publications with limited circulation.

Rod was vague about the course of the Hughes/Boyd affair and wasn’t certain about when it actually ended. “Maybe three weeks of white heat, then a sometimes thing,” was his best estimation.

On May 21, 1927, Howard stayed glued to his radio set, listening in fury at the news of the history-making voyage of Charles A. Lindbergh on his non-stop transatlantic flight to Paris. He rode alone in a single-engine plane, the *Spirit of St. Louis*. Had that little engine given out, he would have gone to a watery grave. All the commentators were hailing a new American hero, a handsome daredevil of amazing courage. The adulation sickened Howard.

House servants at the Muirfield mansion could hear the rage of their boss as he shouted back at the radio. Even the thick locked doors of his library couldn’t drown out his voice. “I’ll beat the bastard’s record. So help me!” His bellowing vow was heard by the gardener, Robert Quantrill, who was planting new gardenia bushes outside Howard’s window.

The next day, Howard continued to barricade himself in his library, not sending out for food or drink. He listened to the news of Lindbergh’s tumultuous reception by the Parisians, who shouted *Vive Lindbergh!* in the streets. Upon the aviator’s return to New York, an even greater welcome awaited him before he’d go on to be celebrated throughout the United States.

In the months ahead, whenever there was major news about Lindbergh, Howard abandoned all his plans for the day to sit by his radio. On June 13, 1927, he heard a broadcast about Lindbergh’s triumphant return to New York. The largest crowd of well-wishers in the city’s history, an estimated 4½ million New Yorkers, turned out, and some eighteen tons of paper were dumped on the streets from skyscraper windows.

An enraged Howard, in a phone call to Dietrich, predicted that one day New Yorkers would give him an even more enthusiastic hero’s welcome.

Perhaps in a last desperate attempt to save her rapidly deteriorating marriage, Ella announced that she was going on a summer vacation in New England with her sister, Libby Farish. At least that’s one point of view. Other more cynical observers noted that the much abused Ella might have embarked on a mission of revenge to pay Howard back for all his philandering.

After taking a train all the way to Boston, Libby and Ella journeyed by limousine to the summer resort of Peckets-on-Sugar-Hill at Franconia, New Hampshire. Once there, Ella sent word to Howard that she and Libby were driving to Manchester, New Hampshire, a distance of ninety miles, to welcome Lindbergh to that city along with thousands of others.

On his victory tour of America, women were “throwing themselves at the aviator hero,” in the words of one radio announcer. A Manchester newspaper reporter wrote, “Married or not, it was all the same wherever Lindy went. Women swooned over him greater than they did over Valentino.” He cited an example of a matronly woman approaching Lindbergh in a local restaurant to look inside his mouth to see what he was eating for lunch, discovering it was a pimento cheese sandwich. While all this was going on, some maid was stealing Lindy’s dirty underwear from his hotel suite as a souvenir.

A ten thousand dollar check to the city’s parks department had already assured Ella of a seat at the chief banquet table honoring Lindbergh that night.

Although it is known that Ella met with and talked to Lindbergh that night, the rest of the evening will forever remain a mystery. When Libby returned to Houston, she very discreetly dropped the word that the aviator “had been enchanted with the lovely Ella. He was completely mesmerized.”

By the time word traveled along Houston’s gossip circuit, the scoop was that Ella and Lindy were having a torrid affair. Libby later confided to Annette Lummis that Ella and Lindy spent the night together in his hotel suite. In time, this news got back to Howard, no doubt via Rupert, who apparently was gleeful at hearing the story from Annette.

Howard’s reaction to the possible affair has not been recorded, as he apparently confided in no one, not even Dietrich.

On hearing this news about his wife and his arch rival, he immediately fired off a wire to Ella: “Were you able to see Lindberg?” Howard never learned to spell the hero’s name correctly. “Did he live up to your fantasy?”

Usually it was Howard who didn’t respond to Ella’s telegrams. This time she chose not to answer him but to leave him guessing and simmering in his jealous stew.

It didn’t help matters when Marion Davies phoned him the next month. Dietrich later claimed that Howard “almost had a stroke” when Marion dropped a bit of tantalizing news. Her benefactor, William Randolph Hearst, had met secretly with Lindbergh. The aviator had been offered half a million dollars, plus ten percent of the profits, if he’d appear in a picture produced by Hearst about aviation.

Marion reported to Howard that Lindbergh was seriously tempted by W.R.’s offer and had even gone so far as to sign a contract. Later, Lindbergh learned that W.R. had designated Marion to be his co-star in the film.

The household staff at Muirfield would later report that Howard “burst into an insane rage.” He was not a hunter but often took a gun along to shoot at pigeons flying too close to his yacht, while making the crossing to Catalina Island. After slamming down the phone, Howard took his gun and went into the gardens of Muirfield, shooting blindly into the air. The gardener, Quantrill, was able to restrain him.

It was Rupert himself who had first proposed that Howard be the star of a movie about aviation. Nothing came of that, but Howard had gone ahead with his own plans to produce—not star in—his own picture about pilots. He told Dietrich he feared that if the Lindbergh picture were made, audiences would flock to that film and stay away from his own movie.

Lindbergh did not take up W.R.’s offer, and pleaded with him to tear up the contract, which the newspaper czar reluctantly did. Another producer later offered Lindbergh a guaranteed five-million dollars if he’d sign a movie contract to star as a dashing leading man in pictures. He turned that one down too. However, he did accept a far more limited series of testimonials and endorsements which capitalized off his fame.

When Howard learned that Lindbergh had turned down all movie offers, he was seriously tempted to contact him and offer him the lead in *Hell’s Angels*. But he thought better of it, fearing that Lindbergh’s fame was so great that it would detract from his own celebrity as producer.

Howard also had to disappoint Gary Cooper when he came to Muirfield to meet with Howard. Gary made a pitch that he and Clara Bow be cast as

the stars of *Hell's Angels*. Howard had to turn Gary down, fearing that using the same stars who had appeared in *Wings* would be detrimental to his own movie. "I don't want it to look like I'm making a sequel," he told Gary.

In the years ahead, Howard avidly read any news of Lindbergh that he could, and was mesmerized by the saga of the kidnapping and subsequent death of the Lindbergh baby. When Lindbergh, on the eve of the U.S. entry into World War II, urged America to stay out of the global conflict, Howard denounced his rival as a Nazi sympathizer. Howard claimed that, unlike himself, Lindbergh was not a true American patriot.

At one point, Dietrich was ordered to see if Howard could purchase the *Spirit of St. Louis*. Howard's motive, apparently, was not to preserve it as a memorial to Lindbergh, but to tear it apart and sell the aircraft as junk.

Dietrich filed Howard's request in the top of his desk drawer and never brought up the subject again with Howard. No second order ever came in from Howard. He always contemptuously referred to the historic plane as "that sweet little thing."

Howard later criticized Lindbergh's history-making flight to Paris, claiming that if he had been the pilot, he would have flown *Spirit* all the way to Rome. "Then the god damn Pope would have lifted his skirts and raced across the airfield to kiss me!"

While plotting the upcoming production of his epic, *Hell's Angels*, Howard quickly produced two more films and continued a series of not-very-serious nor very long affairs. He was just months from launching himself into his greatest love affair and his most famous motion picture. In the meantime, he kept himself busy until the real thing came along.

Their past misunderstandings cleared up, Howard once again turned to Lewis Milestone to direct a gangster movie, a crime film-noir called *The Racket*. Character actor Louis Wolheim was called back in the supporting role of Nick Scarsi, a bootleg racketeer based on the life of gangster Al Capone.

The lead role of the dedicated cop, Captain McQuigg, went to Thomas Meighan, a strikingly handsome leading man of the silent screen whose star was fading near the end of the Twenties. Rugged and strong-jawed, he had piercing blue eyes and stood six feet tall with the build of an athlete.

Meighan was known for seducing his leading ladies, including Mary Pickford with whom he appeared in a Western drama, *M'Liss*, and Norma Talmadge with whom he'd co-starred in *The Forbidden City*.

He was rumored to have had an affair with Big Howard's former mistress, Gloria Swanson, during the filming of DeMille's *Male and Female*, which also starred the beautiful Lila Lee.

In retirement, Lila Lee lived in Key West in a home provided by her gay son, James Kirkwood, who'd won the Pulitzer Prize as co-author of the Broadway musical, *A Chorus Line*. Ever since they'd appeared in *Male and Female*, she and Thomas Meighan had remained close friends—"never lovers," she was quick to point out.

She visited her favorite actor several times on the set during the filming of *The Racket*. "Everyone in the know, including Milestone himself, was predicting that Hughes would swoon over Tommy," Lila said. "In reality, Hughes found two other cast members more to his liking—beautiful Marie Prevost and a dashing handsome blond actor, John Darrow. It wasn't a casting couch thing, though, because John and Marie had already been cast in their parts before meeting Hughes."

She recalled Meighan taking her to see *The Racket*. Critics agreed that Howard had come up with another winner. "There was even talk that it might be best picture of the year," Lila said, "but it lost out."

"The Hughes affair with Marie, and I talked to her about it myself, lasted for only a weekend," Lila recalled. "It took place at a Santa Monica beach house, either owned or rented by Ben Lyon."

"I saw Marie a week after the seduction," Lila said. "She claimed she was madly in love with Hughes. I remember her exact words. 'Why is Clara Bow raving about Gary Cooper's equipment? She should audition Howard Hughes. But if she does, I'll scratch the eyes out of the bitch.'"



Marie Prevost

Relaxing in her living room in Key West, Lila went on, "Howard Hughes was a fairly unknown commodity in Hollywood in those days. The way he

treated women was still a bit of a secret. Poor Marie had a lot to learn. She thought Hughes would continue the affair. Apparently, the lying bastard had told her that he was in love with her. He might have said that on a Saturday night. By Monday morning, it was back to business for Hughes. On the set of *The Racket*, he practically ignored the poor girl after the Santa Monica episode. It really broke her heart. She was emotionally fragile as it was.”

Born in Canada and seven years older than Howard, Marie Prevost was the first in Howard’s series of doomed girl friends. A Mack Sennett bathing beauty, she was seduced by the bisexual director. Howard had first seen her on the screen in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Beautiful and the Damned*. He had been impressed by her looks, and had gone once again to see her in the Ernst Lubitsch film, *The Marriage Circle*. Lubitsch had succeeded in bringing out the beautiful seductress side of Marie, erasing the last remaining trace of her convent school education in Montréal. Howard may have suggested to Milestone to give her the lead in *The Racket*, in which she played a torch song night club singer.

Beginning in 1926, her life had taken a tragic turn when her mother, to whom she was very close, died in an automobile accident in Florida. The news took a devastating toll on Marie, and she began to drink heavily.

“She and Hughes initially bonded by talking about the early deaths of their mothers,” Lila claimed. “In time Hughes often seduced women by talking about their mothers, or, in many cases, such as Ginger Rogers, actually inviting the mother out on a date, making it a threesome. Of course, I don’t mean sexually.”

“Before she realized she’d been dumped,” Lila said, “Marie told me that Hughes had liberated her sexually. I think that meant teaching her the joys of oral sex. Until then, Marie had presumably had sex only in the missionary position, including with that prissy right-winger, Adolphe Menjou. God, I detested that stuffed shirt.”

Following *The Racket*, the professional and personal life of Marie went on a downward spiral, as her alcoholism increased. Because of her weight gain, she was no longer offered star roles, but appeared in very minor parts, most often playing a wise-cracking, gum-chewing blonde floozy.

“Real second banana parts,” Lila said. Even so, Marie appeared with some of the leading stars of the Thirties, including Joan Crawford, Barbara Stanwyck, Clark Gable, and Howard’s own discovery, Jean Harlow.

Lila remembered encountering Marie on Hollywood Boulevard in the mid-Thirties. “I think she was surviving on one bottle of Scotch and one grapefruit a day. She looked awful and was penniless. She told me she’d recently engaged in a to-the-death drinking bout with John Gilbert. He won. How could either of them have known that they each had only months to live at that time?”

“Marie told me that she’d made four attempts to get in touch with Hughes, begging him for money,” Lila said. “She was living in this run-down cockroach palace on Cahuenga Boulevard.”

“The same year she’d filmed *The Racket*, she’d also made *A Blonde for the Night*,” Lila said. “That more or less sums up Marie’s involvement with Hughes.”

Howard never returned Marie’s calls and instructed Dietrich to turn down her repeated requests for money. A few months later Marie was found dead in her seedy apartment, her corpse decomposing. She’d been dead for several days.

Her body was discovered on January 21, 1937, by neighbors because of the incessant barking of her dachshund. To survive, the pathetic animal had made mincemeat of her body. After her death, Nick Lowe, the songwriter, penned a song, “Marie Prevost” (sic). In it, he sung of Marie becoming “the doggie’s dinner.”

Like Mozart, the faded beauty was buried in an unmarked pauper’s grave in Los Angeles. Amazingly, she still had a fan club until 1958, when its last aging member, still paying homage to one of the great beauties of the silent screen, died

With the handsome young actor, John Darrow, frequently at his side, Howard launched into pre-production work on *Hell’s Angels*, still vowing to make the greatest movie of all time.

John had become a live-in guest at Howard’s secret hideaway, Angelo, now that Gary Cooper and William Boyd no longer came to call.

Mickey Neilan is credited with giving Howard the story for *Hell’s Angels*, although Rupert still said that he originated the concept when he wanted his nephew to star in a film about aviation.

Howard wisely hired Harry Behn to write the script along with Howard Estabrook. As a producer, Howard had been impressed with Behn’s work on *The Racket*, and the screenwriter had also penned MGM’s *The Big Parade*, starring John Gilbert, in his biggest hit.

As Behn and Estabrook labored over the script, Mickey and Howard plotted the most brutal aerial combat scenes ever to be staged in front of a motion picture camera. The initial planning for *Hell’s Angels* was done at Metropolitan Studios at Cahuenga Avenue and Romaine Street in Hollywood.



John Darrow

Rupert did everything he could to persuade Howard not to go ahead with *Hell’s Angels*, claiming that the public was sick of the gore of World War I and wanted its “mud and blood forgotten.” Howard differed, citing the success of such films as *The Big Parade*, *Wings*, and *What Price Glory?* When Howard wouldn’t listen to him, Rupert predicted that “you’ll lose your shirt on this one.”

Howard remained convinced that his aerial sequences could capture the romance of flying, even if the pilots were engaged in combat. “There’s a

romanticism about pilots battling in the air.” He compared it to dueling knights during the Age of Chivalry. Mickey dismissed all this talk of “kighthood in the sky,” denouncing it as “bullshit” behind Howard’s back.

Not listening to any dire warnings, Howard pursued his dream, turning his back on any devil’s advocate. That included Dietrich, who’d been instructed to raid Toolco’s bank reserves, which he did, looting Houston of one million dollars, with millions more to come.

After the first few weeks, Mickey decided he couldn’t tolerate any more interference from Howard. When he’d directed *Everybody’s Acting*, Mickey had total artistic control, although Howard observed his every move. But for *Hell’s Angels*, Howard demanded that he be included in every decision, regardless of how minor. Despite his status as the film’s director, Mickey suffered the indignity of having nearly every one of his orders countermanded.

When he could take no more, Mickey shouted at Howard, “I want out of this fucking zoo. Find yourself another director.” He stormed out of Metropolitan, and for the rest of his life retained a burning hatred of Howard, a man whom he’d originally courted.

Howard replaced him with Luther Reed, a Wisconsin native who’d written about aviation for five years for the *New York Herald*. He’d become a director, turning out such forgettable flickers as *New York* and *Evening Clothes*, both in 1927. After only two months, Reed too could no longer stand Howard’s interference. “Find yourself another god damn director,” Reed shouted at Howard in front of cast and crew when he countermanded his latest directive. “Direct the picture yourself, cocksucker!”

“That’s exactly what I’ll do, you incompetent shithead!” Howard shouted at Reed’s back as he stormed across the stage toward the exit sign.

Weak on plot, *Hell’s Angels* is the story of two brothers attending Oxford. They enlist in the RAF when World War I breaks out. They also fall in love with the same girl, who appears rather indifferent to them both. The brothers volunteer for a suicide mission in a captured German bomber.

On October 31, 1927, Howard began the principle shooting of the interiors of *Hell’s Angels* at General Service Studios in Hollywood. Since meeting Ben Lyon, on loan from Warner Brothers, Howard had become increasingly friendly with this handsome star, much to the annoyance of John Darrow, who did not conceal his hostility on the set.

Ben was cast in the lead, playing opposite another popular actor, James Hall. As much as he liked Ben, Howard detested James Hall, finding him prudish offscreen and wooden on screen. But since he’d signed a contract, Howard continued with James Hall playing Ben’s brother.

As Howard’s favorite young man of the moment, and that was obvious to the cast, John Darrow was cast as the dashing Karl Armstedt, a member of the German Zeppelin crew. Other than his catching the eye of Howard, John had few acting credentials at the time, having appeared in such fluff as the 1927 *High School Hero*, characterized only by its boring scenario.

For the female lead, Howard originally wanted the very sexy Dorothy Mackaill, with her blonde bob, great legs, and generous lower lip. But she had other commitments, including five other films to make in 1927. Mackaill would one day compete and lose to Jean Harlow the role in *Red Dust* opposite Clark Gable.

Howard’s second choice was Greta Nissen, one of the era’s reigning blonde beauties of the screen. Almost immediately Howard regretted his decision, clashing several times with Greta who spoke in a heavy Norwegian accent. No romantic sparks were generated between Howard and Greta. Behind her back, he mockingly referred to her as Brunhild. “The fucking bitch should wear a breast plate and sing opera.” He told Harry Behn that “this Nissen creature makes me nervous. Thank God the picture is silent. That’s the worst voice since Vilma Banky opened her pussy-licking mouth.”

One of the Hollywood personalities who began to intrigue Howard was Ben Lyon, whose reputation as a womanizer and sexual athlete was widespread throughout Hollywood. Ben had had a famous and much publicized affair with Marilyn Miller, “the toast of New York” and one of the reigning stars in Broadway musicals. Their affair followed her messy divorce from Jack Pickford, brother of Mary. On the side, Ben was dating silent screen vamp, Bebe Daniels, whom he would eventually marry.

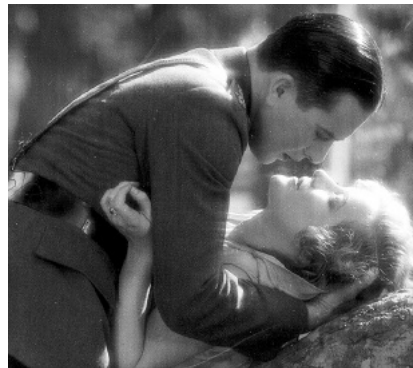
Born of Irish descent, Ben Lyon was touted as the all-American equivalent of Latin lovers Ramon Novarro and Antonio Moreno. With his dark hair and blue eyes, he had a clean-cut all-American look. If a director were shooting a script about a college football team, he might cast Ben as the captain.

According to Harry Behn, Ben joined Howard in a string of seductions of young starlets, most of which had been arranged by Ben himself. These off-the-record romances would mark the pattern of Howard’s life for the immediate decades to come.

Ben was eager to take to the skies with Howard and his boss began to instruct him as a pilot even though Howard would not obtain his own pilot’s license until January 7, 1928. Ben and Howard often flew off together on weekends.

James Hall later remembered Ben bragging in his dressing room that he and Howard had booked three beautiful starlets into three different rooms within the same hotel in San Diego, where they kept “the ladies satisfied, and none of the gals was the wiser.”

On some occasions, if we can trust Hall’s memory, Ben and Howard stayed in the same room with two of the various starlets they “auditioned,” often seducing them on the same bed at the same time. “I put on quite a show for Howard,” Hall quotes Ben as having said, “I think he’s a *voyeur*.”



Ben Lyon and Greta Nissen

Details are sketchy, but at some point Howard seduced the good-looking and very masculine actor Ben Lyon. James Whale in his pre-*Frankenstein* days knew Ben quite well when they worked together on *Hell’s Angels*. Whale confirmed that Ben indeed did have an affair with Howard. “Ben was one of the biggest ladies men in the world,” Whale later said. “He was also boyishly cute and very athletic, the kind of likable and charming man Hughes went for. I guess if you’re an actor, and even though a bona-fide heterosexual, you might drop your trousers if the richest man in the world—and your

producer—makes such a request. Since Hughes was known at the time for his expertise in giving oral sex, Ben didn’t have it so bad. One day I overheard John Darrow having a big fight with Hughes over Ben, and I knew this other little cutie had found out.”

“For God’s sake, did any of these boys—or did any of the Hughes women—think that this Texas alley cat would remain faithful to them?” Whale asked. “In those days and for years to come, Howard Hughes was a tiger burning bright and lusting after anything in the night, male or female. His only requirement: His prey had to be gorgeous.”

Many fans remember Ben the way he looked when he got older and was married to Bebe Daniels. Like so many actors, he went through a baby-face period. “When he smiled at me with that schoolboy look, my heart would melt but he was out of my league,” Whale confessed. “I saw him nude several times in his dressing room and he had quite an athletic build and was rather well-endowed, the way Hughes liked. He did tell me one time that Louis B. Mayer found him too scrawny for *Ben-Hur* and he lost out on that big part. So what did Mayer up and do? Give it to that Mexican girl, Ramon Novarro. What a lady she was, prancing around as *Ben-Hur*.”

“Ben did confide one big secret to me about Howard in bed,” Whale said in a conspiratorial tone. He quotes Ben as saying, “While he was making love to me, and doing all the work, I might add, he wanted me to talk at the same time, describing what it was like screwing Billie Dove when we made *The Tender Hour* together in 1927. It was obvious to me that Billie Dove was going to be Howard’s next big conquest.”

A letter arrived from his boyhood friend, Dudley Sharp, asking Howard to be the best man at his upcoming wedding in Houston. Dudley had been the best man at the wedding of Ella Rice to Howard.

Although Howard ignored most requests such as that, he did send a telegram to Dudley in which he congratulated him on his upcoming marriage. “Too busy with *Hell’s Angels*,” Howard wrote. “Can’t make it. Sorry.”

“Very short of money,” Dudley answered Howard with another request. He wanted to bring his new bride to meet Howard and stay with him for two weeks in the roomy mansion at Muirfield.

“That won’t be possible,” was Howard’s terse reply. “San Diego, however, is nice this time of year.”

“The friendship was over after that second telegram,” Dudley later said. At the same time, he revealed that he had requested money from Howard in the autumn of 1925 and had also been rejected. His mother, Estelle Sharp, could no longer afford his tuition or an allowance for him to continue at Princeton. She had urged Dudley to contact his boyhood friend. “After all, if Big Howard hadn’t gotten me to sell Daddy’s shares, we’d be part owner of Toolco today.”

Not wanting to ask for an out-and-out loan, Dudley met with the officials of the Alloy Steel Corporation in Dayton, Ohio. They agreed to pay him a kickback of twelve-thousand dollars if he would convince Toolco to order metal from them. Howard turned down the proposal, even though it would not have cost him any money, and ordering steel on Alloy’s terms would have saved him fifty-thousand dollars in one year alone.

Howard told Dietrich, “Don’t mention the name of Dudley Sharp to me again. If he ever tries to correspond with me again, file the letter unopened.”

Without Howard’s help, Dudley went on to enjoy a successful career. An Eisenhower Republican, he in time would become secretary of the U.S. Air Force.

Los Angeles, 1928

Even as he moved forward with *Hell’s Angels*, Howard produced another film, *The Mating Call*, directed by James Cruze. Howard had seen the director’s *The Covered Wagon* in 1923 a total of three times and had been impressed with Cruze’s take-charge style of handling a difficult picture.

Although Mormons would later become the menacing guards at the door of the reclusive and dying Howard Hughes, Utah-born Cruze may have been the first Mormon Howard ever met.

The Mating Call was filmed during the twilight of silent pictures, but it did have a musical score. Budgeted at \$400,000, it would barely make a profit in spite of the top-grade talent engaged in its production.

Because he was almost completely absorbed by *Hell’s Angels*, Howard did not try to direct *The Mating Call*, giving Cruze more or less a free hand. Howard did show up frequently on set, however, but that may have been because of his romantic interest in two of the female cast members.

The film was based on a novel by Rex Beach, a popular writer of his day. One of Beach’s novels, *The Spoilers*, was made into five different films, including a 1942 version starring Marlene Dietrich.

Herman J. Mankiewicz wrote the titles for *The Mating Call*, for its release as a silent movie. By 1941 he’d co-authored the screenplay with Orson Welles for *Citizen Kane*, which would win them a co-Oscar for writing. Based on the life of William Randolph Hearst, Citizen Kane is still considered the greatest motion picture ever made. It contains an unflattering portrait of Marion Davies, the press tycoon’s mistress. If Welles had followed Mankiewicz’s original wish, *Citizen Kane* would have been based on the life of Howard Hughes—not Hearst.

To write the scenario of *The Mating Call*, Howard hired William Axt and David Mendoza, the two hottest writers in Hollywood. They had scored big with such successes as *The Big Parade* in 1925, *Ben-Hur*, also in 1925, and *Don Juan* the following year.

Howard once again cast Thomas Meighan as his leading man. Meighan and Howard had a somewhat formal—actually, a chilly—relationship, and Howard would never use him again. He told Cruze after two weeks of shooting, “I’ve misjudged Meighan and shouldn’t have hired him again. His star is fading.”

Howard was much more enchanted by the film’s two leading ladies, Renée Adorée and Evelyn Brent, both beauties.

When signed to do the movie, in which she played a Russian immigrant impounded on Ellis Island, Renée was at the peak of her career. She’d scored big opposite John Gilbert in *The Big Parade*. When Gilbert wasn’t resting in the arms of Greta Garbo, Gilbert and Renée would become on-and-off again lovers for three more years and would remain close friends after that.



Renée Adorée

At the time Howard met her, Renée spoke a little English but with a heavy French accent. With the coming of talkies, she would improve her English so that her voice recorded better.

Renée had performed in the circus since she was five years old and later became a dancer at the Folies-Bèrgere in Paris. Around five feet tall, her petite stature, sensuous beauty, and penetrating eyes attracted Howard. She told Cruze that she thought Howard “is the handsomest American man I’ve ever seen, even better looking than John Gilbert.”

When news reached Louella Parsons that Howard had cast Renée in *The Mating Call*, the gossip maven pronounced her “one of the sexiest leading ladies in film today.” That column piqued Howard’s sexual curiosity.

In an interview given shortly before his death in Los Angeles in the summer of 1942, Cruze said, “Hughes just had to have Renée, at least for one night. He put about as much emotion into the affair as purchasing a gold bracelet for a starlet for the night. But he must have promised Renée the world. A big career. Marriage. God only knows. At any rate, she fell for him—and big.”

Renée had once been married to actor Tom Moore, the former brother-in-law of Mary Pickford during her ill-fated marriage to Owen Moore. “After Howard,” Renée told Cruze, “Tom doesn’t even count. Not even as a distant memory.”

In ill health, Cruze tried to remember as best he could what happened during the filming of *The Mating Call*. “Renée had had experience with Hollywood wolves, but she was still naïve. Back in those days, Hughes’s reputation wasn’t as ingrained as it later became. The gals actually fell for his line. When he lost interest in Renée—maybe after a shack-up that lasted no more than forty-eight hours, he just didn’t know her. She was crushed.”

“I watched her career slowly fade and even saw her last picture, *The Singer from Seville*,” Cruze said. “It was released in 1930. Renée never made it in Talkies and became one of the doomed ladies of the silent screen.”

She died early in her life on October 5, 1933 of tuberculosis. Upon her death, John Gilbert said he regretted that “so many bullies and bastards remain in Hollywood while a sweet decent girl like Renée has to fill the graveyards.”

“Renée told me that she wanted to continue the affair with Hughes,” Cruze said. “But she was simply abandoned. Howard had already seen her female co-star and decided that instead of Renée he wanted Evelyn Brent.”

Although he still owned his Waco, Howard, on the advice of Noah Dietrich, purchased a Boeing P-4. He had it rebuilt by Douglas Aircraft at Clover Field. On several occasions he ordered that work be completely redone. Costs mounted, as he demanded one new safety feature after another, until the final bill ran up to \$75,000.

The Boeing had originally cost less than \$50,000. Refusing to pay for the overhaul, he eventually got the bill down to \$15,000, which meant that Douglas Aircraft lost thousands on the deal. The president of the company, Donald Douglas, vowed “never to do business with the son of a bitch ever again.”

Although concerned with the safety features on the Boeing P-4, Howard was reckless in piloting other planes. “He’d just jump aboard and start flying one of those fuckers, with no concern for its safety features, much less his own life,” Dietrich recalled.

Having heard about this, Evelyn Brent, the co-star of *The Mating Call*, was at first afraid to fly with him when he invited her to come aboard for the revamped Boeing’s inaugural flight to San Diego.

From her modest apartment in Westwood Village in 1974, Evelyn recalled her strange, brief relationship with her producer. “When Hughes first asked me out, I thought he meant dinner—maybe dancing. Instead, we ended up in San Diego where he’d rented a suite.”



Evelyn Brent

Over dinner and on a sardonic note, Evelyn and Howard talked about Mormons. As an actress, she'd come into prominence in two British features, both released in 1922. One, *Trapped by Mormons*, was followed by its sequel, *Married to a Mormon*. These films, even in their day, were viewed as lurid and incendiary, documenting "the menace of the Mormon church and its teachings," especially about polygamy.

As later life demonstrated, Howard did not share Evelyn's distaste for Mormons. He often selected them as "palace guardsmen," and he liked the fact that none of the Mormons on his staff smoked or drank.

Evelyn amused Howard with her stories about the director of the anti-Mormon pictures, H.B. Parkinson, who believed that virginal English girls were being lured to Utah, where in his view they were forced into sexual slavery by men who had many other wives.

Howard was already familiar with the career of Parkinson. At a private showing with Marion Davies and Charlie Chaplin, he'd seen Parkinson's *The Life Story of Charles Chaplin*. Much of the film was true, especially the part that revealed The Little Tramp's fascination with pubescent girls. Chaplin was furious and somehow got the film suppressed. Pirated copies were released, however, and the film was frequently shown at Hollywood parties in 1926 and 1927.

Chaplin told Howard, "Some day you'll become as famous as I am, and some asshole will make a movie of your life. Don't let them. Suppress it!" Later Howard took Chaplin's advice, when he secretly paid Orson Welles fifty-thousand dollars for him and Herman Mankiewicz to base the subject of *Citizen Kane* not on him but on William Randolph Hearst instead.

Initially, if only for a weekend, Howard was attracted by Evelyn's beauty. She had porcelain white skin, a Cupid mouth, and curly brunette hair. On and off the screen she evoked a smoldering intensity. On screen, playing exotic and dangerous characters, she always had a hint of mystery about her, a screen characterization that would soon become the hallmark of Marlene Dietrich. It is said that her director, Josef von Sternberg, originally created the screen persona of Marlene by experimenting with Evelyn in two of his films, *Underworld* in 1927 and *The Dragnet* in 1928. In his pre-Marlene days, Von Sternberg was so intrigued with Evelyn that he also cast her in his 1928 *The Last Command*.

Six years older than Howard, and born in Tampa, Florida, Evelyn was the daughter of an Italian woman who was only fourteen years old at the time of Evelyn's birth. Her Irish-American father was all of seventeen. On their first date in San Diego, Evelyn aroused Howard's sympathy by speaking of her terrible upbringing. Orphaned by the time she was fourteen herself, she was forced to support herself, drifting into show business. When she'd saved up five hundred dollars, she went to London and managed to get cast in British films, including those two pictures about the Mormons. Back in the States, she was hailed as "the British beauty," not revealing her true origins.

When interviewed in 1974 in her apartment in Westwood, California, a year before her death, Evelyn recalled, "That bastard Hughes promised me everything that night in San Diego. He claimed he was going to sign me to a personal contract and star me in five major motion pictures, paying me one-hundred thousand dollars per picture. Of course, that was before he met that whore, Billie Dove. He actually carried through on the movie deal, but with Dove, and not with me. Fool that I was, I fell for his line."

Even when dumped by Howard, Evelyn still had a contract with Paramount and starred in *Interference* in 1929, one of that studio's first talkies. Regrettably, her first talking pictures were dismal failures at the box office, even though she had a pleasant speaking voice. Her future roles between 1930 and 1950 grew smaller and smaller, and she eventually retired from the screen to become a talent agent.

"I was an actor's agent in the 1950s, and I pitched several deals toward Hughes when he owned RKO," Evelyn claimed. "But he never went for anything. It was like writing to a stone wall. I never got a response."

She vividly remembered that night in San Diego back in 1928 when Howard took her to his hotel suite after dinner. "Yes, he did make love to me. I have to be perfectly frank. I didn't know myself in those days. I really believed that sex was something a woman had to endure, not a source of pleasure. While Howard was making love to me, I looked into his eyes. He wasn't even there. It was like he had drifted into some far and distant place."

Waking up the following Sunday morning around ten o'clock, she said, "I thought Hughes was still in bed with me. But while I was sleeping, he'd gotten up and slipped out of the suite and flew back to Los Angeles in his new plane. The jerk didn't even pay the hotel bill. I had taken only ten dollars in my purse. Mad money. That's all I had. The hotel manager wouldn't let me leave until the bill was paid. I called Caddo in Los Angeles, and I think at one point even Noah Dietrich got involved. Finally, an agreement was reached with Caddo, and they were billed for our weekend. Fortunately, I had a girlfriend who lived in San Diego, and she agreed to drive me back to Los Angeles. The next week when I saw Hughes on the set, he didn't even acknowledge me. Men!"

In time, Evelyn gave up all men, having divorced three husbands. In her Westwood apartment, her live-in lover was the actress Dorothy Conrad. At the time of her death of a heart attack on June 4, 1975, Evelyn had not appeared on the screen in twenty-five years.

Many of the nation's leading stunt pilots, especially Paul Mantz and Roscoe Turner, began assembling in January of 1928 at Mines Field at Inglewood (now the Los Angeles International Airport). These pilots were hand-picked by J. B. Alexander, Howard's former flight instructor. Most of the pilots—many World War I aces—earned their living by performing dangerous stunts at country fairs around the nation.

A few months earlier, Frank Tomick, had been signed by Howard to search the country for a fleet of planes—German, American, British, and French. Many of these aircraft, which had seen actual combat, had been shipped to the United States after World War I. Tomick found planes in “mothballs” in such states as Virginia and especially New Jersey.



Dogfight scene from *Hell's Angels*

When not enough planes were located in the United States, Tomick purchased aircraft from France, Germany, and England, finding them beside abandoned airfields in England's East Anglia, or within dusty warehouses in the suburbs of Paris or Berlin.

He bought several Fokker D. VIII's, the top killer of World War I, along with Nieuports, S.E.5s, and DeHavillands, but he didn't always find what he wanted.

Back in California, a crew of thirty-five mechanics, along with members of Howard's prop department, converted Curtiss Jennies into what looked like British Avros. Since an intact German Gotha bomber could not be found, Sikorskys were disguised to look like the Kaiser's fabled craft that had once caused panic in London.

In the San Fernando Valley, Howard purchased a cow pasture and turned it into Caddo Field, named after his production company. Howard himself flew the antiquated and dangerous Spads he'd purchased along with the RAF's former “Sopwith Camels.”

The armada quickly became known as the Howard Hughes Air Force in Hollywood. It was the largest private air force ever assembled, some eighty-seven private planes, although press reports claimed more than one hundred aircraft.

The fired director, Mickey Neilan, contemptuously dismissed Howard's efforts. “That god damn Texas bastard is going to restage World War I.” At the time, Mickey accurately predicted to the press that several stunt pilots would die. “I knew his original plans. Life doesn't mean anything to him. If those pilots are fools enough to follow his command, they deserve to die!”

Dietrich watched in horror as costs mounted. He repeatedly fought with Toolco executives as he raided their diminishing cash time and time again. Dozens of protests arrived from Houston, but the officers had no choice but to release the money. “It's my god damn money, and I'll spend it however I wish,” Howard angrily informed Dietrich.

Howard hired more than one thousand extras, along with a cast of thirty-five and a crew that at various times numbered anywhere from 101 to 167.

Although barred, Louella Parsons defiantly came onto the set one hot afternoon. In an article entitled, “The Man Nobody No's,” she commented, “I remember watching the picture being made and even I was appalled at the way Hughes spent money. At one time he had twenty-four cameramen shooting battle scenes. He was creating his own war, and it was almost as expensive as the real one.”

It was a bit of an exaggeration, but Dietrich at the time might have agreed with Parsons. He'd already spent five hundred thousand dollars on “worthless junk in the skies.”

During the early stages of the film, Howard showed the stamina of the twenty-three-year old that he was by working long stretches at a time, twenty or even thirty hours at a stretch. He expected his crew to do the same. He thought nothing of calling one of his cast at three o'clock in the morning if a new idea occurred to him.

He had long ago thrown away the wristwatch that Dudley Sharp had given him and would never wear one again.

Ella was an almost forgotten figure. He never responded to any of her messages which she slipped under the door of his study at Muirfield. Even though they often slept under the same roof, she might as well have been back in Houston as far as Howard was concerned.

Long work sessions were followed by reckless partying when Howard chose to escape the tension. He once disappeared—no one was quite sure where—for forty-eight hours with John Darrow. During his absences, *Hell's Angels* virtually ground to a halt. Sometimes Howard would vanish for about the same amount of time with Ben, leaving John to silently fume at Howard's hideaway, Angelo. When he did show up, Howard never told John where he'd gone or what he did with Ben.

James Whale later recalled Howard shouting at John. “For Christ's sake, you're not my wife! I think I still have one of those, and I don't want another.”

On the set of *Hell's Angels* the next day, Howard ordered his staged dogfights between “German” and “British” pilots to be filmed by cameras mounted inside airplanes, a revolutionary technique in its day. This method of filming greatly improved on what Howard had witnessed when director William Wellman photographed *Wings*.

One night Howard stayed awake until dawn dreaming up his most dangerous stunt. By seven o'clock that morning, he ordered Frank Clarke to come to the runway where Howard stood beside a Thomas Morse S4C Scout. Clarke was one of the most daredevil pilots on Howard's crew, and he'd personally selected him for the dangerous shot.

Still chewing on a bread roll, Clarke listened with growing apprehension as Howard ordered him to perform “a banked take-off.” To the pilot’s astonishment, Howard asked him to dive toward the earth but “jerk back” when he reached an altitude of only two-hundred feet.

“You’re out of your mind,” Clarke bluntly told him, daring to challenge his director. “If the plane goes lower than a thousand feet, the Morse will crash.”

“A good flier could do it,” Howard said sarcastically.

“I’m not going to do it, and I’m not going to let one of my boys do it, even one of the crazy ones.”

Howard wasn’t used to having his commands defied.

Clarke warned him that the Morse had a rotary engine. “If sharply banked in the same direction as the rotation, the plane will spin dangerously out of control as it nears the ground.”

Howard’s face flushed with anger. “You’re a shithead!” he shouted. He was using that word with greater frequency. “A coward to boot.” Turning to face the astonished crew, who had assembled around the plane, he yelled, “If Sissy Boy here can’t do the job, I can!”

Clarke backed away from the plane. “It’s a graveyard stunt. Go up in the air and kill yourself!”

Ignoring him, Howard called for his chief cameraman, Harry Perry, to whom he gave last minute instructions about angles. Then, in front of the stunned pilots, Howard leaped into the cockpit, wearing a leather jacket, argyle socks, an argyle sweater, and a pair of russet-red corduroy breeches. He looked like an overgrown schoolboy as he sat contemptuously in the cockpit. Once the engine was started, he tested his instruments and had a graceful take-off into the wild blue yonder.

He circled the field at Inglewood at least a dozen times, learning to maneuver his craft. He had agreed with Perry on some signal before he was to make his plane plunge toward the earth.

“Hughes was a total fool at this point,” Perry later recalled. “He was more interested in getting the shot than in saving his skin. When the plane was about a thousand feet over the tarmac, I heard this awful screech. It sounded like a hundred big fat crows singing a mocking chorus. Suddenly, when he was no more than eight hundred feet above the ground, even this crazed daredevil must have known he was in trouble.”

Watching Howard’s dive, stunt pilot Paul Mantz said, “I knew at this point that Hughes could not pull out of the dive. The Morse was racing directly toward the ground. It looked like curtains for Hughes. I stood with my mouth hanging open looking at his upcoming death. There was nothing I could do.”

As the plane plunged to a point only one hundred feet from the tarmac, Mantz could see Howard in the cockpit. He tossed off his leather helmet and braced his feet against the dashboard. “It was all over for Hughes,” Mantz said.

The Morse went into a tailspin and nose-dived into the tarmac. The impact was heard for miles around. The left wing folded first.

“I’ll never forget the sound of the propellers digging into the macadam,” Mantz said. “It was a gruesome screech of death.” The wings were torn from the fuselage, and the landing gear splintered like brittle wood.

“There goes our god damn meal ticket,” Clarke said to the other stunt pilots. “I warned the fool.”

After impact, Reginald Callow was the first member of the crew to run toward the wreckage to pull Howard out. “As I yanked him out, he was covered in blood,” Callow recalled in a 1975 interview. “He was dazed. Didn’t know what in hell he was saying. I remember he said, ‘That’s another par hole I made. I shot a four on that one.’ He was babbling. I guess he thought he was on the Wilshire golf course.”

Others have claimed that Howard was thrown from the plane and was found propped up against the hangar. Callow disputed that. “I should know. I was the one who pulled my boss from the cockpit.”

As Callow heard the sirens of the ambulance arriving on the airfield, he thought Howard “was a goner. I didn’t see how any doctor could save him at this point. His skull looked crushed in.”

Callow later said he wanted to resign from the picture before any more lives were lost. “At that point, I thought Hughes was crazy.” However, he stuck through until the bitter end, witnessing the deaths of several other stunt pilots. He went on to become one of the best assistant directors in Hollywood, holding that position during the filming of *Gone With the Wind*.

When Noah Dietrich arrived at the Inglewood Hospital, he confronted Dr. Monroe Campbell. “Give it to me straight and in layman’s lingo,” Dietrich ordered.

“There’s a crack in his skull,” Dr. Campbell said. “It runs from the top of his head to just over his left eyelid. There are lacerations and injuries at the top of his spinal cord. Brace yourself. There may even be brain damage. We think he’s lost the sight in his right eye.”

The next day, with almost reckless disregard for the actual circumstances, Louella Parsons and other newspaper reporters claimed that Howard walked away from the wreckage without a scratch. One commentator wrote that he “waved his lucky Stetson at the ground crew before brushing the soot and grime off his breeches.”

In Houston a day later, from the home of her wealthy sister, Libby Farish, where she was living, Ella heard about Howard’s crash. Furious that Dietrich hadn’t personally notified her, she took the next train to Los Angeles.

Once she reached the Inglewood Hospital, Howard denounced her for returning. “You want a son?” Two nurses heard Howard shout at Ella. “Well, I’m giving birth to something that means more to me than any snot-nosed kid. I’m birthing *Hell’s Angels*. I’m not going to let some god damn airplane crash stand in my way. Now get the hell out of here!”

In what Dietrich later viewed as a miracle, Howard was soon back on the set, defying the orders of his doctors. “I’m fully recovered,” he falsely claimed.

It is believed that Howard suffered lasting brain damage in the wake of this accident, the first of others to come. Only when an autopsy was performed by doctors upon his corpse in Texas did they discover a shard of metal still lodged in his skull from the long-ago accident.

Following this crash, he would suffer from blinding migraines for the rest of his life. Not only that, but he would also suffer from lapses in memory, which would grow more frequent as the years drifted by.

Not one of the sanest people before the accident, he would become more and more irrational with each passing year.

Dietrich later blamed it on the plane crash, but Howard signed a contract with a Shanghai movie star known as “the Mary Pickford of China.” “Butterfly” Wu was the most famous and most beautiful star of her country.

Born to a Cantonese family in either 1906 or 1908, she counted fluent Mandarin as one of her language skills. When Chinese pictures started to talk,

her knowledge of both Mandarin and Cantonese made her top box office. She would, in fact, star in the first Chinese talkie ever made.

She would go on to star in both Mandarin and Cantonese films up until the Japanese invasion of her homeland. In post-war Shanghai and Hong Kong, she would make a comeback.

“Why Howard ever signed her, I haven’t a clue,” Dietrich said. “Since there was nothing for her to do, Butterfly returned to Shanghai.”

Somehow Ben Lyon told Howard about the “glories” of Asian girls, and had even misinformed Howard, as part of a rather juvenile misconception, about “how their plumbing is constructed different from Caucasian gals.”

Apparently, the engineer in Howard had to find this out for himself. If he were going to be “dating Chinese,” he wanted only the best and most famous. He moved in on Butterfly when she visited Hollywood.

“Apparently he promised her that he would lay all of Hollywood at her feet,” Dietrich later confided.

The details of the so-called romance between Howard and Butterfly have long ago disappeared from radar, except for this tantalizing comment.

Noah Dietrich said he asked Howard what it was like making love to this Chinese beauty.

“Noah,” Howard replied, “have you ever fucked a log that fell in the forest twenty years ago?”

During Howard’s frequent “disappearances,” John Darrow wasn’t sitting around his cottage knitting. He had met Russell Gleason, a handsome and intelligent young juvenile actor who was three years younger than Howard.

He was the son of the famous character actor, James Gleason, most often cast as a tough-talking, hard-boiled urbanite, known for roles that included a detective, a marine sergeant, a gambler, and a boxer’s manager. He’d married Lucille Webster, a minor actress, whose career never equaled her husband’s.

Rail-thin, Oregon-born Russell had appeared on stage with his parents in some of their productions. He’d made his film debut in the 1929 *The Sophomore*, and had also been cast as third lead in *The Flying Fool*, a film that co-starred two of Howard’s cast-off lovers, Marie Prevost and William Boyd. Russell’s only A-List picture would be the Oscar-winning *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

Although he worked steadily after making that classic, he was for the rest of his career cast only in B pictures.

Russell appeared with his parents in a series of Higgins family comedies for Republic in the late 30s and early 40s, but his career was going downhill fast. Although he tried a few times, Russell never developed that touch of Damon Runyon-style New Yorkness that had made his father such a success, especially when he’d received an Oscar nomination for his role of Max Corkle in *Here Comes Mr. Jordan* in 1941.

Eventually, Russell married Cynthia Lindsay, a radio and screen actress best known today for her affectionate memoir, *Dear Boris*, published in 1975 and devoted to the Gleason’s family friend, Boris Karloff.

John Darrow was emotionally involved with Howard in the hopes that he would boost his film career. But there is evidence, mainly from James Whale, that John “fell hopelessly in love with young Gleason,” and that Howard learned about it. “Although Hughes was cheating on John left and right, he still wanted to pay back his sometimes lover for his (perceived) betrayal.”



Russell Gleason

“Through means of his own, Hughes set up a secret date with Russell, and the kid accepted,” Whale claimed. “I mean, after all, we’re talking Howard Hughes here. What struggling young actor wouldn’t accept such an invitation?”

The inevitable happened. Russell fell in love with Howard and dropped John, who received a “Dear John” note. Although furious, John never confronted Howard with this betrayal because he didn’t want to alienate such a powerful ally in the film industry.

Howard would continue into the Thirties with an involvement on some level with both Russell and John. “I don’t even know whether his relationship with Russell remained sexual or not,” Whale said. “I doubt that it did. I do know what happened with John Darrow. When he lost his boyish good looks, he still stayed in Hughes’s good graces. By that time, he’d learned what type of young man Hughes liked. He took up pimping for Hughes instead.”

Mystery still surrounds the death of Russell Gleason on Christmas Day in 1945. He’d been drafted into the Army and had completed his basic

training. During this grueling period, he wrote Howard at least fifteen letters, desperately pleading with him to intercede for him and get him out of the Army. Perhaps Howard had the power to do that because of his government connections—perhaps not. The point was that Russell thought Howard had such power.

When Howard refused even to take Russell’s calls, the aging “juvenile” threatened Howard with blackmail. He was going to expose Howard’s private life to the press if his former lover didn’t give him twenty five thousand dollars and obtain an exemption for him from military service.

On Christmas Day, 1945, only twenty-four hours before Russell was to ship out for active duty, he died in a fall from a Manhattan hotel window. The New York police ruled that it was an accident and that Russell had fallen from the hotel window. In those days before air conditioning, New York City hotel windows were open for ventilation. But a four and a half foot wall separated the window from the floor. It would have been almost impossible for Russell to fall out the window, unless he was leaning dangerously out of it, and even then he would have almost needed to jump.

Some newspaper reporters speculated that Russell Gleason’s death was actually a suicide leap. One reporter moronically wrote that Russell killed himself “to avoid being sent into combat.”

There was no combat. Hostilities had ceased with the Japanese surrender in September after Harry Truman had ordered the dropping of two atomic bombs on the island empire.

Up until his death at Woodland Hills, California, on April 12, 1959, James Gleason always insisted to all who would lend an ear, “Howard Hughes had my son murdered!”

Suffering from lack of sleep, Howard took over the German Zeppelin sequences, wanting them to be among the most dramatic scenes in *Hell’s Angels*. His special effects department had devised two sixty foot models of the dreaded Kaiser Zeppelin.

The climax of the scene comes with the Zeppelin’s fiery descent toward earth. Dietrich totaled up the cost at nearly half a million dollars. Mickey Neilan, the fired director, told the press that he made his best movies on far less money than that. He predicted inaccurately that the picture would end up costing eight million dollars if Howard continued on “his mad quest.”

It was for one of the close-ups of the Zeppelin airship that Howard became the laughing stock of Hollywood, ridiculed as “One Hundred Takes Hughes.” According to the script, the pilots of the Zeppelin were hoping to escape back to the Continent in the wake of its raid on London.

As the script indicated, the dirigible was rapidly losing altitude. The pilot ordered that all ballast must be jettisoned, including several members of the crew, to cut down on the craft’s weight.

German aviators, again according to the plot, were asked to volunteer to jump to their deaths for the Fatherland. As large wind machines billowed smoke to evoke clouds, more than three dozen sturdy stuntmen jumped out of *the faux* Zeppelin onto thick padding concealed below out of camera range. Never satisfied, Howard ordered take after take until the stuntmen had jumped out of the Zeppelin more than one hundred times.

James Whale later said that he thought each take looked authentic, but Howard kept ordering another shot. In Whale’s words, “Before a shot finally pleased Hughes, the poor men could hardly walk, much less jump. If I remember correctly, and I do, I took the prettiest and most muscular stuntman home for an in-depth massage that night.”

Remembering how William Wellman wouldn’t shoot mock aerial battles for *Wings* unless he had the right cloud formations, Howard followed his mentor’s example. In his private plane, he roamed the smog-free blue skies over Los Angeles looking for what he called “buttermilk,” meaning billowing, cumulous clouds. When he couldn’t find what he wanted, he’d fly back to base. A grip would post a sign: NO WAR TODAY! NO CLOUDS! REPORT BACK TOMORROW!

Howard eventually found that the clouds over Oakland tended to be thick and fluffy. He ordered that his entire air force be moved to Oakland where aerial combat photography went on for another grueling four months.

The film was running up bills of five thousand dollars a day, much of it absorbed waiting for the clouds to roll in. As costs soared, Dietrich and Toolco officials protested but to no avail. When Howard was determined, he wouldn’t listen to objections from anyone, including the most skilled of his stunt pilots.

Reginald Callow recalled that Howard had many bitter fights with Frank Clarke about the safety of the antiquated World War I aircraft he’d purchased. Howard falsely claimed that his mechanics had put all his planes in mint condition. Clarke shot back, “They’re flying coffins.”



Stunt scene from *Hell's Angels*

“In the middle of their heated argument,” Callow said, “the motor dropped out of a Fokker. End of argument. Clarke won the argument but Howard won the war. Shooting continued. After all, Howard was the sucker with the big bucks. But perhaps the real suckers were the stunt pilots.”

Roscoe Turner was the best stunt pilot working on *Hell’s Angels*. Howard had devised one of the most dramatic scenes in the film, depicting a converted German Gotha bomber—once the most deadly weapon in the arsenal of the Luftwaffe, portrayed in this incident by a retro-fitted Sikorsky—hit by British ground fire. The plot calls for the craft to lurch dangerously before it spins out of control and hurdles to the earth, where it crashes into a fiery

furnace of death and destruction.

Knowing that Turner would be risking his life for the filming of the scene, Howard offered him five thousand dollars. As much as he wanted the money, this daredevil said no. He and Howard argued for an hour. Howard pleaded his case, claiming that he wanted Turner to fly the Sikorsky to the highest altitude possible, then nosedive toward the ground. If he couldn’t pull it out of this stall, he was to jump out and parachute to safety.

Stubbornly rejecting all offers, Turner stormed away. Howard immediately went to see Dick Grace, Hollywood’s most famous “crash pilot.” Howard had remembered the daring stunts Grace had performed for director William Wellman during the shooting of *Wings*.

Instead of five thousand dollars, Howard, for reasons known only to himself, offered Grace only two hundred and fifty dollars to perform the same stunt. Grace came back with a counter offer. “I’ll do it for ten thousand.”

Howard turned down that offer and went to yet another stunt pilot, Al Wilson, who said he could pull it off. “Name your price,” Howard said.

“A thousand dollars,” Wilson said.

“It’s a deal,” Howard agreed.

To accompany Wilson during his dangerous stunt, Howard hired “grease monkey” Phil Jones, assigning him to ride in the rear of the plane, releasing smoke bombs to simulate that the craft was on fire. If Wilson couldn’t get the plane out of its stall, then Jones was told to parachute to safety. He was willing to perform this risky stunt because he had recently contacted syphilis and needed money for treatments.

The daring feat was performed as both Wilson and Jones flew to the highest possible altitude and then plunged the plane into its stall. As Howard had feared, his pilot couldn’t pull it out of the plunge. As Howard looked up to the sky, he saw Wilson jumping out of the cockpit and parachuting to earth.

He searched for Jones’s parachute but saw nothing. The “Gotha bomber” crashed into an orange grove from a height of seven thousand feet and exploded, killing Jones. It was never determined why the young mechanic didn’t bail out. There was speculation that he was unable to because he’d been knocked unconscious.

There were other deaths. The first fatality had occurred when stunt pilot Al Johnson hit high-tension wires flying from Glendale Airport to Mines Fields. His plane got tangled in the electric power lines, and he was badly burned. Amazingly, he survived and was rushed to the nearest hospital. Howard paid him a visit but the pilot never regained consciousness. Death came to Johnson eighteen hours after Howard’s visit.

Yet another aviator, C.K. Philips, was flying a SE-5 to a location in Oakland. Carelessly, he hadn’t checked his fuel before taking off. Running out of gas at one thousand feet over the earth, he was forced into a “deadstick landing,” meaning without the motor running. Philips was killed instantly upon impact.

Wilson must have been the stunt pilot with nine lives, as soonafter, he was involved in yet another crash. Flying a Fokker D.VIII this time, he was in his cockpit as his propeller suddenly dropped off, falling through the air until it hit Hollywood Boulevard. It rolled and bounced down the street, sending cars off to the side of the road. Startled pedestrians scampered to safety, and no one was killed. The pilot-less plane crashed about two blocks from Grauman’s Chinese Theatre. Again, no one was injured.

Wilson had bailed out, landing by parachute in the Olympic-sized swimming pool of movie tycoon Joe Schenk, who was conducting “a nude aquatic audition” with a hopeful young blonde starlet. The pilot’s landing at such an inopportune time became the fodder for gossip at Hollywood parties for at least two more months.

It was the last banquet.

Tout Hollywood was shocked to receive an unusual invitation from Howard and Ella Hughes for a proper sit-down dinner at their Muirfield estate at Hancock Park. Ella had returned to Los Angeles after the Lindbergh encounter in New Hampshire, and had planned the gala as if she wanted to present a united front to Hollywood, showing this world that her marriage to Howard was still intact.

Every day as she made lavish preparations, she posted a sign on Howard’s library door, reminding him of the Saturday night event. She’d purchased him a hand-tailored tuxedo that even such a fancy dresser as Big Howard would have been proud to wear.

For the fête, Ella had ordered a two-thousand dollar *couture* gown “in creamy peach” from Paris, and had adorned herself with her most expensive jewelry, including a diamond and ruby brooch.

In a daring move, she invited Howard’s associates in the film world as well as her Pasadena society crowd. In real life, these two groups, always contemptuous of each other, never mingled socially.

The event was scheduled for the last Saturday in 1928. At the designated hour of seven o’clock, custom-made cars, such as that driven by Gloria Swanson’s chauffeur, began to arrive in the driveway, along with silver, purple, or black Rolls-Royces; sleek, streamlined Packards, showy Hispano-Suizas, and custom-made Duesenbergs, some with scarlet-red upholstery and many painted in crayon colors.

For the illegal martinis, Ella ordered many cases of bootleg gin, much of it imported from Britain, which had been stashed away at the Ambassador Hotel and sent over to Muirfield.

Swanson was determined to be the best dressed woman there, and in a “black swan gown,” she succeeded, although the competition was tough. Years later, she recalled that some of the show business contingent wasn’t as well-dressed as the Pasadena society crowd, and the two groups didn’t mingle, standing on opposite sides of the living room. She remembered one particularly obnoxious man with a cigar who wore a sports jacket in lime green and lemon yellow.

Ella gracefully glided between the two antagonistic cabals, assuring each of them that Howard was making two movies at the same time and must have been unavoidably detained at the studio.

“Lillian Gish in her greatest closeup didn’t put on such a brave, courageous smile as Ella Rice did that night,” Swanson claimed.

At eight-thirty, when her head chef insisted that he could not hold dinner any longer, Ella gave the command for the party to move into the dining room, out of which tables overflowed into the courtyard.

“The dinner party was almost over before Howard arrived,” Blanche Sweet would later recall. “I think it was almost nine-thirty. He was dressed like a bum, and his white shirt was stained like he had dripped soup on it. He wore a pair of corduroy slacks in some ghastly shade of cowshit brown. He wore no stockings but the dirtiest pair of tennis shoes ever seen. They looked like they had been at a hog-calling contest in Mississippi.”

“Without even acknowledging Ella, Howard sat down at his reserved seat at the head of the table and announced to the head waiter—hired for the

evening and formally dressed—that he was hungry enough to eat a horse,” Blanche said.

“Ella had served the grandest meal I’d ever seen in all my days in Hollywood,” Ben Lyon recalled. “Lobster medallions heaped with dollops of the rarest of caviar. Sautéed foie gras. Roast suckling pig from a chef she’d hired who had cooked for the King of Spain. It was spectacular. Howard rejected everything and ordered a little steak—seared on the outside, blood-red on the inside—along with a small salad and some green peas. Instead of all the fancy wine, Howard asked for a glass of water with two ice cubes. When served, he gobbled his steak but took time to separate the big peas from the little peas, pushing the big peas aside and refusing to touch them.”

At the end of the meal, Howard wiped his mouth on Ella’s precious imported Madeira linen, dropping the napkin on the floor as he stood up and pushed back his upholstered chair. “If you good people will excuse me, I’m going to bed.” Without saying another word, he turned his back on the dinner party and headed to the library where he proceeded to bolt the door.

“I don’t think there was an actress in Hollywood, with the possible exception of myself, who could have pulled off the next scene,” Swanson later said. “Ella Rice was a patrician. She held her head high and got through the rest of the evening. At the door, she personally thanked each guest, even the vulgarian in the sports coat, for coming.”

When all the guests were gone, Ella ordered her maid to follow her to her upstairs bedroom. Once there, she began to pack all her clothing and possessions. It took until nearly five o’clock the next morning.

By six o’clock she was heading for the train station in Pasadena in a chauffeur-driven limousine, trailed by another van with all her luggage.

When Howard awoke at ten o’clock, a servant told him that his wife had left Muirfield and was heading back to Houston on the train.

“Let me see the note?” Howard demanded.

“She left no note, sir.”

In the exciting year to come, most thoughts of Ella were forgotten.

New lovers, both male and female, were on the horizon. Three of the lovers waiting in the wings—two actresses and one actor—would in time become Hollywood legends.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Los Angeles, 1929

One morning, a sleep-deprived Howard stormed into Noah Dietrich's office and announced, "*Hell's Angels* is going to talk." Disoriented, Dietrich learned that the previous night, Howard had seen a private showing of Al Jolson's *The Jazz Singer*, which had actually been released many months before, in October of 1927, its use of sound creating a nation-wide sensation.

"Chaplin lied to me," Howard claimed. "He told me that talking pictures were a fad that would go away in a few months. I think sound has raised its ugly voice, and it's here to stay." Although he was never known for his skill as a mimic, he gave a very bad rendition of Jolson bellowing, "Wait a minute, folks, wait a minute—you ain't heard nothin' yet!"

Fearing that Howard was planning to reshoot the whole picture, on which he'd already spent an astronomical two million dollars, Dietrich protested, but to no avail. He urged him to release the film as it was, since silent flickers were still playing across the country. What he didn't say was that the silents were still being screened, but often to empty houses as the public rushed to hear recorded voices in "the talkies" instead.

To prove that he was right and Dietrich wrong, Howard staged a sneak preview of *Hell's Angels* in Pasadena. His aerial combat scenes and his dogfights were largely ignored by the inattentive audience. They seemed bored with Howard's multi-million-dollar extravaganza. Ben Lyon, James Hall, and Greta Nissen opened and closed their mouths soundlessly on the screen as the audience squirmed in their seats.

At the end of the showing, Howard's increasingly annoying uncle, Rupert, predicted that the film would be a financial disaster. After all the loss of life, the millions spent, and the months of grueling work by the cast and crew, Rupert in the lobby of the theater told Howard that he should put the film in mothballs like he'd done with *Swell Hogan*. "Or else destroy it!" Rupert added. That last remark earned Rupert a punch in the nose, a rare violent act on the part of Howard, who rarely struck anyone.

Dietrich issued an inaccurate warning. "*Hell's Angels* will drive Toolco to financial ruin." But Howard went ahead with his plans to reshoot most of the film anyway.

He'd determined that much footage of the expensive drama could be saved, especially the combat scenes. He'd add sound to his dogfights in the sky. "My god damn air force will be noiseless no more," he told James Whale.

All of the interior scenes, however, would have to be reshot. The voices of his two male stars, Ben Lyon and James Hall, recorded well. The problem was the thick Norwegian accent of Greta Nissen. This blonde looked stunningly beautiful, but her voice was the doom of her career.

The poet, Joseph Moncure March, was hired away from MGM to write dialogue for a new script. Whale began to rehearse the actors in their new speaking parts. The director urged Howard to come up with a female star—and soon—but he stalled, telling Whale "to work around the gal until I find her."

In and out of Metropolitan Studios paraded a bevy of young beauties, mostly blonde, for screen tests. Howard could not agree on the right girl. He even hired two projectionists and would summon one of them to the studio at two or three o'clock in the morning to look at the previous films of female contenders who might be right for the part of Helen.

His fellow Houstonian, the sleek and elegant blonde, Ann Harding, was recommended to him. She was photographed in a very dignified, almost refined matter. Howard pronounced her "too genteel," claiming that "the part calls for a whore in spite of her fancy airs."

Harding survived the rejection, shortly thereafter signing for *Holiday* which brought her an Oscar nomination. Regrettably, Harding's *Holiday* has been doomed to obscurity, replaced eight years later with another version, which starred Katharine Hepburn, Howard's future girlfriend.

One myth that circulated through Hollywood was that Howard was seeking an unknown for the lead role because he couldn't afford a "name" actress. Such gossip was ridiculous. He was prepared to spend another two million dollars, and possibly more, to make *Hell's Angels* a talkie. That budget could easily have covered the salary of any of the biggest female stars in Hollywood, even one who commanded one hundred thousand dollars per picture. Most stars he could have had for one-fourth of that salary.

Although she didn't print it in her column, gossip maven Louella Parsons told Marion Davies and W.R. Hearst that Howard was a casting couch director. This legend began at the time of his recasting of *Hell's Angels*. In a sense, it was true. But a casting couch usually suggests that an actor or actress goes to bed with a producer or director in whom they have no sexual interest. Or, as Ben Lyon so bluntly put it, "they fuck to get the part."

Howard auditioned both established actresses and unknown ones. He never insisted that these women lie on his casting couch. "Many of the girls wanted to bed this shy, rich, and handsome Texan, even if they didn't get the damn part," Ben said. "Howard never forced himself on any of them. The ladies seduced him, and I was there to see much of the action up close and personal."

One day Whale approached Howard on the set. "I've found our Helen," he said. "She's blonde. She's beautiful. Tarty yet with a certain vapid elegance. I've cast her in *Angels* in an uncredited part as a girl selling kisses. Want to meet her?"

"Who is this wonder?" Howard asked.

"You'll fall for her," Whale predicted. "She's going to become one of the biggest stars in Hollywood. What Mae Murray was to your father, Marian Marsh is going to become to you."

Howard was continuing to see actor Russell Gleason, and he too raved about Marian Marsh, having met her in *The Sophomore*. Marian had been right under Howard's nose all along but he'd paid no attention to her until Whale and Russell sang her praises.

Born in British-controlled Trinidad in 1913, Marian was a leading lady in films from the early 30s until 1942. If she's remembered at all today, it's for her appearance playing Trilby to John Barrymore's *Svengali* in 1931. Trilby's fabled nude scene in that film was actually shot with a double who wore a body stocking.

Howard was initially intrigued with her, and they dated several times but no serious romance developed. Marian, however, is still included in the round-up of "the usual suspects" among Howard's girlfriends.

Whale, and he was only guessing, claimed that he felt Howard's relationship with Marion was "merely platonic." They were seen together on a number of occasions. During the time they were dating, he seemed to undergo a tremendous change of character from the shy Texas millionaire in the late

Twenties to a more self-assured young man about town in the early 1930s. Perhaps it was Howard who got Marian interested in aviation. In time, the fading star would marry Cliff Henderson, a promoter and spokesperson for the aviation industry, and general manager of the National Air Races from their inception in 1928 until 1939. Henderson was also the founder of the City of Palm Desert.

Marian could successfully bat her saucer-blue eyes while charming a potential husband in real life, but in films she remained rather expressionless, like her portrayal of Trilby in *Svengali*. Howard was initially attracted by her doll face, but after a screen test, he decided he could do very little with her. Even the fabled director Josef von Sternberg, who succeeded so magnificently in his direction of Marlene Dietrich, failed to get much from her when he directed her in *Crime and Punishment* in 1935.



Marian Marsh

Nonetheless, Howard liked Marian, and they had an easy relationship. It was with a certain sadness that her fans watched her career drift into obscurity. This reporter's attempts to track her down to her Palm Desert lair to hear about her side of her friendship with Howard were not successful.

Dietrich later claimed that Howard flew Marian in his Sikorsky across the broad plains of America to Chicago and New York but there was "no real chemistry there."

As was his way, Howard soon became distracted by other beautiful actresses vying for his attention.

"It seemed that every actress in Hollywood wanted the part of Helen," Whale said. "So many, in fact, that Howard found that these women were taking up too much of his time. At one point, he refused to see all "but the most beautiful and the sexiest."

"He was like a kid in a candy store," Whale further claimed. "Some of the most gorgeous women in the world were making themselves available to him. His male beauty had faded a bit after plastic surgery, but his face had assumed a more manly character. Of course, all of these women were a little too much, and every now and then he liked to escape to the arms of a Gary Cooper type-that is, when Gary himself wasn't available. I personally believed that he continued to see Coop long after the insider crowd thought it was over. In that, I suppose, I remain an opinion of one."

Throughout the shooting of *Hell's Angels*, Howard was fuming at another director, also named Howard. Howard Hawks, shooting *The Dawn Patrol*, was already touting it as "the greatest air epic ever!" In Howard's view, he himself was shooting the greatest air epic ever.

Howard was already familiar with the picture's two male stars, the more prominently featured of which was Richard Barthelmess. Lillian Gish had called him "the most beautiful face of any man who ever went before the camera." Although no longer on the best of terms with Howard, the picture's costar was Douglas Fairbanks Jr.

Throughout his life Howard both admired the success of Hawks as a director and also resented that acclaim. He was also jealous of Charles Lindbergh's heroic breakthroughs in aviation.

Growing increasingly paranoid, Howard became convinced that Hawks was stealing material from *Hell's Angels* to use in *The Dawn Patrol*, including some of the ideas behind Howard's unique aerial combat scenes. At least some of these ideas came from Elmer Dyer, reputedly the best aerial cameraman in Hollywood, who had worked for, and advised Howard, in *Hell's Angels*, and who was now working for Hawks on *Dawn Patrol*.

Actor Neil Hamilton, once famous as the "Arrow Collar Man" when he was a model, was overheard making a remark in a nightclub. Sharing third billing in *The Dawn Patrol*, he told friends that Hawks was rushing to have his picture released before *Hell's Angels* "so that he can sweep the market first."

When reported to Howard, Hamilton's remark drove him into a rage. That afternoon he secretly hired five members of Hawks's crew to spy on the filming of *The Dawn Patrol*, promising each of them five hundred dollars if they would supply him with revealing information.

To retaliate against Hawks, Howard also hired some of the director's best stunt pilots, offering them more money if they came to work for *Hell's Angels*. Hawks later revealed, "I had pilots under 'exclusive' contract, and Hughes also had the same pilots under 'exclusive' contract."

Even when Howard had finished his scenes involving airplanes, he ordered Dietrich to continue to buy up World War I craft so that they would not be available to Hawks. There was a sudden demand for Spads and Camels, which prior to that had been rusting in mothballs.

Finally, when he could take it no more, Howard showed up early one Sunday morning, after a sleepless night, at Hawks's doorstep for a confrontation.

No one will ever know exactly what words transpired between the two combative directors. Hawks was a notorious liar and could never be trusted. He later gave a rather sanitized version of the encounter to the press. However, on the set of *The Dawn Patrol*, he told Doug Fairbanks Jr. and Richard Barthelmess "what really happened," or so he claimed.

"I woke up one morning with the mother of all headaches," Hawks said. "I'd just gotten in at four that morning after a night of drinking and fucking Thelma Todd. We must have finished off two bottles. My head was pounding like someone was in there with a sledgehammer. I suddenly woke up with a start realizing an intruder was also persistently ringing my doorbell. It wasn't even six o'clock."

Wrapping a towel around his nude body, Hawks stumbled to the door, planning to bludgeon to death the unwanted guest. "I threw open the door to confront Howard Hughes. His blood vessels were popping out of his skin. That was one mad Texas boy, but I wasn't afraid of him at all."



George O'Brien

"Howard Hughes here," he said.

Hawks was contemptuous. "As if I didn't know who you are. My worst nightmare."

"I'm making an air epic," Howard said, standing in the doorway and not invited in. "And I'm told you're making a pale imitation of it."

"We'll battle it out at the box office," Hawks said.

"You've got a scene in your shitty picture where a guy is hit by a bullet of a German aircraft," Howard said. "He's shown spitting up blood. You stole that from me."

"Like hell I did!" Hawks countered. "I wrote that scene myself. It's original. In case you didn't know, I stole the incident directly from World War I. Pilots were shot. They vomited blood. That happened to hundreds of pilots. You don't own the concept. Now get the fuck off my doorstep, or I'm calling the police."

"I want you to take that god damn scene out of your picture," Howard demanded. "Or else!"

"Listen, Hughes, you're a rich Texan," Hawks said. "Oil or something. You're in the movie business on a lark. A hobby for you. I'm a filmmaker. I shoot films for a living. The scene stays in!"

"I'll sue your ass!"

Hawks slammed the door in Howard's face.

"I stumbled back into my kitchen and made a sure-fire cure for a hangover," Hawks said. "Four-fifths tomato juice. One-fifth hot pepper sauce. But as I was to find out later, I didn't get rid of Hughes so easily by slamming the door in the fucker's face!"

Receiving no satisfaction from his one-on-one with Hawks, Howard came up with a scheme that afternoon. He had to obtain a copy of the script of *The Dawn Patrol*, hoping to bring an injunction before Hawks could release his epic.

He summoned his assistant director, Reginald Callow, and his screen writer, Joseph Moncure March, to Muirfield. The unholy trio conceived a scenario whereby they would approach Hawks's secretary with a bribe.

"Wine and dine her," Howard ordered. "Hell, fuck her if you have to. If that doesn't work, give her five hundred dollars."

Amazingly, the secretary accepted a dinner invitation from both men, which rather surprised them. Callow was a bit suspicious. "It looks too easy," he said, "like taking candy from a baby."

Over dinner the secretary agreed to obtain a copy of the script and illegally hand it over to them. She told them that if they came by her apartment the following evening around eight o'clock, she'd be there with a copy of the script.

The next evening Callow and March showed up at her apartment at the appointed time. After they counted out the five hundred dollars, the secretary handed them the script.

Just as they were telling her goodnight, two Los Angeles detectives emerged from the bedroom with handcuffs for both Marsh and Callow. They were taken to the local police station and booked.

By midnight, Howard learned of their arrest. He called Dietrich at once and demanded that he do something "to get Joe March out of jail. He's got important work due on my script." "What about Reggie?" Dietrich asked. "Fuck him!" Howard said. "I don't need him so much. He can rot in jail for all I care."

In the middle of the night, Dietrich approached a friend of his who was a superior court judge. After accepting a bribe, the judge agreed to hold a hearing at five o'clock that morning when no members of the press were around.

At a three-minute hearing, the judge released the men without bail.

For some reason, Hawks never followed up with charges against the script thieves. The case was dropped.

Not grateful for that act of conciliation, Howard called Neil McCarthy, his attorney. "I want you to sue the hell out of Howard Hawks."



June Collyer

“What’s the charge?” McCarthy asked.

“How the hell do I know?” Howard asked. “Copyright infringement, whatever. Why do I pay you all the money I do? For you to come up with the fucking charges.” He slammed down the phone on the attorney.

Beverly Hills, 1965

In his search for an actress to play Helen, Howard ordered his projectionist to screen for him a copy of the silent film, *East Side, West Side*. Made in 1927, it starred June Collyer and George O’Brien.

Howard was immediately impressed with June and ordered a screen test for her right away. Apparently, he was also physically attracted to George O’Brien and filed his name away in his little black book, hoping to have someone arrange a future encounter with this exceptionally handsome actor, who was known for stripping down any time a photographer such as Rod St. Just wanted a nude shot.

When he met June, a New York native who had been born one year after himself, Howard was immediately impressed with how photogenic her face was. He told Whale, “Her face practically glows. Call it luminous if you will. And no actress ever had such fantastic dimples.”

At her home in Beverly Hills, three years before her death in 1968 of bronchial pneumonia, June remembered Howard with both generosity and a tinge of regret bordering on bitterness.

“You’d hardly call our first meeting romantic,” June said. “Just as I appeared, some of his rambunctious crew was pulling a big stunt on Hughes. Because he was so young, they jokingly called him ‘the kid’ or ‘boy’ behind his back, as I was to learn later. Hughes had gone to the privy to take a crap I guess. While he was in this makeshift outhouse, as flimsy as a piece of cardboard, a stunt pilot turned on the propeller of his plane. The wind gusts blew the outhouse down. Hughes came running out of the wreckage with his trousers down as he desperately tried to pull up his underwear. I’ve heard of *coitus interrup-tus*, but I don’t know what you’d call the state Hughes was in.” She laughed at her own memories.

Whale later added more information to Howard’s running battle with his stunt pilots. The engineer in him got even, and he constructed a hydraulic device that shot water through a pipe and into the bottom of a septic tank. As the pilots went in to defecate, the waste from below was shot upwards onto their exposed buttocks. The one-upmanship games continued throughout the shoot. One pilot drilled a trio of holes into a wooden partition for the insertion of a penis. The largest one was marked for pilot Frank Clarke, with another pilot, Frank Tomick, getting the average sized one. The smallest hole for the smallest penis went to Howard, which infuriated the hell out of him as he was proud of his large endowment.

“And so began our hot, torrid affair which lasted about as long as it takes a candle to burn down,” June said. “It was fun, though. But somewhere along the way I realized Hughes was just toying with me. He had no intention of casting me in the role of Helen.”

She recalled that on their first date that same evening, he took her back to Muirfield. “I’d heard that he was married to some Texas broad, but she was nowhere to be seen. I guess she’d gone back to Houston or something.”

Astonishingly, after a dinner prepared by some of his servants, June claimed that Howard took her into his study to show her some films. “I just assumed they were previews of some of the dogfights in *Hell s Angels*, because that’s all he talked about through dinner.”



Thelma Todd

He began to screen some badly photographed pornographic movies that starred Joan Crawford. “I remember one of them was called *Bosom Buddies*, and it involved a lesbian scene,” June said. “I recall Hughes saying, ‘Wait until Fairbanks Jr. gets a look at these.’ For some reason, he seemed to have a great resentment against Crawford and young Fairbanks—I don’t know why. Maybe they had done something bad to him. He was enjoying the fact that Crawford was being humiliated by having these movies shown at Hollywood parties. I had never seen pornography before or since. Frankly, I thought that Crawford was better in *Mildred Pierce* than she was in those stinking movies. I once talked to Humphrey Bogart, who told me that he’d seen these blue films at Texas Guinan’s speakeasy in New York back in the late Twenties.”

Years later, Howard was still screening these so-called blue movies for some of his guests, as actress Terry Moore confessed in her bittersweet memoirs, *The Beauty and the Billionaire*.

Los Angeles, 1929

From the moment he met her, Howard was mesmerized by the blonde-haired comedienne, Thelma Todd, who signed her notes, cards, and letters “Hot Toddy.” The wise-cracking bombshell, who had wanted to be a schoolteacher until she became Miss Massachusetts of 1925, was a hard-drinking Jazz Age baby. Normally, Howard didn’t like actresses who were luses, but Thelma amused him in a way that none of his previous girlfriends had done.

Unknown to Howard at the time, Thelma was also a pill-popper, desperately trying to keep her weight down in spite of her heavy drinking. Thelma called her drinking “tippling.”

The tall blonde with the “Baby Blues,” before her tragic early ending, was known as a custard-pie comedienne under the tutelage of tough-minded producer Hal Roach.

Over the years, she was cast opposite the Marx Brothers, Jimmy Durante, Buster Keaton, Laurel and Hardy, Wheeler and Woolsey, and Joe E. Brown. Gary Cooper had taken Howard to see the western, *Nevada*, in 1927, in which Thelma had appeared.

From his first night with her, Howard felt she had the talent to rise above slaphappy roles, and he wanted to give her the chance to play Helen in his serious drama *Hell’s Angels*. She was so delighted that such an important producer would take an interest in her that she virtually told him she’d do “anything for him,” or so her frequent co-star, Patsy Kelly, later claimed.

Thelma’s confidante, Brooklyn-born Patsy Kelly, years later when she was a guest of Tallulah Bankhead, said “Hughes and Thelma hit it off. I think they had known each other for only four hours before they wanted to make whoopee.”

The same age as Howard, Thelma, a New England born bundle of talent, called Patsy the next day and told her, “I not only got the part but I’ve got myself a new boyfriend.”

Howard laughed at her observations when he took her to the Plantation Café, which was managed at the time by Fatty Arbuckle, the disgraced comedian. Tuxedoed, Fatty greeted them in a very personable way and showed them to a table near one occupied by Buster Keaton sitting with Charlie Chaplin. At a faraway table, John Gilbert sat alone, drinking himself to death and perhaps lamenting the coming of sound to movies.

At table where illegal booze was served, Thelma told Howard, “Men are always chasing after me, and I don’t run very fast.”

As the evening grew serious, at least according to Patsy Kelly, Thelma came to believe that Howard had seen through her façade and sensed a serious actress waiting to escape.

For one week, Thelma announced to everybody that “My lead role in *Hell’s Angels* is all but wrapped up. The contract is being drawn up now. It’s the part I’ve waited for all my life. When the contract’s signed, I’ll take off a few pounds. Howard wants me thinner. Right now, I’m cute and bouncy, but Howard will want me leaner and meaner for the part.”

Called a few days later to a dinner meeting at the Brown Derby, Thelma gleefully went, finding movie mogul Joe Schenck and Howard Hughes there, along with her agent, Roland West, who had also become her lover. West was aware that she was “two-timing” him with Howard, but he had previously encouraged her to “fuck your way to the top.”

With dangling diamond earrings and a white beaded gown similar to one worn in a film by Clara Bow, Thelma faced the triumvirate. Out of nervousness, she immediately apologized for putting on a few extra pounds, claiming she could take them off in three weeks.

Schenck, who had agreed to distribute *Hell’s Angels* for Howard, was concerned that Thelma might run into a contractual problem with her producer, Hal Roach.

She assured both Howard and Schenck that she was certain “Hal would let me go because I have a free-lance clause in my contract.” She also assured the men that she also had a “potato clause” in that same contract, so there was no way that she’d be putting on any more weight.

As Thelma later told Patsy, “the four of us sat there getting stinking, dirty, rotten drunk. Even Howard, though I’d been told he never drank. Maybe a cocktail or two and that was it. We stayed there until midnight. I kissed Roland goodbye and went home to Muirfield with Howard. My promised night of love-making didn’t happen, though. It was midnight when we got there, and he passed out in the living room. There was nothing I could do to revive him.”

The next day, when Thelma was filming a three-reel musical, *High C’s*, she broke at lunch to go to Hal Roach’s office. But instead of giving his consent for the freelance role, he attacked her for going to Howard without consulting him first.

“There’s no way I’ll ever let you take that part in *Hell’s Angels*,” he said, threatening her. “If you even attempt it, you’ll never work again in Hollywood. I’ve devoted time and money building you up as a comedienne the country loves. The role in *Hell’s Angels* calls for a whore. The blonde bitch sleeps with all the pilots. It will destroy your image.”

There was more verbal abuse to come. Thelma stood and took it.

“My lawyers studied your contract this morning,” he said “It clearly states that I have to approve any free-lance roles you’re offered. And I don’t approve of the part in *Hell’s Angels*. You’re out of the picture before you even got into the damn thing. Besides, Hughes is a nut. He’ll never finish that god damn film.”



Carole Lombard

That night, without Howard or Roland West, Thelma went on a drinking spree and piled up her car at two o’clock in the morning. Fortunately, she didn’t injure anyone. She fled from the scene of the accident, and later told the police that her car had been stolen. No charges were ever filed.

Two days later, after Roland negotiated furiously but unsuccessfully with Roach, he placed an early morning call to Thelma. “You’re out of the picture,” he gloomily reported

“That god damn Roach,” she shouted into the phone. “I could strangle the bastard.”

“It’s not Roach,” Roland said. “It’s Hughes. He found himself another blonde.”

“Oh, shit!”

In spite of the rejection, Thelma would once again re-enter the life of Howard Hughes.

After a trip East to recover, Thelma confronted reporters when she arrived back in Hollywood. She was asked how it felt to lose such an important role.

“No big deal, fellahs,” she said. “A blonde, even a bleached one, is a blonde and a part is a part. Who in the hell cares? In my next movie, *Corsair*, I’m changing my name to Alison Loyd—a whole new image for me—and winning the Oscar. No more custard pies in the kisser!”

She did just that. Only she didn’t win an Oscar. The film flopped.

Shes came back again as the comedienne, Thelma Todd

Without knowing it, she’d embarked on the road to disaster, becoming another one of Howard’s doomed ladies.

“I’ve slept with Joseph Kennedy, so why not Howard Hughes?”

Before Howard stood a Hollywood original, Miss Carole Lombard, still in the process of inventing herself.

He looked startled, as if he hadn’t heard her correctly. This former pie-in-the-face Mack Sennett cutie had come over at James Whale’s request to make a screen test for the role of the still uncast Helen. Time was running out on the schedule of *Hell’s Angels*, and Howard needed to find a replacement... and soon.

Until he met and fell in love with Ava Gardner, he would never meet such a potty-mouth as Lombard.

When he didn’t respond to her Kennedy line, she seemed to work overtime figuring out ways to shock him. “Ben Lyon tells me you like a gal with tits.” Right in front of him, she manipulated her dress to expose her left breast. “You’re not entitled to look at the right one until you’ve signed me to play Helen. Then you can have whatever you want. It’s all yours, baby!”

“The part calls for a woman to be a bit of a slut,” Howard said, standing up from his desk. “At least you qualify for that.”

Carole Lombard, who in those days called herself “A Scotch-English lass,” was actually born Jane Alice Peters in Fort Wayne, Indiana. She was three years younger than Howard.

Directed by James Whale, her screen test was scheduled for that afternoon. Intrigued with her, although not especially drawn to “talk dirty” women, Howard invited her to dinner that night.

“Some dinner!” she later told Whale. “I got a stale baloney sandwich at midnight. Some studio grip brought it to us when I told Howard I was starving to death and would have to suck semen from him for protein if he didn’t get me something to eat soon.”

Instead of dinner at the Brown Derby as he’d originally promised, Howard took her to 7000 Romaine Avenue in Hollywood where he showed her his staff’s experiments in color film. “I missed out on the coming of sound,” he said, “but I’m convinced that in the future, all films will be shot in color. They’ll talk and have color, too.”

Before his experiments, films had been hand-painted to add a bit of color. This tinting, often blue of scenes after dark, or sepia for turbulent skies, wasn’t very effective.

Technicolor was under way, but the drawback was costs. Howard’s company, employing at least two scientists from Cal Tech, as well as a skilled engineer from Toolco headquarters in Houston, was called Multicolor. Howard laboriously explained the process to a bored Lombard, who’d dressed for an evening on the town.

Although Howard was correct in his assessment of color in pictures, his timing was wrong. Before he abandoned the experiment, he’d spent nearly two-million dollars.

Carole Lombard would go on to grace the screen and become a Hollywood legend, especially when she married Clark Gable, king of the box office. But the world would remember her face on the silver (black and white) screen, not in Technicolor.

Carole confided to Whale that after her stale sandwich, Howard drove her high into the Hollywood Hills “for a long talk.” There, he told her about his plane accident and how he’d never liked his face since surgery.

She confided that she had experienced equivalent feelings during events that had begun with an automobile accident.

On a date with Harry Cooper, son of the vice president of Security First National Bank of Los Angeles, she was riding in the passenger seat when his Bugatti roadster crashed. The windshield was shattered, a shard of glass slicing through the right side of her face, slitting it open from the corner of her nose to her cheekbone.

The doctor told her that during surgery, the use of an anesthetic would make her facial muscles relax in ways that would reduce the possibility that her face would be restored to what it had been before. She bravely informed him that if that were the case, she would endure the four-hour operation without anesthesia. In agonizing pain, and fully conscious, she lasted through each of the sixteen stitches required.

In the aftermath, plastic surgery was eventually required anyway. And even after that, the scar was never completely erased and had to be covered over with makeup.

She told Howard, “I went through it all, because I wanted to be a god damn fucking movie star.”

He seemed to identify with her plight, perhaps because of his own disfigurement. The next afternoon, he viewed her screen test with great concentration, demanding that it be run a total of fourteen times. Making no comment until the final showing, Howard abruptly stood up and signaled to his projectionist to go home.

“I’ve seen all I want to see,” he said to Whale.

“Is she in or out?” Whale asked.

“I’ll let you know tomorrow,” he said, leaving the studio without another word.

When Whale met with Howard the following morning, he got the impression that Howard had spent the night with Carole, although he revealed nothing. “I’ve called my attorney,” he said to the director. “Lombard is Helen. Start rehearsing her at once. Since this is a talking picture, be careful what she says. She talks like a sailor’s parrot. Every tenth word is ‘fucking.’”

Lombard could be very blunt about her sexual liaisons. When she learned that Ben Lyon was Howard’s friend in more ways than one, she kidded him without mercy during evenings on the town. Often Howard invited both Ben and Carole as his guests for the night. Since Ella Rice Hughes seemed to have permanently left, he moved Carole into Muirfield.

“I can give him something you can’t,” Carole mockingly told Ben one night at the Zulu Club, with its African motif.

“And what might that be?” Ben asked, repeating the dialogue to James Whale the next day.

“I found out Howard’s favorite type of sex with a woman,” Carole allegedly said. “And I had to look it up in the dictionary. Intermammary intercourse, it’s called.”

“You mean sticking it between a woman’s breast?” Ben said. “Hell, I’ve been doing that for years. But it’s not my favorite thing.”

On the day before she was to go before the cameras on *Hell’s Angels*, Carole arrived at Muirfield to find her luggage packed and a limousine waiting to take her back to her real home. In desperation, she called Whale at the studio to find out what happened, since Howard wouldn’t come to the phone.

“I’ve been trying to get in touch with you,” he said “I’ve got bad news! This morning Hughes cast Jean Harlow as Helen.”

To this day it isn’t known exactly why Howard dumped Carole so abruptly. In a confidential talk with Louella Parsons, Marion Davies at San Simeon offered the best reason. “The night I introduced Howard to Billie Dove—and he’d been urging me to do that for weeks—I knew it was curtains for Lombard.” Forbidden to print that story, Louella proceeded to spread the gossip across Hollywood

After her marriage to Clark Gable in 1939, Carole encountered Howard on at least two occasions, once at a dinner party. Apparently, no mention was ever made about why he gave her the part in *Hell’s Angels*, then abruptly snatched it away.

Miriam Hopkins, the only actress in Hollywood who Bette Davis hated more than Joan Crawford, once said that she sat across from Carole and Howard at a party in Beverly Hills. “Hughes was there with Ginger Rogers that night,” Miriam recalled. “I’d heard that Carole and Hughes had had an affair. But he had not one word to say to her, focusing all his attention on Ginger instead. It was like he’d never met Carole.”

Later, when Miriam was in the powder room with Carole, she said the actress did deliver a one-liner about Howard. “He’s got Clark beat by four inches, but Hughes has no soul.”

It would actually be another Howard (Hawks) who would do more for Carole’s career than most. She was his second cousin. Meeting her after years had gone by, he was taken with her image at a Hollywood party as she held a gin and tonic in her hand. Her laughter and off-color remarks intrigued Hawks, who cast her opposite John Barrymore in Columbia’s *Twentieth Century* in 1934. That film liberated the on-screen Carole Lombard and made her a big star.



Randolph Scott

A Transcontinental and West Air luxury airplane (TWA), of which Howard Hughes Jr. was the kingpin, crashed near Las Vegas on January 16, 1942, killing all eighteen passengers aboard, including Carole Lombard and her mother.

The day before, Carole had sold more than two million dollars worth of war bonds. At the time of her death, she was earning half a million dollars a year, making her the highest paid female star in Hollywood.

For Carole's funeral, Howard sent Clark Gable a large wreath of red American Beauty roses. He signed it: "In loving memory, H. Hughes."

One of the most ambitious men ever to set foot in California arrived at Howard's studio with a letter of introduction from his family back East. From Orange County, Virginia, Randolph Scott claimed that Big Howard had been a friend of his own father, whom he'd known from their wildcatter days.

Taking one look at this strapping, handsome, soft-spoken Southerner, Howard didn't even bother to read the letter of introduction. "He fell for six feet four inches of hard, tanned muscle," James Whale recalled. With a rather horsey face, Randolph had a gracious manner about him, rather courtly in fact. Square-jawed, he stood with a regal stance, and had a lazy, swinging walk that evoked another lanky actor, Gary Cooper.

Actually Randolph Scott hadn't come to Hollywood to be an actor. He'd studied engineering and was applying for a position with Toolco.

When Howard learned that Randolph knew how to play golf, he immediately invited him to the local country club. On the golf course, both men got acquainted with each other and even found that they shared some prejudices in common, including a dislike of Jews and blacks. After the game, the two handsome young men went in to take a shower together, and apparently Howard liked what he saw of Randolph, who had been a nude model in Washington, D.C., before riding the westbound train to Los Angeles.

Before the day was over, Howard had invited him to Muirfield where he found out that he was sexually compatible with this athletic young man.

Howard soon convinced Randolph that he should give up engineering and pursue a career as a matinee idol. Howard promised that until he had a starring part for him, he would get Randolph work as an extra, which he proceeded to do, securing him a bit part in the film, *The Far Call*.

After their first week of living together and sleeping together every night, Howard became convinced that Randolph was a cold and calculating individual "with the soul of an adding machine," he told Whale. That cold heart didn't bother Howard at all, especially when Randolph agreed to do whatever Howard wanted in bed. A natural top, he became a bottom for Howard, even though he found that role both painful and humiliating. Howard, however, seemed to enjoy his dominance over this rugged athlete.

"To get ahead, Randolph would screw anything or get screwed," Whale said. "Just look what he'd do in the years ahead. I mean, look at that rich Marion DuPont scarecrow he married for money. He set out to become as rich as Howard Hughes. In that he didn't succeed, but he did become the richest actor in Hollywood."

By the second week, Howard had already put Randolph on a back burner in his life, as he ardently pursued affairs with two actresses. Randolph painfully learned that he wasn't going to become Howard's boy and share in Toolco's riches, but would only be a sometime toy.

Left alone for most nights of the week and hungry for sex, he wandered one night into Griffith Park in Los Angeles. That was the major meeting place for homosexual pickups. But it was extremely dangerous because homosexuality was illegal and arrests were frequent. Handsome young men were hired as vice cops to work undercover to entrap homosexuals in the park. Once one of these cops was propositioned by a man, the victim would be immediately arrested.

Randolph was the victim of such a fate on his first and last visit to the park. Booked at a local precinct, Randolph immediately called Howard to bail him out. Howard phoned his attorney, Neil McCarthy, who could get anybody off on any charge, including murder, or so his legend went. In those days, bribery was an accepted custom with the Los Angeles police. After securing Randolph's release and parting with three thousand dollars in crisp bills, McCarthy drove Randolph back to Muirfield where Howard greeted him with a stern lecture. In the years to come, Howard would always credit himself for having saved Randolph's career.

In the weeks ahead, whenever Howard didn't come home, Randolph still pursued young men, but in more discreet ways. It was only when he met Cary Grant that he would flaunt his homosexuality.

Not wanting to get arrested again, Randolph began to "make the lavender rounds," as Billy Haines called it. Howard had introduced Randolph to Billy and had asked his friend to show Randolph around Hollywood.

After seducing him, Billy did just that. "First, it was *moi*," Billy said. "Then Ramon Novarro. Nils Asther (that affair lasted for only one night). Ben Lyon (maybe two nights at the most). James Whale (Randolph submitted to a blow-job). Joel McCrea (Randolph found him hotter than he found Howard). And, then, the second love of his life, Gary Cooper. Grant was always *numero uno*"

In the weeks ahead, when Randolph wasn't seen with Howard, he was out with Gary Cooper. Sometimes they would go away on weekends together. "Those two taciturn gentlemen never said more than three words to each other, or so I bet, on a weekend, but I just know that there was plenty of action under the bedsheets," Billy said.

Randolph had been introduced to Gary when he was hired to help the Montana-born actor with his lines in *The Virginian*, which was a talkie. Rather

proud of his endowment, Gary often received guests in his dressing room “buck ass naked,” as he put it. Randolph was pleasantly stunned when Gary opened the door and invited him in.

It seems that somewhere during their conversation, the telephone rang. Some woman—perhaps that Mexican spitfire, Lupe Velez—was on the other end of the phone, telling Gary what she was going to do to him later that night.

Randolph later told Billy. “There I sat watching Gary rise to the height of Mt. Everest. I was impressed—even bigger than Howard.”

His association with Gary Cooper and Howard didn’t make Randolph rich overnight. “The only thing I got from Gary,” he later told Whale, was “Lupe Velez. I inherited her when Gary dumped her.”

Adela Rogers St. Johns, the newspaper columnist, claimed that Velez was being passed around in those days from one celebrity to another, “like a Christmas fruit cake that no one wants. First, Jack Dempsey. Then John Gilbert, followed by Randolph Scott. She ended up marrying Tarzan, however.” The columnist was referring to Johnny Weissmuller.

Although Randolph’s romance with Gary would be short lived, Cooper’s legacy lived on throughout Randolph’s career. In spite of his millions, the Western star eventually became known as “the poor man’s Gary Cooper.”

“Regardless of his other lovers in the years ahead, male or female—and that includes Cary Grant—Randolph Scott came running if Howard ever called him to ‘come fly with me,’” Billy said. “If there’s one thing that Virginia boy respected, it was money, and Howard Hughes had more of that stuff than he could count.”

Arriving from Kansas City, Missouri, Jean Harlow was only eighteen years old when she met Howard Hughes, who still had not cast the role of Helen in *Hell’s Angels*. Actually, the actress, who wasn’t even an actress at the time, had borrowed her screen name from her mother, whose maiden name had been Jean Harlow. The blonde bombshell’s actual given name at the time of her birth was Harlean Carpenter.

Many men, including Ben Lyon, claimed that they had discovered Jean and introduced her to Howard. The actual introduction, however, was made by James Hall, who had enjoyed a brief affair with Jean before they drifted apart. James had first met Jean when he co-starred with Clara Bow in *The Saturday Night Kid*, with Jean appearing in an uncredited role.

Married at sixteen to stockbroker Charles (Chuck) McGrew, Jean was fresh from affairs with actor Gilbert Roland, bandleader Roy Fox, and Joel McCrea, with whom she’d made a lackluster screen test. Jean’s career was going nowhere at this point, and once again she was appearing in an uncredited role, in spite of her striking looks.

One day on a Hollywood set, his arm linked with Jean’s, Hall introduced her to Howard and suggested he order a screen test. Her hair was referred to unattractively as “albino blonde.” Howard took in her figure, showcased in a sexy, revealing, bias-cut dress that had been designed by Edith Head for Clara Bow. Bow had given it to Jean when she’d grown too fat to wear it.

Focusing on her breasts, Howard said, “You don’t wear a bra.”

“I read that women in ancient Egypt didn’t wear bras, so why should I?” she asked.

“Why indeed?” he said before turning and walking away.

This was the unlikely meeting of two future Hollywood legends who would be forever linked.

Even though Howard told Hall he wasn’t impressed with Jean, he ordered Tony Gaudio, his cameraman, to make a three-minute test of her. David Marx, a crew member of *Hell s Angels*, later confirmed in an interview that it was Hall, not Ben Lyon, who brought Jean to meet Howard for the first time.

That day Howard had ordered his projectionist to screen two bit parts of Jean’s for him, her appearance with Charlie Chaplin in *City Lights* and her appearance with Laurel and Hardy in *Double Whoopee*. After viewing the two segments, he told James Whale, “Harlow lacks the magic it takes to be a star.”

The next day after Howard, with Whale, viewed her screen test, he still remained unimpressed yet almost inexplicably, he decided to negotiate a contract with her agent anyway. Under that albino hair, he found that her face “was puffy and sulky and her head photogenically wrong for her body. She’s got great tits, though.”

Joe Angel, the former president of Metro Pictures, who was booted out of his job by Louis B. Mayer, also watched the test with Howard. He found her Missouri accent “so thick it sounds like a bar maid screaming for the brewmas-ter to open a fresh keg for the boys.” Later, when the name Jean Harlow became a household word, Engel claimed that he’d discovered Jean, and that he was the one who had introduced her to Howard.

The scriptwriter, Joseph Moncure March, who should have had a better choice of words, compared Jean’s figure to a dust pan, making one wonder what dust pans looked like at his house.

To the surprise of all his crew, even Hall, Howard impulsively announced that “Harlow gets the part. Get her agent over here if she even has an agent.”

Since no one was ever able to penetrate the mind of Howard Hughes, there is only speculation about why he cast her in such a pivotal role when he clearly found her unsuitable.

That morning, Howard told Ben Lyon that he’d had a major fight with Carole Lombard and had broken off relations with her.

Years later, James Hall said he knew why Howard didn’t cast a major star in the role. “He wanted to take an unknown actress and make her a star. We’d heard rumors that he had a bet with Rupert that he could take a sow’s ear and turn it into a silk purse. He planned to sign a gal of his creation to a five-year contract to take advantage of her peak earning period and her greatest beauty—and he wanted her to sign before she became famous so he could get her to work for peanuts. He also wanted a woman who would be putty in his hands.” In lieu of a better explanation, Hall’s assessment will have to stand.

By six o’clock that evening, Harlow’s agent Arthur Landau showed up to negotiate with Howard. He would later claim that it was he who had introduced Jean to Howard.

Landau was never reliable with the truth. He told interviewers that he discovered Jean on the set of *Double Whoopee* and brought her that very day to see Howard, forgetting that the picture had already been released before Jean showed up on the set of *Hell’s Angels*.

Standing less than five feet tall, Landau was short and thin with a thick streak of sentimentality. Citing the fact that Greta Nissen pulled in \$2,500 a week, he offered Jean to Howard for \$1,500 a week with a six-month minimum.

Howard laughed in his face. “She gets only \$1,500 for the whole six weeks. Take it or leave it!” As he threatened to break off negotiations, Landau caved in and accepted these humiliating terms for his new client, who was already three months in arrears on her rent.

In trying to pitch her to Howard, Landau claimed, “She looks like a whore on her first day in a brothel. Still willing to do anything and not dried up inside.”

Before dismissing Landau, Howard told him to see that Jean showed up for work with her hair even whiter. “And never say albino blonde in front of me again. From now on, we’re going to bill her as platinum blonde.” That term, of course, became Jean Harlow’s trademark and the basis of her fame.

When Jean was asked by reporters how she got cast as the female star on *Hell’s Angels*, she said, “I guess Howard Hughes got tired of looking at all the blondes in Hollywood and went for me.”



Ben Lyon

As shooting began on *Hell’s Angels*, James Whale noted that Harlow could not work long in front of the camera before she had to excuse herself and race to her dressing room. At first the director thought she had weak kidneys. She later told him that she had to disappear to rub her nipples with ice cubes. “That makes them erect in front of the camera.”

Reginald Callow was horrified that Howard had cast her as Helen. “She’s the world’s worst actress.” Inexperienced and in her first major role, she and Whale had several clashes. When given a line that had been written by Howard himself, Jean claimed she couldn’t say it. “It’s the corniest god damn line in the history of movies.”

She was so adamant that Howard had to be called to the set to force her to utter the line. Appearing before Ben Lyon in a particularly revealing evening gown, Jean asks, “Would you be shocked if I put on something more comfortable?” It became the most famous line in the movie and part of the Jean Harlow legend. Howard was right.

Whale exploded on the set one day and denounced Jean in front of the crew, forcing her to run away in tears. Believe it or not, the actress, who throughout most of the Thirties would be known for sex on the screen, wasn’t playing a scene with Ben with enough allure. The next day, Whale demanded she perform the scene again and again. Nothing she did satisfied him. “Tell me what you want me to do,” she pleaded with him. “My dear girl,” Whale told her, “I can tell you how to be an actress but I can’t tell you how to be a woman.”

After the first week of shooting, Whale went to Howard to demand that Jean be replaced with Carole Lombard, his original choice. “Keep the cameras rolling,” Howard ordered. “Teach her what she needs to know and don’t bother me with this. Maybe that damn platinum hair will carry the day for her. No one will notice her acting. Only her tits!”

As a reward for the humiliations she endured, Jean received the absolute minimum paycheck the Screen Actors’ Guild allowed. Making things worse, she came down with an affliction of “Klieg eyes,” or burnt eyeballs. Her MultiColored segments required massive floodlighting, and she was sometimes exposed to these harsh lights sixteen hours a day. A studio doctor confirmed that her conjunctiva had been burned.

Howard was on the set when he heard Whale ridicule Jean. “You’re not only giving a bad performance, but a ridiculous one. I predict audiences will boo you when they’re not falling out of their seats convulsed with laughter.”

Instead of defending an already insecure star-to-be, Howard felt that the solution to the problem involved dressing her even more provocatively. With a designer, he helped create a backless gown. Originally, the gown showed the upper two inches of “the crack in her ass,” as Whale put it. Her bodice was cut so low it had to be held up by rhinestone-studded straps like those used by strippers. Whale called for restraint, but Howard demanded that Jean’s “come-hither negligée” be opened even wider. “Make it so wide the audience can see all the way to Honolulu.”

Eventually, the gown had to be modified, since Jean was practically nude on camera. Still, Howard demanded that his cameraman emphasize Jean’s bust-line, as he would do in a later film, *The Outlaw*, starring Jane Russell.

William Heller, publicist for the picture, said, “Howard personally directed the stills showing Harlow with a plunging décolletage.” Howard, at least according to Heller, said, “I’ve tested those breasts personally, and that’s what I’m selling to the American public. Harlow’s tits—not her acting!”

Somewhere during the shooting of *Hell’s Angels*, Howard began an affair with Jean Harlow that would go through many vicissitudes.

There has been a slew of biographies claiming that Jean Harlow and Howard Hughes never had an affair, as if that could really be determined. Of all the biographers, only Peter Harry Brown and Pat H. Broeske got it right, writing accurately about a sexual relationship.

Ben Lyon, who was actually on the scene and still a confidant of Howard’s at the time, claimed that “sexual sparks were ignited between Howard and Jean Harlow after the first week. She wasn’t really his type, and he regarded her as a whorish slut. People have cited that as evidence that they

didn't connect sexually."

"Let's not forget that Howard occasionally visited whorehouses, even though claiming he detested sluts," Ben said. "Maybe he did. But he still patronized them for reasons of his own. Not all his conquests were with prim and proper ladies like Ella Rice. His attraction to Jean was a love/hate thing. He wanted to put her in bondage, but Jean was far too free-spirited for any kind of slavery, except, perhaps, to her mother."

Howard confessed to longtime agent Johnny Maschio that Jean both excited him and turned him off at the same time. "She's not my type," Howard is quoted as having said as if echoing Ben's words. "A little too coarse and vulgar for my tastes." Nonetheless, Maschio claims that the two lovers disappeared once for four days during the shooting of *Hell's Angels*. They went just over the U.S./Mexican border to Agua Caliente, which stars frequented in those days, sometimes for off-the-record weekends.

Maschio also claimed that Howard took Jean on a gambling expedition aboard a cruise ship in international waters off the coast of California, where he played roulette and blackjack. The captain of the vessel, Utah-born Alfred Harrison, later revealed that, "Miss Harlow and Mr. Hughes shared the same cabin and same bed. That doesn't mean they had an affair, but I doubt if they were in there engaged in Bible reading."

Joan Crawford, out with Billy Haines (strictly platonic) for a night on the town, remembered seeing Howard and Jean together in a padded booth at the Cocoanut Grove. "He was practically playing with her tits, which were on ample display," Crawford said.

Adela Rogers St. Johns reported seeing Jean enter Howard's bedroom after midnight one weekend at San Simeon. W.R. Hearst had a rule that no unmarried couple could share the same bedchamber, although that hardly applied to the press baron and his mistress, Marion Davies.

Marion, however, always giggled at the indiscretions going on, reminding her favored guests that "W.R. goes to bed early, and when the cat is away the mice will play." Love-making between unmarried couples was all right by her. Since she was herself sleeping with another woman's husband, she could hardly object on moral grounds.

Howard informed Noah Dietrich that he was having an affair with his leading lady. For reasons of his own, Dietrich claimed in his memoirs that Jean was not an *inamorata* of Howard's, yet he privately admitted to friends and other biographers that he knew about Howard's relationship with Jean.

Yet Dietrich had no restraint about protecting the reputation of the long-dead Jean Harlow in his memoirs. He claimed that she offered to sleep with him if he'd have Toolco pay off a fifteen-hundred dollar bill for clothing she'd acquired when Howard sent her on the road to publicize *Hell's Angels*. Dietrich even claimed that she pulled "me down on my office couch" in an attempt at seduction. He said that it took all his will power, which was put to a strenuous test, to resist her.

When Jean reached New York, at least according to Dietrich, she "pulled the same act," in his words, on Howard's representative there. Dietrich sadly cites how that dalliance ruined the rep's life. He was an Irish Catholic with a wife and four children, but was prepared to give it all up for Jean.

"Harlow's promise to marry him didn't mean a damn thing," Dietrich later said. "I suspect the blonde bombshell had forgotten all about the hopeless lovesick fool by the time her train reached Chicago heading west again."

Howard also confessed to Billy Haines that he was "fucking Harlow, a lousy cocksucker but a great lay if you like the missionary position."

Ben quoted Jean as saying, "I like sex as much as the next gal, except it's so messy. Talk about messy! Howard is a real pervert. He wants things done to him that no self-respecting gal would do. For that, he should go to a whorehouse. I hear the gals there do everything."

To the press, including writer Anita Loos, Jean made this statement: "Howard's got a lot of charm in his own funny way. But he never mixes business with pleasure."

That comment must have been met with utter cynicism by Loos, who knew that Howard always mixed business with pleasure.

"As far as I'm concerned," Jean said, "I might be another airplane. The nearest Howard ever came to making a pass at me was offering me a bite of his cookie."

In today's lingo, such a statement would have been met with a "*Yeah, right!*"

Later, during a drive to Palm Springs for a weekend retreat, Jean told George Raft, Humphrey Bogart, and director Rowland Brown that she suspected that Howard liked boys more than girls. "When he took me to bed, he had three autographed photos of Randolph Scott in his room. When he was fucking me, I got the impression that he kept looking at those pictures to keep himself hard."

One of Howard's attempts at intercourse failed miserably, at least according to Jean. "He just couldn't get it up," she confessed to Raft. "I tried everything and it stayed limp."

In another decade, Bette Davis would face the same problem with Howard. But, like the Duchess of Windsor with her Duke, Bette would be far more clever than Jean in improvising.

Jean would be the first woman to ever talk about Howard's impotence. In the years to come, it would become an increasing problem for him even in the presence of some of the world's most sought-after women.

As Gloria Swanson in white chiffon glided by Howard on the dance floor of the Biltmore Hotel's Starlight Ballroom, Marion Davies took Howard by the arm. At long last she was going to take him across the floor to meet Miss Billie Dove, the reigning film star of the silent screen. For weeks, Howard had been beseeching her to introduce him to one of her best friends. She'd warned him that Billie was a Venus's flytrap and he should avoid her at all costs, but he was insistent. She also put him on alert that her husband since 1923, the bull-necked director, Irwin Willat, was jealous, possessive, and "perhaps psychotic."

On the way to Billie Dove's table, Marion encountered Corrine Griffith, sitting at the head of a table that included Pola Negri, Lowell Sherman, and Nita Naldi. Howard ignored Marion's introduction to all these other stars, concentrating his focus entirely on Corrine.

A fellow Texan from Texarkana, and eleven years older than Howard, Corrine had been starring in films since 1916. She mesmerized people who encountered her face for the first time. The "Orchid Lady of the Screen," as she was called, was hailed as the most beautiful woman in silent pictures. It was a contradiction, but across the room sat Corinne's rival, Billie Dove, acclaimed as the most beautiful woman—not only in pictures—but in the world.

Howard gazed into Corinne's blue eyes and almost seemed to want to fondle her lovely brown hair. He looked at her hair so longingly, she smiled and said, "It's my natural color, and no other actress in pictures can say that." Her entourage laughed.

Standing silently before her, Howard finally found his tongue. He made a remark that was completely uncharacteristic of him. He almost never engaged in flattery. "The close-up was invented to capture the beauty of your face."

Again, the table laughed, but Howard didn't seem to hear the mockery. All he managed to say was, "I'll call you tomorrow," before Marion urged him on across the room to meet the room's other reigning beauty.

Unknown to Howard at the time, Corrine wasn't eager to meet with him at all. After this social event, she had an off-the-record midnight date with a handsome young extra named Clark Gable who had appeared briefly in her 1925 film, *Declassée*. Corrine considered Clark "too raw" to introduce to the social elite of Hollywood.

"Keep your tongue from hanging out," Marion warned Howard as they approached Billie Dove's table. Like Corrine, Billie was surrounded by her entourage, some eight guests that notably included Ben Lyon, Norma Talmadge, and Charlie Chaplin.

After weeks of seeing Billie from afar, once in the presence of Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Howard was awkward and shy when introduced to this sophisticated screen star. Billie later confided to Ben, "I thought I was meeting an overgrown Texas schoolboy. I felt he couldn't really be the multi-millionaire, Howard Hughes, that everybody was talking about."

Once Billie had shaken his hand, Howard had absolutely nothing to say to her. To him, she must have appeared like a Dresden doll in a champagne-colored satin gown. This classic American beauty was not only a bigtime movie star, but was widely regarded by directors as the epitome of female perfection on camera.

Speaking through pouty lips painted a scarlet red, she said, "Good evening, Mr. Hughes. Are those oil wells still pumping in Texas?" He did not bother to correct her to inform her he made his money not through oil but through a drill bit.

Her large hazel eyes seemed to draw him nearer to her, yet they warned him to stay back at the same time. He took in her flawless and creamy complexion and smelled her perfume, which was appropriately called "Seduction."

Howard's thoughts on meeting Billie will never be known. He'd read all he could about her, including how she'd launched herself in 1919 as one of Flo Ziegfeld's bevy of Follies beauties that at one time had included Marion Davies herself. Finally, he was able to speak in front of the table. "Is it true that Irving Berlin wrote *A Pretty Girl Is Like A Melody* for you?"

"It would be immodest of me to answer that," she said.

"I see all of your films," he said. At the time of their meeting, Billie was one of the biggest attractions in cinema, ranking up there with the two reigning box-office champions, Colleen Moore and Clara Bow. Billie Dove's films, at the time of their meeting, surpassed those of Greta Garbo, Mary Pickford, and Gloria Swanson in box-office receipts.

He held her hand for a long moment, looking into her large expressive eyes. He seemed to focus on her sensitive mouth, perhaps imagining the pleasure it could give him. Born of Swiss immigrants, she was two years older than Howard, but as Marion later noted, she seemed so much more worldly that Howard could almost pass for her son.

As he continued to absorb her soft, voluptuous femininity, he told her that she looked glorious in Technicolor. She had appeared in this new two-colored film process, and was rumored to have had an affair with Douglas Fairbanks Sr. when they made a color version of *The Black Pirate* in 1926.

"I've been doing some experimenting in color myself, and getting nowhere," he told her.

From Ben, Howard learned that Billie's marriage to Willat was in serious trouble. He knew that behind Willat's back, she played the field. Ben had confessed to having an affair with her in 1927 when they co-starred in *The Tender Hour* directed by George Fitzmaurice.

Howard's meeting with Billie was brief. Back at Marion's table, Howard told her that he wanted to know where Billie was going to appear every night. He planned to show up at the same gatherings.

True to his word, Howard appeared the next night at the Montmartre Café, a vision in white, from his tie to his suit and including his white wing-tipped shoes. Billie too was dressed entirely in white when Howard first spotted her. She was dancing around the floor in the arms of Billy Haines. On a signal from Howard, the male Billy delivered the female Billie into the presence of Howard.

"We meet again, Mr. Hughes," she said in front of Billy. "Are you following me?"

"A mere coincidence," Howard responded.

"I'm sure that's not true." Blowing a kiss to Billy she took Howard's hand and walked with him to an open-air terrace. As Billie Dove would report to Billy Haines the next day, "It was a full California moon and either the garden was scented or else it was my perfume. But I kissed him. I also said, 'Mr. Hughes, is it true that I'm the only star in Hollywood that you have not deflowered?'"

"My reputation is greatly exaggerated," he reportedly told her. Without hesitation, he took her in his arms and kissed her deeply.

Unknown to either of them, a young Irish private eye, Pat O'Casey, had excused himself from his date for the evening to oversee what was happening on the terrace between the married Howard and much-married Billie Dove.

Howard was not aware that Willat was gathering evidence to use against Billie in his upcoming divorce from her. Willat's career as a director was fading, and he wanted as much of her savings as he could get.

"I'll give Billie up," Willat was quoted as saying, "but here's my big chance to set myself up real pretty for life. I'm not going to waste such a golden opportunity. Let them have their fun, but what costly fun it'll be for the both of them."

Willat was not a man known for making idle threats.

With Randolph Scott moved out of Muirfield and into an apartment, Howard still turned to him for the occasional satisfaction of his homosexual desires. And Jean Harlow was still under contractual bondage to him.

With virtually no one's knowledge, Howard contacted Corrine Griffith almost daily, hoping to get her to go out with him. She consistently turned him down, even when he offered her a startling \$17,000 a week if she'd sign a contract with his Caddo film studio. He was tenacious in his pursuit of her and would continue to go after her until the prize was his, even if it took years.

In spite of all these entanglements, Howard pursued Billie Dove like a hungry wolf lusting for a cuddly, tasty sheep. It seems doubtful that she was the love of his life, as so many biographers have claimed, even Howard himself. Both Howard and Billie during the white heat of their affair were still embroiled with other lovers, and with spouses lurking in the background.

In time, the world would learn that Howard was not faithful to Billie. He was never faithful to anyone, male or female. What was not known is that Billie had other men on the side even during the most intense passion of her affair with Howard. It was this lusting after other men that would eventually destroy their relationship.

Although he was not prepared for a total commitment to Billie, Howard began to bombard her with expensive presents, all paid for by checks signed by Noah Dietrich. First a diamond bracelet to be followed by a diamond-and-ruby tiara. He practically purchased every red American Beauty rose in southern California until he found out that she preferred only white roses.

The rarest of orchids, the sweetest-smelling gardenias, along with those white roses, were delivered daily to Billie. “No presidential funeral ever got so many flowers as that white lady,” to quote Billie’s housekeeper. The most expensive perfumes in Hollywood were delivered to Billie’s home in large decanters. When she went to her dressmaker, she learned that her bill, previously in arrears, had been paid in full. Not only that, but twenty-five thousand dollars had been deposited into her account for the order of future *couture*.

When Marion Davies and Billie Dove invited Norma Talmadge, Carol Dempster, and her New York banker friend, Edwin S. Larsen, for a picnic, a plane suddenly appeared overhead, buzzing the site. Coming in for a landing, Howard emerged in his helmet and leather jacket. Though not invited, he joined the picnickers.

Unknown to Billie, two detectives had been hired by Willat to trail his wife to get evidence on her. Willat hired yet another detective to trail Howard as well. Like something from a Mack Sennett comedy, Howard had also hired two detectives to trail Billie. Presumably, Howard and Billie were the most spied upon lovers in Hollywood.

The detectives always lost their trail when Billie began to fly with Howard in his private plane on weekends. Perhaps they’d fly to the vineyards in Sonoma County or else head south for Big Howard’s once-favorite resort, the Coronado Hotel in San Diego. Once he flew her to the Grand Canyon.

When not wooing Billie, Howard faced a massive three million feet of film to cut. For the final cut of *Hell’s Angels*, he could use only one percent of it. To Dietrich’s horror, the budget on the film was rapidly approaching four-million dollars.

Like Big Howard before him, Howard took to the sea, determined to become a grand yachtsman. He ordered Dietrich to negotiate for the purchase of a 175-foot craft, the *Hilda*, anchored at Santa Barbara and requiring a crew of eighteen to operate.

The *Hilda* had been owned by the multimillionaire New York steel magnate, Charles Boldt, and his wife, Hilda, had been granted the yacht in a divorce settlement. Ironically, the boat had previously been named *King Vidor*, in honor of the husband of Eleanor Boardman, Big Howard’s former mistress.

For three straight weekends in a row, he sailed away with Billie as his sole guest on Friday night, returning the following Monday, presumably as part of a series of “test drives” to determine if he really wanted to buy the yacht. When he tried to borrow the *Hilda* a fourth time, its owner Hilda Boldt, rebelled, claiming that he’d tested it enough. “I want to see \$450,000 in cash or else no dice.” Shocked at the price, Dietrich negotiated it down to \$350,000.

Dietrich was certain if he held out long enough, he could get this widow of a steel magnate to come down yet another \$100,000. But Howard had already made plans with Billie to go sailing and told Dietrich to buy it. After Dietrich failed to talk him into waiting, he went ahead and paid Mrs. Boldt her asking price.

In full possession of the *Hilda* for the first time, Howard ordered his crew to prepare a romantic moonlit champagne supper for Billie and him on the aft deck. At the appointed time, Billie appeared on the moonlit deck looking like a goddess to him. She was barefoot and dressed in baggy white sailor shorts studded with gold stars. A thin halter top exposed most of her milky breasts.

Dinner was delayed as she ordered a foot rub. As he massaged one of her feet, she used the other one to rub against his burgeoning crotch. Soon his massage progressed from her feet to her calves, and then her thighs, as he removed her sailor pants.

In the single most pornographic passage ever written in a movie star memoir, a future flame of Howard’s, actress Terry Moore, in her book, *The Passions of Howard Hughes*, described his seduction of Billie in graphic detail, including how he pulled off his trousers to reveal an erect penis to Billie and the fact that he wore no underwear.

As they progressed with their foreplay, Billie ordered him to, “Get the champagne and pour it over my feet and up my legs and onto my pussy.” Those exact words appear in Terry’s memoirs, followed by this page-scorching description. “He started kissing her toes, then he licked off her calves, and as he reached her thighs, she reached down and began stroking his erection.”

The only misstatement in the memoirs is that Terry claimed that this was Howard’s first oral sex with a woman. That was hardly the case, as it was his preferred form of seduction with both men and women.

Terry has Billie “moaning, wailing, almost sobbing as she writhed against him, pulling and pushing his head, and then she let loose with a scream from deep within her as her entire body convulsed around him.”

Terry got the sex play between them right, and she wasn’t even one year old when this happened. One can only speculate that he must have told Terry the lurid details one night during pillow talk.

The same description of this oral sex act on Billie more or less matched the report that the young Irish detective, Pat O’Casey, gave to Irwin Willat. O’Casey had hired himself out as a member of the eighteen-member crew of the *Hilda*. He was spying on Billie and Howard every chance he got.

Once the *Hilda* reached shore, he would provide a detailed written report to Willat, who was “still planning to rob both the lovebirds blind.”

Decades later Willat confirmed that O’Casey made such a report to him, confirming what Terry Moore described in her book.

As Howard later told Ben Lyon, “Billie can give oral sex as good as she likes to receive it.”

“I know, my dear boy, Ben told him. “Remember, I broke her in for you.”

Only the night before, May 31, 1929, Louella Parsons had gushed that the union of Howard Hughes and Billie Dove was “divine fate.” But on the morning of June 1, Howard was thinking only of himself as the sweat rolled down his body. He staggered into the entrance of his Muirfield estate, collapsing on the terrazzo floors in the foyer. He’d been working for thirty-six hours straight cutting *Hell’s Angels*.

Two male servants rushed to pick him up and carry him upstairs to the master bedroom. A call was immediately placed to Noah Dietrich, who summoned Dr. Verne Mason to Muirfield. The doctor had attended to Howard after his plane crash on the set of *Hell’s Angels*.

When Dr. Mason and Dietrich reached Muirfield, Howard’s resident housekeeper, Beatrice Dowler, rushed to the door to greet them. “Mr. Hughes is dying,” she said. “He’s unconscious and sweating blood.”

Upstairs, Dr. Mason discovered a patient that he suspected was dying of spinal meningitis. In 1929 before the introduction of antibiotics, that disease was often fatal.

For two days and nights, Dietrich and Dr. Mason never left Muirfield, leaving the master bedroom only for meals in Howard’s sanitized kitchen. His condition seemed to worsen by the hour. “I don’t think Mr. Hughes is going to make it through another night,” Dr. Mason told Dietrich. “Better call his wife, although I fear by the time she gets here it’ll be time for the funeral.”

There had been no communication between Howard and Ella since early March. Nonetheless, Dietrich wired Ella at the Ambassador Hotel in New York. That following morning she was set to sail on the French Liner, *Normandie*, to France with her sister, Libby, and Libby’s husband, W.S. Farish.

“Howard’s dying,” Dietrich’s cable said. “Return immediately to Los Angeles.”

Initially, Ella was suspicious, thinking that Howard was feigning illness as he had so often done before. But on reconsideration, she felt it was a genuine plea for reconciliation. Accompanied by her protesting sister, who continually denounced Howard as a “whoremonger,” Ella boarded the train heading for Chicago. She cabled Dietrich to inform her in Chicago about Howard’s condition.

When Ella’s train was only one hour from its approach into Chicago, Dr. Mason was sitting in an armchair by Howard’s bed nodding off. He was suddenly awakened by movement under the bedcovers and the moans of his patient, who was coming to life for the first time since his collapse in his foyer. Howard was not only regaining consciousness but trying to kick off his covers. Weakly he tried to sit up. “What in god damn hell is going on here?” were his first words.

Dr. Mason attended to him at once and summoned Dietrich to the room. “I’m starving,” Howard told Dietrich. “Order me a steak the way I like it.”

As he gobbled his breakfast, even eating the big peas as well as the little peas, something he never did, he learned news that infuriated him. Dietrich informed Howard that he had summoned Ella from New York and that her train would soon be in Chicago.

“Why in the fuck did you send for her?” Howard demanded to know. “You know I don’t want her here. It’s all over between us.”

Even though weakened, Howard immediately swung into action, placing a call to Michael McCloud, the head of the office of Chicago Western Union. He dictated a cablegram to Ella, demanding that it be sent to her on the train. It read: “Just heard you had left. Why didn’t you let me know first? My temperature is down to one-hundred today.” [He didn’t actually know that but it was later confirmed by Dr. Mason to have been accurate.] “I do not know why Dietrich wired you, but it is nothing serious. It is ridiculous for you to spend three days on the train so please go back to New York and call me from there. By all means, don’t come. Don’t come until you talk to me on the phone.”

Traveling with her sister, Libby, Ella received the cablegram on her train but chose to ignore its message. In Chicago, Libby and Ella changed trains, boarding the Santa Fe Limited headed for Pasadena.

Howard rested, thinking that Ella had taken the train from Chicago back to New York to continue with plans for her ocean voyage to France. That afternoon he called Billie, telling her that he had recovered and asking her to come and stay with him at Muirfield, to which she agreed.

On a sunny day, Howard was resting in the master bedroom, still recovering, and Billie was taking a luxurious bubble bath. A woman servant came to tell her that Ella Hughes had just arrived in the driveway.

“I jumped out of my bath, and I think I was stark naked as I darted out the back door and into the garden,” Billie later told Ben Lyon. “A servant had to fetch some clothes for me before I could flee the grounds.”

As Billie had gone out the back door, Ella and Libby entered through the front entrance. Ella rushed immediately to the master bedroom where she confronted an astonished Howard, who thought she was in New York. “Get out!” he shouted at her. “Get out of my house. I never want to see you again. I loathe you. You’re nothing but a cud-chewing Texas cow!”

Ella burst into tears. Before fleeing the room, she spotted Billie’s mauve pelisse with a matching feather boa resting on an armchair. As she ran down the steps, she knew all those rumors about Howard and Billie Dove were true. Louella Parsons was practically broadcasting news of the affair.

Ella was in the house for no more than five minutes, just enough time to confer with Dr. Mason. He told her that he had made the wrong diagnosis. Instead of spinal meningitis, Howard had come down with a bad case of influenza.

Dietrich was having breakfast in Howard’s garden when Beatrice Dowler alerted him that Ella had arrived at Muirfield but was leaving at once with her sister in a limousine. Rushing around the side of the mansion, Noah confronted Ella as she was getting into the back of the long, shiny vehicle. She stuck her head out and said, “Noah, inform Howard that as soon as I reach Houston, I’m filing for divorce.”

For some reason, in his memoirs Dietrich wrote that Ella and Libby stayed at Muirfield for around two weeks, although he knew that wasn’t true. But he never believed in full disclosure. He didn’t even identify the “beautiful actress leaving by the back entrance” as Billie Dove.

In the weeks to come, Dietrich would negotiate the divorce settlement with Ella’s Texas attorneys. Howard’s fortune at the time was estimated at thirty million dollars, and, according to Texas law, Ella was entitled to half of it. Amazingly she agreed to settle for only \$1,250,000. Not only that, but Howard was given liberal payment terms: five annual installments of \$250,000.

“He got away with murder on that deal,” Dietrich later said. “If only his luck would have held out against all the other blood-suckers waiting for him in the years ahead.”

Even though Howard was professing his devotion for Billie Dove and Ben Lyon was publicizing his undying passion for actress Bebe Daniels, the two men frequently left “the loves of their lives” behind as they dashed down to Agua Caliente in Mexico for off-the-record weekends.

For those two closeted bisexuals, Mexico was where they found their freedom as they went on wild sprees, indulging their sexual fantasies either with young boys or younger girls.

Back in Los Angeles, Howard was still seeing both Randolph Scott and “the Adonis,” John Darrow, he’d cast in *Hell’s Angels*. How he found time to do all this and still keep up a grueling work schedule is still baffling, but he would manage to pull off such stunts for the rest of his salad years.

The only embarrassment from Agua Caliente came in the form of a blackmail photograph. Ben would drink heavily and Howard would imbibe occasionally. But when he did drink heavily in those days, he often became what he himself admitted was “a bit insane.”

On one of those reckless nights, when he’d finished off four bottles of champagne with Ben, he put on a dress he’d bought that day and asked a Mexican photographer to take a picture of him sitting in Ben’s lap, kissing him on the lips. It was supposed to have been all in fun.

When Dietrich opened the envelope delivered to Caddo studios, he noted not only the photograph but a demand for ten thousand dollars from the photographer. Realizing how damaging the photograph could be to his reputation in Hollywood, Howard immediately dispatched Dietrich to Agua

Caliente where he managed to buy back the negative for two thousand dollars. He’d taken the extra eight thousand dollars “just in case.” Although he admitted to bootlegging for Howard and other tawdry tasks, Dietrich left this incident out of his “tell-all” memoirs.

Another candid photograph, taken in jest, also caused Howard grief. He’d photographed Ben seated on a log with a sawed-off branch emerging between his legs, evoking a mammoth erect penis. As a joke, he had his publicity department send out this picture to Ben’s female fans.

Regrettably, one of these fans, Caroline Black, of San Bernardino, was only fourteen. When she showed the picture to her father, he reacted violently and set out on a campaign “to destroy Caddo films.” First he sent a petition to all the women’s clubs of southern California, asking them to boycott any film released by Howard. He also turned the picture over to the district attorney of San Bernardino County, asking him to bring a case against both Ben and Howard, charging them with an attempt to corrupt a minor. Finally, he filed a one million dollar lawsuit against Ben and Howard, which Neil McCarthy settled out of court after Black was offered one hundred thousand dollars to drop the charges.

There was more trouble ahead.

Black Thursday dawned on October 29, 1929. It was the day of the Wall Street crash. On that doomed morning, men were killing themselves over their sudden losses.

Dietrich rushed to the studio where Howard was still working on *Hell’s Angels*. “You’ve lost five million dollars in the last hour!” he shouted at his boss.

Amazingly, Howard didn’t say a word but continued cutting his film as if he didn’t want to hear of this disaster.

Ben Lyon came to him that afternoon, pleading with him to lend him money to cover margin payments on his own stocks.

Howard adamantly refused. “I don’t lend money!” he shouted at Ben, who retreated from the studio.

Their relationship all but ended that day. The old camaraderie, the wild sex parties, the procuring of virile pilots or mechanics for him, the weekend escapades came tumbling down like the stocks on Wall Street.

Howard was about to enter a strange new period of his life, characterized by daredevil risks and behavior patterns that were almost pathological.

After his recovery, Howard sailed with Billie aboard the *Hilda* to Catalina Island. The trip, as Howard later told Randolph Scott, was almost like a honeymoon now that he no longer had Ella’s shadow lurking behind him.

Howard detested the name *Hilda* and had rechristened his yacht, *Rodeo*, based on the name of a character, “Rodeo West,” that Billie had played in her talkie, *The Painted Angel*, adapted from a Fannie Hurst story. Since her co-star, Edmund Lowe, was a notorious Hollywood homosexual, Howard had no reason to be jealous of Billie’s leading man.

Aboard the yacht, as it anchored in the port of Avalon, Howard carefully planned his most romantic dinner. Even a full moon cooperated with him. As a soft breeze was blowing in the candlelight, his on-ship butler arrived with a gold-colored florist box with a ribbon made of pure spun gold.

After gently opening it, Billie discovered a dozen white orchids inside surrounded by fresh gardenias. In the center rested a red-velvet jewel box. Opening it, she discovered a huge diamond engagement ring.

“I want you to become the next Mrs. Howard Hughes,” he said to her.

Almost in tears, she immediately accepted. But when he went to kiss her, she drew back. “Marrying me won’t be so easy.”

She’d postponed her bad news until now. Before embarking for Catalina, she had had a confrontation with Irwin Willat, who was threatening to name Howard as a correspondent in a very messy and very public divorce proceeding. With his own divorce with Ella not yet finalized, Howard feared that he could not afford such bad publicity.

Although Ella had tentatively agreed to Dietrich’s divorce settlement, she had not signed any documents. Howard feared that a highly publicized divorce between Billie and Willat would tarnish Ella’s own name. She was very sensitive about what Houston society thought about her.

Billie detonated her bomb. Willat was demanding to let her go peacefully for \$350,000. Dietrich would later claim it was \$325,000, but in an interview granted shortly before he died Willat put the figure at \$350,000.

Despondent, Howard paced the deck all night. By morning, when Billie found him shooting at sea gulls soiling his deck, he told her he was going to agree to the blackmail demand.

“Money is the easiest way to buy our way out of this,” he told her. “That is, if Black Thursday left me with any cash at all.”

She relayed a final request from Willat. Even if Howard agreed to pay the extortion, Willat wanted to meet with him at the bungalow where he lived. Howard didn’t understand why, but told Billie that he would agree to that rather odd request. “You’re worth it. To have you, I’d meet with the Devil himself.”

As they sailed back to Santa Barbara, that meeting came close to never happening. Billie almost drowned.

She was crossing the deck, heading back to the stateroom, when a Pacific swell, seemingly coming out of nowhere, churned up waves of twenty-five feet. These waves without warning swept across the deck of the *Rodeo*. The powerful surge from the sea knocked her down. “I felt someone had me by the legs and was dragging me overboard,” she later told Howard.

At the last minute, the ship’s captain spotted her and ran to save her. Grabbing her by her delicate ankles with his big, strong hands, he pulled her back on deck only seconds before she’d have been swept into the turbulent sea.

Howard was down below tinkering with the ship’s engine when told of what happened. He raced to the stateroom where he found the ship’s captain and his first mate wrapping a “wet rat” Billie in blankets.

He quickly knelt down by her side, finding her trembling and in tears. “You could have been swept overboard,” he told her, stating what was obvious. “It took that swell to teach me how much I love you. Without you, I would die. I’ll never leave you.”

These are the most romantic lines that Howard would ever be known to utter to any woman. Had he stopped there, it would have been fine, as she reached out to embrace him warmly. He burst into tears and buried his head in her lap. “I’ll always love you, my darling Allene.”

Up until that embarrassing and revealing moment, he had not uttered the name of his mother since her untimely death.

Shortly after his return to Muirfield from his sailing trip, Howard drove himself to Willat's bungalow. The meeting was private and Howard never discussed the minute details of what was said between the director and himself.

Later, it was learned that Willat had a far greater demand than the \$350,000 he wanted for an uncontested divorce. Originally, he had Howard trailed to learn the details of his romancing of his wife.

In doing that, his detectives, especially Pat O'Casey, had learned other intimate details about Howard's private life. Willat found out about Howard's clandestine affairs with John Darrow and Randolph Scott. He also discovered that Howard had paid handsome young hustlers to service him as well.

Howard was visibly shaken when he left Willat's bungalow. Although he'd demanded that Willat tell him how much more money he wanted, the director refused. "There will be time for that later, after the divorce."

Howard was forced to admit this latest extortion attempt to Dietrich, who would be in charge of making the blackmail payments.

Dietrich was horrified at yet another blackmail attempt. "There's nothing we can do," he said, "except wait for the other shoe to fall."

"Tomorrow morning he wants \$350,000 in cash," Howard said. "Take it across town to him. In increments of one thousand dollar bills."

"Even if you make the second ransom payment," Dietrich said, "and God only knows how much that will be, Willat might have you by the balls for life."

"In that case, we'll just have to have him done away with," Howard said. "There's a limit to how far I'll be pushed."

On December 9, 1929, a Houston judge granted Ella her divorce on grounds of "excesses and cruel treatment." She also charged that Howard had steadily neglected her and that he was "irritable, cross, critical, fault-finding, and inconsiderate." Howard did not contest the divorce.

In time Ella would marry the "true love of my life," James Overton Winston. It was no longer a question of his lack of money and inability to support her in a style to which she was accustomed. Howard's money was enough for the both of them.

Two years later in Houston on Toolco business, Dietrich encountered Ella at a society party. He started to tell her the latest news about Howard but she interrupted him. "Why should I be interested in news about someone I've never heard of?" She turned and walked away.

With his divorce behind him, Howard began contemplating his next marriage. "As soon as her divorce comes through, I'm marrying Billie," he later told Dietrich. "She's the only woman I've ever loved."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Nevada, 1929

With his own divorce about to be finalized, and without any protests from Ella about the settlement, Howard turned his attention to freeing Billie from the marital clutches of Irwin Willat. Howard's lawyer, Neil McCarthy, told him that a divorce would be granted more quickly in Nevada than in California. All that Billie had to do was establish a residency for six weeks.

Howard concocted an scheme where they could live in Nevada and escape press scrutiny. Riding in economy seats, he took Billie on the train to Nevada. They were disguised as farmers and introduced themselves to the homesteaders there as brother and sister.

Floyd and Arlene Struck owned a one hundred and fifty acre spread, and they gladly welcomed the handsome stranger, "George Johnson," and his stunningly lovely sister, "Marion." The Strucks never drove into town to see a movie and they never read a newspaper, so they didn't have a clue that their guests were a world famous pair, Howard Hughes and Billie Dove.

Wearing a blue and white checked gingham dress with a flowered bonnet, "the world's most beautiful woman" helped out at household chores, while Howard tended the fields with the local farmer. At night Howard and Billie slept in a corrugated metal hut with a dirt floor and an opening for a window with no glass panes.

Billie recalled years later that she felt that Howard, the richest man in America, was the happiest he'd ever been in his life, living this rustic, cornseed existence and toiling in the fields like a day laborer for exactly one dollar a day, plus room and board.

It was never explained to Billie exactly why they had to pretend to be farmers' helpers to speed up the divorce process. She didn't understand why she couldn't live somewhere in Nevada in luxury until the residency requirement was met. "It was all part of Howard's madness at the time, and I went along with it," she said. "In many ways, it was fun. I even learned to can pickles. I guess I never realized before they were made from cucumbers."

After doing some research, McCarthy notified Howard that the hut on a Nevada farm would not qualify as a legal residence. By that time, Howard had grown bored with farm work. He ordered Dietrich to send a limousine.

To the astonishment of the farmer and his wife, a black Duesenberg promptly arrived to drive Howard and Billie back to California, where she would seek a divorce from Willat through regular channels. To the farmer's further astonishment, Howard handed him ten one hundred dollarbills and thanked him for the hospitality and gra-ciousness shown to him and to his "sister."

His career as a field hand over, Howard would do manual labor only once again in his life.

Los Angeles, 1929

Back in Los Angeles, Howard began to behave erratically. He'd dropped Ben Lyon from his list of friends, but he continued to meet for private sessions with both John Darrow and Randolph Scott. He began to suspect that Billie, on the nights he wasn't with her, was also seeing another man. In a pattern that would be repeated throughout the rest of his romantic life, he hired detectives to follow her, just as Irwin Willat had done.

Within two weeks, Howard received the first of two reports on Billie's activities. The star had resumed her old romance with George Raft, with whom she'd had an affair when she was a Follies beauty for Ziegfeld in New York. The part-time actor, part-time gangster, had come to Hollywood to break into films.



Billie Dove

Howard’s detectives reported that Raft was down on his luck—actually he was broke—and was forced to room with an actor he’d known from his speakeasy days in New York. It was Humphrey Bogart, a minor Broadway juvenile who’d also come to Hollywood, like Raft, to break into films.

Howard was familiar with Bogart’s name, as Rupert had written the actor’s first screen role. Shot in 1928, the movie was called *The Dancing Town* and had starred Helen Hayes. A short instead of a full-length feature, the 20-minute film in some releases had also been named *Prancing Prune*.

Howard was informed that Billie was heading for the Raft/Bogart apartment, and he decided to trail her. His agent had already secured a duplicate of the key to the apartment for only one hundred dollars.

Howard asked his favorite photographer, Rod St. Just, to accompany him to the rendezvous. After a certain amount of time had passed, Howard, along with his two detectives and Rod, entered the apartment surreptitiously to have the couple photographed, presumably as they made love.

Breaking in on people and photographing them *in flagrante delicto* was a common custom in those days. What Howard planned to do with this photographic evidence is not known.

The scene that ensued was like a silent screen comedy about marital infidelity. Rod St. Just years later tried to piece together exactly what happened:

“Billie Dove went to Bogart’s apartment all right,” he recalled. “But not to have sex with Raft. She’d already done that and while going at it, sampling the actor’s legendary ‘Blacksnake’, she lost an earring that Howard had given her. Only Raft’s roomie, a then relatively unknown Bogart, was at the apartment when she came on her Easter egg hunt to retrieve the jewelry that had been lost two nights before. Raft was down in San Diego that night with one of his gangster pals, no doubt Owney Madden.”

Rod remembered that one of the two detectives turned the key to Bogart’s apartment and slipped in, trailed by another detective, Howard, and himself.

“There was no sound at first,” Rod remembered. “Then we heard the sound of a struggle coming from the bedroom. Dove screamed at Bogart. On a cue from Howard, I rushed in and snapped a picture of the scene. Bogart was jaybird naked and struggling with a fully clothed Dove. I caught him in all his uncut glory. She looked like she’d just emerged fresh from her *toilette*. Bogart may have stripped down and was hoping to accost her for some fun and games as soon as her Ladyship emerged from the crapper. I never thought Dove went to the apartment to have sex with Bogart. But horny boy that he was, he decided to take advantage of the situation. How many hot-blooded men ever get a chance to be alone in an apartment with the world’s most beautiful women? If I went in for that stuff, I couldn’t blame him.”

When Billie rushed into the living room, she confronted Howard. He hurled some accusations back at her. She shot back, “Fuck you, you impotent bastard. You god damn faggot!” She raced out the door.

“From that remark,” Rod said, “I gathered that Howard had failed to get it up like he did with Harlow,” Rod said. “But apparently, he had no trouble getting it up for Scott and Darrow.”

After one of the burly detectives ordered Bogart to dress, he was ushered into his own living room to meet the unwelcome Howard.

“One of the detectives told Bogart he was going for a ride,” Rod remembered. “To me, that meant only one thing. Howard was going to kill Bogart!”

Howard didn’t want to kill Bogart—or perhaps he would have liked to if he thought he could get away with it. Instead he “wanted to put the fear of, if not God, then Howard Hughes, in the struggling young womanizer,” as Rod St. Just later described.

Seated between two detectives, Bogart was driven to Mines Field, where aircraft used in the making of *Hell s Angels* rested. Bogart was strapped into the back seat of a two-seater plane and left with the engine idling for an hour, wondering what was going to happen to him. He’d heard that stunt pilots had died during the shooting of *Hell’s Angels*, and he was genuinely frightened. He later told his friend, fellow actor Kenneth MacKenna, that he thought “Hughes was going to have his boys work me over.”

Dressed in a leather jacket with a helmet, Howard appeared on the tarmac and got into the cockpit. Launching the airplane upward into the pinkish predawn sky, Howard had the errant Bogart at his complete mercy.

During the first fifteen minutes, it was smooth sailing among the clouds for both of them, as they had the sky over Los Angeles all to themselves except for some early rising birds.

All of a sudden Howard began to pilot the craft recklessly, as if recreating some of the ersatz dogfights that had been filmed in *Hell’s Angels*. Propelling the plane like an air show stuntman, he put the craft into a somersault. Like a dangerous missile, the plane seemed to be going into a tailspin, hurtling to the earth. The rooftops of several residential buildings came into view.

Bogart started to scream. “Don’t, you god damn fool,” he shouted. “I don’t want to die!”

At the last possible moment Howard brought the craft up from its freefall, sailing smoothly over the peaks of the buildings that could easily have become their joint burial ground. He headed into the clear sky once again as the sun came up over California. After a few more minutes, the plane landed smoothly on the tarmac.

After Howard got out of the cockpit and disappeared, the same pair of burly men who’d broken into his apartment came to unstrap Bogart from the back of the plane.

As he landed on his feet on the ground, he realized for the first time that he’d messed his pants.

Later, after he made emergency repairs in the toilet, the two “pieces of beef” directed him into Howard’s office, where the Texan sat behind his desk with his feet up, most of his face concealed in the shadow of a Fedora.

Howard came right to the point. “Listen, Bogart, and listen good. I intend to marry Billie Dove. If you make any attempt to fuck her again, you’ll be a footnote in Hollywood history—and definitely a soprano.”

Bogart protested that it was “just a prank—you know, like in college.”

Howard quickly reminded him that by tomorrow, he’d have a photograph of him with his dick hanging out.

“I’m gonna have that picture developed and maybe five thousand prints made of it. If you fuck with me at any time in the future, copies of that photograph are going to be mailed to every influential person in Hollywood. We’re talking Mayer, Thalberg, Laemmle, the works.”

“No need to do that,” Bogart said. “I’ll be a good boy. I really mean that.”

“Of course, you will.” Howard continued to study him intently. “As long as I have that picture, I can make you jump rope.”

“Maybe I’m still a little shaky from that plane ride, but I don’t get it,” Bogart said.

“Once or twice a week, I need some smooth errand boy to do a job for me,” Howard said.

“What kind of job?” Bogart asked with growing apprehension.

“No killing or stuff like that,” Howard said. “When I need to have someone’s joints realigned, I’ve got plenty of men to do that. Like those two guys who brought you to the plant. They’re good at their work. No, I’m talking something else. Some of my errands call for one of you fast-talking New York actors. A guy who can wear a tux, look presentable, and perform certain tasks for me.”

“I still don’t get it,” Bogart said.

“Why should you?” Howard asked. “There’s nothing you need to know now. When I want you to perform a task for me, I’ll get in touch with you and tell you exactly what it is I want done.”

“I guess I won’t learn about what you’ve got in mind until the time comes,” Bogart said.

“You sound like a smart man. A wimp, but smart.”

“Can I go now?” Bogart said. “I’ve got to report to the studio for a new picture I’m doing. It’s with George O’Brien.”

“I’ve seen his films,” Howard said. “Mr. Body Beautiful. I hear he bats both ways in the ballpark.”

“I haven’t personally sampled the merchandise, but I can virtually assure you that’s true.”

“Good to know that,” Howard said. “That bit of information might come in handy some day.”

Bogart saw him scribble a note in the little book he kept in his breast pocket.

“I’m going to be late for work,” Bogart said. “Can I go now?”

“Sure you can,” Howard said, “because I’m through with you, at least for the moment and I don’t want to see your ugly face again until I need you. I’ll have someone contact you.”

That was said like an ominous threat.

For some illogical reason, Howard seems to have blamed Bogart for all the trouble he’d been having with his lady love, and not the truly guilty parties, Billie and her sometimes lover, George Raft.

Bogart later told the complete story about his experience with Billie, and his demented airplane ride with Howard, to his close friend, actor Kenneth MacKenna.

Billie, who had been staying at Muirfield, engaged in a battle royal with Howard the moment he returned from Bogart’s first and most harrowing airplane flight.

Muirfield’s housekeeper, Beatrice Dowler, later reported hearing the sound of breaking crystal, screams, shouts, and recriminations, although she could not make out the exact words.

Later she heard Billie run screaming from the mansion and into the night. Howard did not follow after her, but Beatrice could still hear him shouting in rage.

Beatrice went to sleep but was awakened shortly before dawn that morning. “It sounded like explosions coming from the cellar,” she told Dietrich in a panicky phone call.

Jumping into his car wearing only his pajamas and bathrobe, he drove frantically from the cozy bed he shared with his wife in Westwood Park, fearing Howard had aroused all the neighbors. Seeing no other lights on in the high-class neighborhood, he decided the cellar at Muirfield must be well-insulated.

In the cellar, he found Howard with the Thompson submachine gun that had been used in the shoot-out scenes from *Hell’s Angels*. Howard had shot up the ceiling and shattered most of the expensive bottles of Big Howard’s pre-Prohibition liquor, which had previously been stored in Houston and in Los Angeles at the Ambassador Hotel.

“There were many rare vintages,” Dietrich later said. “Maybe with a market value of some one hundred thousand dollars. Howard had laid the bottles to waste. The whole cellar would reek of Scotch and bourbon for weeks to come.”

Dietrich later recalled that he felt Howard was “in a bad state mentally.” Actually his client was in the middle of a nervous breakdown.

With the help of two male servants, Dietrich managed to get Howard, still smelling of illegal booze, to bed. After he seemed to be resting, Dietrich hastily called Dr. Verne Mason to come and sedate his boss even further.

Shortly before dawn, Dr. Mason arrived in the driveway at Muirfield. “I don’t know what he shot into Howard’s arm, but the chief slept for two days and two nights in a row,” Dietrich recalled. “At one point I feared he might have lapsed into a coma.”

When Howard revived, he ordered Beatrice to have the kitchen staff prepare him three large steaks. He was famished.

His first call after his meal was to Billie, who tearfully claimed that when rushing out of Muirfield, she had tossed her large diamond engagement ring out the window.

Before the day ended, Howard had presented her with an even larger diamond. They re-committed themselves once again to their engagement, and Howard told Dietrich he still planned to marry Billie as soon as her divorce came through. He hadn’t heard from Willat about his blackmail threat, and he told Dietrich he was very uneasy. “The guy’s a psycho,” Howard said. “He could be plotting anything right now.”

A few days later, Howard spent the night with John Darrow at his secret retreat, Angelo. Left alone, Billie decided to attend a Hollywood party. Louella Parsons was the guest of honor.

The next morning over his glass of milk, Howard read the headlines:

“TERRIBLE CRUELTY ASSERTED BY INTERNATIONAL BEAUTY,” shouted the *Examiner*. “BILLIE DOVE SAYS WILLAT SLUGGED HER.” The headlines were true. In a call to Howard, Louella said she’d witnessed the entire incident. Willat had stormed into the party uninvited and had physically attacked Billie.

Howard immediately called Neil McCarthy, instructing him to get a restraining order against Willat and to have Billie file an assault-and-battery charge against her husband.

When Billie returned to Muirfield, she met privately in the library with Howard. Dietrich was not privy to this conversation. Billie urged Howard to stop all legal actions against Willat.

Earlier that same day, she’d met with Willat at his bungalow, and he’d shown her some items from his growing file of incriminating evidence about Howard’s secret bisexual life. At that meeting, and after having already received \$350,000 from Howard in exchange for the promise of an uncontested

divorce, Willat demanded an additional \$350,000 as a blackmail payoff.

Billie urged Howard to meet the latest demand.

Apparently, proof of Howard’s bisexuality presented no significant problem for the worldly wise Billie. “Ever since I entered show business in New York, I’ve been surrounded by homosexual or bisexual men,” she later told Dietrich. “I just assume that all men in Hollywood are like that, and I had already heard plenty of stories about Howard and Ben Lyon. How could I blame Howard? I, too, have had sex with Ben. But it’s not the men in his life I’m jealous of. It’s the women! Just don’t ever let me catch him with another woman!”

Years later, Dietrich also asserted that Billie then demanded to know if Howard had been sleeping with Jean Harlow. Dietrich went on to say that he then lied to her and assured her that Howard didn’t even like Jean.

“But if I ever catch the two of *them* together,” Billie threatened, “I’ll remove the last platinum strand from her head, leaving her platinum bald, and then I’ll go for all the platinum short hairs. I’m told she bleaches herself down there, too.”

Los Angeles, 1930

On January 2, 1930, Billie, in a black Chanel suit with pearl buttons and a black straw toque imported from Paris, made a stunning appearance before the judge in the Los Angeles Superior Court. She had arrived in Howard’s longest, blackest, and sleekest limousine. Stepping out of the car, she faced a media circus, as reporters screamed their single question: “When are you and Hughes getting married?”

Like a graceful black swan, Billie eased herself into the witness box at exactly 9:07 a.m. At 10:12 a.m., Judge Henry R. Archbald granted her petition for divorce. Willat did not show up in court to contest it. Howard’s attorney, Neil McCarthy, had done his job well. Perhaps the case had gone smoothly for them because Judge Archbald was a friend of Howard’s. They had been frequently seen together on the eighteen-hole course of the Los Angeles Country Club.

Reporters expected Howard to show up at the proceedings to lend moral support to Billie, but although he remained in telephone contact with McCarthy, he had mysteriously disappeared.

Bogart later revealed to Kenneth MacKenna exactly where Howard was that day. Under threat of blackmail because of the damaging photographs taken of him, Bogart was only too willing to do Howard’s bidding when he called to tell Bogart that he wanted him to arrange a meeting with one of Hollywood’s most handsome hunks of beefcake, George O’Brien. Howard was well aware that at the time, O’Brien and Bogart were making a movie together, *A Holy Terror*, for Fox.

O’Brien was called “The Chest.” At the time of his inaugural rendezvous with Howard, O’Brien had already had affairs with two famous bisexuals, actor Spencer Tracy and director John Ford. Howard had once ordered his projectionist to show him that epic western of the silent film, *The Iron Horse*, which O’Brien had starred in under the direction of Ford. O’Brien was even rumored to have had an affair with Rudolph Valentino when he appeared in a small part in The Sheik’s 1922 *Moran of Lady Letty*.

Howard’s long forgotten love, Antonio Moreno, had also told him that he’d once had an affair with O’Brien, so Howard knew the actor was “up for grabs,” even though he was also an addicted ladies’ man as well.

The details of what transpired when Bogart set up the Saturday night rendezvous between O’Brien and Howard will never be graphically known. But it was assumed to have been a successful romantic link because Howard took refuge in a beach house in Santa Monica with O’Brien on the day Billie went to court.

Rod St. Just, who knew both O’Brien and Hughes intimately, later claimed that “Romance never entered the picture. But they had great sex together. Although Howard had performed analingus sex on Billie Dove, he’d never done that to a man before, because he felt that men weren’t clean back there. But George turned Howard on to that pleasure.”

O’Brien was a virtual joke in Hollywood because of the obsessive care and attention he devoted to keeping a clean anus. He would tell anyone who was interested how clean he was, and even expose himself for their inspection if he detected interest. He felt that “dirty Rosebuds” led to infectious diseases and that all American homes and public buildings should install bidets.

His lecture on cleanliness appealed to germ-obsessed Howard. O’Brien maintained with complete seriousness that both men and women should keep their asshole kissing clean at all times in case they suddenly met someone who wanted to stick his or her tongue up there. “Always be prepared,” he once told Bogart.

He claimed that his rosebud (and the rest of his skin as well) was as tender as a baby’s ass because of his diet of three raw avocados a day. He suggested an avocado sandwich on white toast in the morning, an avocado with a bit of lemon juice for lunch, and a large helping of guacamole and a very rare steak at night.

“I can only assume that George and Howard discovered how immaculately clean each other’s assholes were because during the next three months Howard was on that avocado diet,” Rod claimed. “Their affair didn’t last that long because I heard George was soon back in the arms of his best friend, Spencer Tracy.”

Billie Dove had been invited to a party at the home of Jeanette MacDonald, honoring actor Kenneth MacKenna and movie diva Kay Francis. These two notorious bisexuals were planning to get married. Bogart too had been invited to the party. Oddly enough, although married at the time to Mary Philips, a Broadway actress, he was seen at the gathering with his first wife, another Broadway actress, Helen Menken.

While Bogart was giving his first-ever interview to Louella Parsons, Howard placed a call to him. One of his spies had just told him that Willat was on the way to the party for a post-divorce showdown with Billie, and he was ordered to remove her at once from the party without arousing suspicion.

While still under the threat of blackmail, Bogart had no choice but to do Howard’s bidding.

Bogart’s attempt to rescue Billie came a little too late. As he walked into the living room, filled with *le tout* Hollywood, Willat had already barged in to confront his former wife. He was shouting at her that “Hughes will never marry you, you tramp!”

Seeing Carole Lombard, he called her a slut and a bitch and falsely accused her of carrying on an affair with Howard at the time, even though the

couple had broken up months before and she was with William Powell that night.

Moving toward Billie, Willat slapped her so hard she fell to the floor. Powell and another actor, Charles Bickford, restrained the bull-necked director. The party's hostess, Jeanette MacDonald, rushed into her living room and ordered Willat out of the house.

The next morning, Louella Parsons would write, "Instead of the peace dove, the menace of a constant beating from her former husband, Irwin Willat, hovers over the head of pretty Billie Dove."

Arriving at Muirfield, Bogart turned Billie over to a concerned Howard, who ushered her upstairs to a bedroom, summoning his housekeeper, Beatrice, to tend to her, as her face was streaked with tears. Bogart discreetly did not tell Howard that Willat had attacked his wife once again.

A servant ushered Bogart into the library where he was surprised to find a good-looking trio of actors, Billy Haines, Ben Lyon, and Randolph Scott.

Before Bogart arrived with Billie, Howard had been discussing a script prepared by Ben Hecht, the best screenwriter in Hollywood. Called *Queer People*, it was based on a novel by two brothers, Carroll and Garrett Graham, and was a seething indictment of Hollywood. It was also the most viciously anti-Semitic scenario ever presented for possible filming until Joseph Goebbels would make such films in Berlin during the Nazi era.

Howard asked Bogart if he'd consider appearing in the upcoming film as a right-wing newspaper columnist, a character that was obviously based on Walter Winchell. Howard mentioned that he was going to ask Bogart's friend, Spencer Tracy, to play a role patterned on Louis B. Mayer in gross caricature.

The lead was intended for Billy Haines, playing a Hollywood reporter through whose eyes the story unfolds. Howard knew that Ben was under strain that night and didn't want to be in the same room with Randolph Scott, suspecting that his close friendship with Howard had been usurped by this good-looking Virginian. Ben viewed Randolph as a money-grubbing hustler out to use Howard.

Only an hour earlier, Ben had protested to Howard that he was desperate for another role. He claimed that after one hundred and five weeks of making both the silent and talking versions of *Hell's Angels*, his fan mail had dwindled from a thousand letters a week to only two dozen. "I've been off the screen for so long that my fans have forgotten me," he protested to Howard, who consented to cast him in *Queer People* as a scheming Hollywood agent.

Seated in the library, Billy read the script aloud. Bogart appeared to be dismayed by its anti-Semitic portraits, but Randolph clearly approved, since the scenario seemed to match his own belief that Jews were taking over Hollywood and destroying it. At one point, Randolph interrupted Billy's reading to tell Howard, "If anybody's got the balls to film this, you're the guy, Howard."

Howard told them that he wanted to cast Billie Dove and Ramon Novarro as a Hollywood couple, both big stars, trapped in a loveless marriage. Randolph would be cast as a handsome cowboy who arrives in Hollywood to become another Tom Mix. In the script, he falls for Billie, rescues her from her loveless marriage and from Hollywood itself, and all its "vicious Jews," and rides off into the sunset with her. Very little of this new script had anything to do with the original novel.

When Billy Haines finished reading the script, Howard thought the happy ending was a bit corny "but we can work on it," he assured the men.

For the next few months and up until the end of the summer of 1931, Howard would have the script revised time and time again, with a constantly changing plot. When word of its possible production leaked out, he received several death threats. A Jew, Joe Schenck, even threatened to sabotage distribution of *Hell's Angels* if Howard didn't abandon his plans to film *Queer People*.

Finally, Louis B. Mayer, accompanied by an unlikely ally, Joseph Kennedy, arrived at Muirfield for a private meeting with Howard. Beatrice later claimed that the conference went on for about an hour in Howard's library. She said she heard all three men shouting at each other. Finally, Kennedy and Mayer left. Beatrice did not know what threats Mayer and Kennedy made to Howard, but she said he was despondent for days.

Howard already hated Mayer. After that day, he would develop a lifelong hatred of Kennedy as well.

One morning Howard called his publicity department and told them to release a story to the press. In the release, he announced that "*Queer People* would have taken the public behind the scenes of Hollywood. I regret we were not allowed to make it."

Since he was one of the richest men in the world and an independent film producer, the release left reporters stunned. Who was responsible for pulling the plug?

The newsmen were never able to answer that one, and Howard refused to speak of the film ever again.

As Howard prepared for the gala opening of *Hell's Angels*, Noah Dietrich rushed into his office with the latest upset. Once in Howard's office with the door shut, Dietrich spread out a series of eight photographs.

They had been taken by photographer Edwin Bower Hesser. Five of them portrayed a seventeen-year-old Jean Harlow wearing only a diaphanous scarf that clearly revealed her breasts and her body. The other three were full frontal nudes without any cover-up.

Hesser himself was not the blackmailer. Someone had stolen the pictures from his studio and was attempting to use them to blackmail Howard on the eve of his release of *Hell's Angels*.

"Before you release *Hell's Angels*, we'll expose these pictures of your little blondie if you don't cough up fifty thousand dollars," the blackmail note said. "We hear you've invested four million in your movie. Don't you think it's worth another fifty thousand bucks to save your star's reputation?" The note ended abruptly with a postscript that the blackmailers would soon be in touch with instructions about where the money was to be delivered.

Dietrich was in a quandary, wanting to save Howard's investment. In those days, nude pictures of a star could mean the death of a career. Howard seemed puzzled and confused, not knowing if he should give in to the blackmailers. He immediately called his attorney. Neil McCarthy asked that the pictures be delivered to him.

After viewing them, he called Howard and suggested that he pay the blackmailers off. "I don't like to give in to blackmailers. But you've lost millions and Toolco has almost run out of ready cash. *Hell's Angels* is your big gamble. Maybe you should pay and call it insurance on your film's release, and thereby avoid a scandal."

After days of trying to figure out what to do, Howard did nothing, ignoring the advice of McCarthy and Dietrich. Amazingly, he was right about this decision. Often, in his past, he had made the wrong choices. For some strange reason, the blackmailers never contacted him again, and left no instructions about how the money was to be delivered to them.

After Jean became a more established star, the blackmail pictures would surface one more time. But then, instead of involving Howard, the blackmailers approached Jean directly with a threat to destroy her career.

At the time Jean was having an affair with Abner (“Longy”) Zwillman, who had just given her a shiny new red Cadillac. Once again, the blackmailers were asking for fifty thousand dollars.

As Howard learned, Jean secretly took the blackmail threat to Longy, asking his help. This time the blackmailers set up a secret rendezvous where the money was to be delivered. That meeting between Longy’s men and the two blackmailers occurred in the middle of the night. The next morning, the blackmailers, both of them gangsters from New York, were found shot in the head, their bodies dumped onto a beach at Laguna. No arrests were ever made.

When Dietrich informed Howard of the killings, he said, “I think actual murder is carrying it a bit far. However, there are times, I suppose, when murder is the easiest way out. At least it doesn’t cost much money to have someone bumped off.” Considering what was going to happen to Howard in the years to come, Dietrich wondered if that afternoon was providing some insight into his own future dealings with blackmailers.

The nude pictures of Jean Harlow would surface after her death, and some of them would actually be published. At that point, their release could hardly harm a career that had gone to the grave.

Although Howard never got directly involved in the battle over the nude pictures of Harlow, he would later become intimately involved in another nude picture scandal of yet another blonde bombshell: Marilyn Monroe.

Hollywood, 1930

On the night of May 27, 1930, Grauman’s Chinese Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard was the site of the world premiere of *Hell’s Angels*. Tinseltown would never see the likes of such a gala opening again.

Working hand in hand with Howard, master showman Sid Grauman accepted forty thousand dollars in expenses to help stage the event. He secured the help of local police in blocking off a huge part of the boulevard for the gawking spectators. Only six hundred policemen were on hand that night to tame a crowd whose size ranged, by various estimates, anywhere from 15,000 to half a million.

A full mile of the boulevard was lit with 185 white arc lights, sending columns of light into the sky to compete with the moon and outdazzle the stars. At every intersection were cutouts of the Hughes Fighting Force—DeHavillands, Snipes, Grummans, Fokkers, and Zeppelins.

Klieg lights scanned the skies as if searching for enemy aircraft. When Howard’s stunt pilots roared in, they were part of a friendly fighter squadron, dropping flares. They emitted ribbons of smoke colored patriotically in red, white and blue. Not only that, but Howard had hired stuntmen to parachute out of the planes and onto Hollywood Boulevard. Except for one pilot who landed on a jagged wrought-iron fence, and “ruined his married life,” the stunt went off successfully.

Fan-shaped clusters of red, blue, and yellow lights were installed in the Hollywood Hills to shine down on the theater.



Jean Harlow

Caught in the biggest traffic jam the West had ever known, Howard, in his limousine with Billie Dove, arrived an hour late for the première. The curtain was held. Howard was dressed in a specially made tailored tuxedo that would have made Big Howard proud, and Billie had on a baby blue gown of satin and held a nosegay of violet-colored orchids.

But it was actually Jean Harlow, who was riding in the limousine in front, who received the loudest and most vocal reception when she arrived at the première. A large blowup of her, dressed in a sexy gown and illuminated in red, had enthralled the audience. But when the Duesenberg that contained her arrived at the entrance to the theater, the spectators were enthralled with the real thing.

Out stepped Jean Harlow, swathed in white fur, with startling platinum-colored hair that the press was still calling “flaxen.” Actually in spite of her cool demeanor, she was shaking in fear, fully expecting that the audience would respond to her performance with boos and hisses.

Her porcelain skin was made even whiter by a scarlet slash of lipstick. Borrowed diamonds hung from the neck of this one hundred dollar a week mama. Her white satin gown, revealing her breasts, looked like it had been painted on. Both men and women screamed at the sight of her beauty. Ominously, her escort was Paul Bern, who would figure so violently in her future.

Even before the masses had seen the movie, it was evident that Hollywood had crowned a new goddess. Other actresses didn’t know it at the time, but their own crowns had already slipped from their heads. Clara Bow, Corrine Griffith, Colleen Moore, Mary Pickford, Gloria Swanson, and even Billie Dove had each begun their respective declines into obscurity.

Ben Lyon and Bebe Daniels were met with less enthusiastic applause. John Darrow and James Hall, the other stars of the picture, arrived separately. John was furious that he couldn't ride in the same limousine as Howard. "I have as much right to him as that bitch, Dove," he complained to Hall.

In a string of other limousines, Hollywood royalty spilled out onto the red carpet, none more notable than Charlie Chaplin and Gloria Swanson. It was a gala night that brought out showman Florenz Ziegfeld and his wife, Billie Burke, along with Jerome Kern, Buster Keaton, Irving Berlin, Leslie Howard, Maurice Chevalier, Lionel Barrymore, Cecil B. DeMille, and Dolores del Rio.

As Howard, Billie, and Jean paraded into the theater to sit down, they received a standing ovation from the 1,024-member audience who had each paid eleven dollars a ticket, an alltime high price at the time. The actual scalper's price was fifty dollars a ticket. Howard had time only to take in the scarlet curtain onto which a picture of a Sopwith Camel had been painted.

Master of Ceremonies, Frank Fay, a big star at the time and known today as Barbara Stanwyck's first husband, opened at ten o'clock with the one-hour vaudeville show that preceded the actual presentation of the film. Mrs. Alice Vernon's Dancing Poodles led the way to the star act of the night, Captain Roscoe Turner and his pet lion cub, "Gilmore." Only two hours before, they had landed from New York on a transcontinental flight that had broken world records. In a few short years, Howard would break that record himself.

The curtain went up at eleven o'clock. The scenes of aerial combat mesmerized the audience who had never seen anything like it. With her atrociously bad acting, Jean escaped ridicule because of her stunning looks, although Mordaunt Hall of *The New York Times* dismissed her as "mediocre." Audiences giggled at Ben's overacting, especially at his hysteria in a scene where he is captured by Germans.

All in all, it was the grandest night Hollywood had ever seen, even though a bitter economic depression had come to the land about seven months before. At long last, Howard, the "sucker kid with the money," was a big name in the picture business. More films loomed in his future.

For the next nineteen weeks, the film played to capacity audiences. Howard and Billie attended the premiere in New York, where it opened simultaneously within two separate theaters. *Hell's Angels* was also a success in London, where audiences thrilled to the scenes of aerial combat, and didn't ridicule the so-called English accents of Ben Lyon, Jean Harlow, and James Hall.

In London, *The Daily Express* called it "the greatest masterpiece the screen has ever known." At home, the critical reaction was a bit harsher, although no one faulted the dogfight scenes. Jean's plunging neckline and her platinum hair thrilled audiences as much as did the aerial combat.

Critics weren't so sure. *The New Yorker* found Jean "just plain awful." As for her own performance, Jean defined it as "a bitch in heat."

Robert E. Sherwood, the Pulitzer Prize winning author, wrote: "The leading players include an obstreperously alluring young lady named Jean Harlow, of whom not much more is likely to be heard." How wrong he was. He also wrote that, "If the lamentable truth must be known, *Hell's Angels* is pretty much of a mess."

Dietrich later claimed that in spite of the picture's great success, it lost one and a half million dollars of its four million dollar investment. Actually, it didn't. *Hell's Angels* would play for twenty years, grossing eight million dollars, paying back its original cost and earning a four million dollar profit.

As movie audiences across the nation lined up to see *Hell's Angels* and Jean Harlow's breasts, Howard, along with Billie Dove, sailed to Europe on a vacation.

Aboard the *Europa*, Howard left New York harbor with Billie, her eight trunks of clothing (she was bringing Paris *couture* to Paris), her two boxes of jewelry (mostly gifts from Howard), and her two maids (one white, one black).

The trip was relatively uneventful as they acted and behaved like rich American tourists, visiting the usual haunts in London, Paris, and Venice.

As Howard was to tell Dietrich, his days abroad with Billie were to be the "most idyllic" of his life. In her, he'd found "both a mother and a girlfriend combined into one."

As Billy Haines privately joked back in Hollywood, "Howard carried out the incest that he'd contemplated but never really followed through with Allene Hughes."

During the first week of their serious dating, Billie had become aware of Howard's deafness problem. Exaggerating her words, she spoke while looking right into his face so he could read her lips even if he couldn't always hear her.

Through the completion of *Hell's Angels* and beyond, Howard continued to bombard her with proposals of marriage. She kept turning him down and continued to conduct secret affairs in spite of her being tailed by his spies. Every week or so she arranged to slip away from the private dicks and go up the freight elevator to a suite at the Ambassador Hotel. Once there, she received George Raft, resuming the love-making they had known since their early show business days in New York.

To Raft, she confessed that Howard had periods of impotence that lasted for days. "He bears a terrible burden," she told Raft who in turn told others. "He's known for his conquests of women—only the most beautiful of course—but it's not because of an overpowering sex drive. He wants the reputation for seducing the world's most beautiful women. But this is often mere myth."

From Vienna, Billie expressed a desire to see the beautiful city of Prague. But she had a motive other than seeing that city's fabled baroque architecture. Somehow she managed to get Howard's permission to have his hearing tested by Dr. Karl Bruner, one of the world's greatest specialists on hearing disorders.

After the tests, Dr. Bruner reported an astonishing hearing loss of 40% for Howard. He was also said to have developed tinnitus, subjecting him to a constant ringing in the ears. Not only that, but he suffered from otosclerosis, an abnormal growth of bone in the middle ear. The condition would only grow worse.

For some reason Howard did not attend the premiere of *Hell's Angels* at the London Pavilion. Had he, he would have met the Duke and Duchess of York, who during World War II were to rule as King George VI and Queen Elizabeth.

While abroad, Howard plotted the future direction of Billie's career. He wanted to be in complete charge.

Upon Howard's return to America, Noah Dietrich waited with some shocking news.

Hell s Angels and the Wall Street collapse had virtually bankrupted Howard, with Toolco's cash reserves dropping to less than one hundred thousand dollars.

At breakfast at Muirfield, Dietrich said, "This is a real secret and word must not get out. But to put it bluntly, you're broke. We've milked the cow too many times. She's gone dry on us."

His accountant showed him the bitter truth on paper. For the first time since 1912, Toolco was losing money. The depression that lay across the land

had finally come to rest at Muirfield's door. It must have been humiliating for Howard to learn that a payment in the divorce settlement with Ella was due, and he would have to default.

"Howard, I hate to say it, but you can no longer afford Billie Dove," Dietrich said.

"What in hell do you mean, Noah?"

"You've spent a million and a half on her already. You paid Willat big bucks for the uncontested divorce. The *Rodeo* ate up \$350,000. The trip to Europe cost \$25,000. Neil McCarthy got another \$25,000 for Billie's divorce. That doesn't include jewelry."

Worse news was yet to come. Stopping over in New York with Billie, Howard, acting on an "insider's tip," had purchased a significant number of blue-chip Chrysler bonds. The next day, the bottom fell out of Chrysler. The bonds were worthless. In one night, on a supposedly very safe investment in the bond market, Howard had lost another four million dollars.

To save the day, Dietrich desperately negotiated a loan from City Bank-Farmer's Trust Company for 2.7 million dollars. Howard agreed to cut his expenses to \$250,000 a year. An agreement was reached with Ella's brother-in-law, William S. Farish, to stagger his divorce installments throughout the Thirties, with a final payoff scheduled for sometime in 1939.

Until she was paid in full, Ella was to hold in trust 25 percent of Toolco stock. In a humiliating concession, Howard agreed to obtain Ella's approval, in writing, for any expenditure greater than \$100,000.

The final blow came when Howard agreed with his former brother-in-law not to make any more films until 1939, although he was allowed to go ahead with the five films which he'd already launched. He wanted those films to star his lady love, Miss Billie Dove.

Hollywood moguls did not know that Howard was broke, and rumors spread that he was about to purchase Paramount, United Artists, Fox, Warner Brothers, Universal, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and First National. What he did instead was urge Billie to end her contract with First National and work exclusively with him. His Caddo films signed her to a very lucrative contract for five pictures.

Howard ignored putting a limitation on his spending and gave Billie *carte blanche* to redecorate Muirfield. In his garage, two shiny new vehicles appeared, a fashionable Duesenberg coupe and a Rolls Royce Silver Cloud. When the Los Angeles Public Library asked him for a \$10,000 contribution, he turned them down but lavished another \$25,000 on jewelry for Billie.

"When he was absent from her, he sent her jewelry," Dietrich later said. "That meant Billie got a lot of jewelry."

His other mistress, Jean Harlow, was kept in virtual poverty, as she was still under contract to him, working for less money than any star in Hollywood. He had no immediate plans for her, but was finding it lucrative to lend her out to other studios, taking the profits she reaped for himself.

Someone had written that Jean had a "slightly lazy sexual aggression," and Howard agreed with that, or so he told Billy Haines in trying to explain why he kept having sex with his number one star. Nonetheless, they weren't always loving. Often they were fighting. Jean kept demanding more money, and Howard kept turning her down. She was trapped into a contract that had been negotiated before she'd become a star.

Executives at First National over the years spread conflicting stories about why they released Billie Dove from her contract. In her first talkie, "her voice had a silken quality and recorded well," said one executive. But others at the studio were more critical, finding her "voice too high and a bit shrill."

Part of this problem could be blamed on the primitive recording devices in use at the time. One publicist, Glenn Richards, said, "Frankly, we were glad to get rid of Billie. Although she was still box office dynamite when Hughes acquired her services, in reality her career was at an end. She would never regain the lofty position she held in silent pictures. The coming of sound meant twilight time for her. Audiences stayed away in droves from her talkies."

Seemingly unaware of that, Howard acquired the script for *The Age for Love* for her. Based on a novel by Ernest Pascal, the script was turned over to Robert E. Sherwood, who had so vehemently attacked the scenario of *Hell's Angels* in the press. "If he thinks he can come up with a great script, let the asshole try," Howard told director Frank Lloyd.

As it turned out, Sherwood was a better critic of movies than a scriptwriter. When the film was released, *Variety* proclaimed, "It takes 81 minutes to tell practically nothing."

Howard had cast Charles Starrett as Billie's leading man in this lukewarm melodrama of married life that was eventually razzed by audiences when it was presented at the Rivoli Theatre in New York.

Legend has it that Starrett as an actor came to Howard's attention while he was filming *Damaged Love* with June Collyer, with whom Howard had a brief flirtation. The film had been directed by Irvin Willat during the breakup of his marriage with Billie. The bullnecked director was a tarantula at any time, but was especially difficult during the filming of the appropriately named picture, *Damaged Love*. He became so tyrannical in his demands with Starrett that the former football player punched him in the nose, breaking it. When Howard heard the story, he told June Collyer, "Any enemy of an enemy of mine is a friend of mine. Starrett gets the part."

"Billie may or may not have known—she probably did know, it was that obvious—but Hughes fell for that strapping Charlie in a big way," Frank Lloyd later revealed. "It was obvious to the entire cast. But there was a real problem here. Charlie was strictly heterosexual. He complained to me that Hughes was in hot pursuit of him. He didn't want to anger such a powerful producer at the beginning of his career, but he didn't want to go to bed with him either."

When asked who won out, Lloyd confessed that Howard did. "I know for a fact that they flew away for three or four weekends together to God knows where. I don't know what sexual arrangement they finally made with each other, but I'd bet my left toe that Charlie never reciprocated. He probably let himself be serviced and that was it."

Although years later he ended up looking like a broken down old cowpoke riding off into the sunset, Charles Starrett, at the time of his casting in *The Age for Love*, was considered by some critics "as the handsomest man in movies." This good-looker had once been a member of the Dartmouth College football team, and had an athletic physique to go with a male beauty that caused women in the audience to swoon.

This six-foot two hunk of beefcake was just breaking into movies when Howard discovered him. Like Howard, he was the scion of a rich tool company, the Starrett Tool and Die Works of Massachusetts. Tall and self-assured, he projected romantic thrills onto the screen. Before meeting Howard, he'd had an affair with one of the actresses playing opposite him *Loose*, Carole Lombard, and offscreen she'd sung praises about his prowess in the bedroom.



Charles Starrett and Billie Dove
in *The Age for Love*

The actual star of *Fast and Loose* was the compulsively vivacious Miriam Hopkins, making her movie debut. The Georgia belle, who Tennessee Williams would one day call “our finest Southern actress” as a dig against Tallulah Bankhead, originally wanted to seduce Starrett, but the New England-born actor was not turned on by her soon-to-be famous gestures and endless chattering, which he called, “flim-flam.” Carole easily made off with the linebacker stud.

As it turned out, Charles Starrett didn’t need Howard to jump-start his career. After a lackluster beginning in films, he became one of the film industry’s top Western stars playing *The Durango Kid*, beginning with a 1940 Columbia Western that took off at the box office. The hit led to a string of Durango Kid oaters that made Starrett one of the most popular Western heroes of the silver screen. What the character of Hopalong Cassidy did for William Boyd, *The Durango Kid* did for Charles Starrett.

Still athletic and handsome in his white Stetson, black shirt, and a long flowing scarf, Starrett remained a matinee idol until the early 1950s. His beautiful silk scarf, it was later learned, was actually a piece of silk taken from a nightgown which Rita Hayworth, a future lover of Howard’s, once wore in a movie.

Starrett, years later at his home in Laguna Beach, California, still remembered Howard with bitterness. “He had money and he had power, and he used both unwisely. He took advantage in very unfair and cruel ways.”

Almost blind and in failing health, he refused to go into any more details. “I never meant to become a Western star,” he said. “I really wanted to be a romantic lead. Hughes was going to do that for me. I’m sick of reading books about what a great ladies’ man Hughes was. That wasn’t the Hughes I knew back in the days when movies were learning to talk. Case closed!”

Rather pretty by normal standards, actress Lois Wilson, a close friend of Gloria Swanson, and a WAMPUS Baby Star of 1922, was also cast in *The Age for Love*. Up to then, her most notable film had been James Cruze’s *The Covered Wagon*, in which she’d co-starred with the homosexual actor, J. Warren Kerrigan, leading to false reports of some big romance between them. Howard had been impressed with her interpretation of Daisy in the first version of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* in 1926. That film is believed to be lost today.

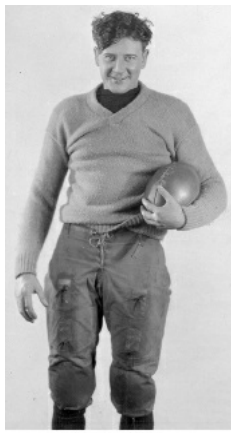
During the making of *The Age for Love*, Lois was romantically linked with the steely eyed and square jawed Richard Dix, a former football and baseball player. Richard had been her co-star in the 1926 version of *Let’s Get Married*.

Howard didn’t interfere with Frank Lloyd’s direction of *The Age for Love*, but appeared frequently on the set, as did Richard himself. The two men bonded, and Howard was further impressed when Richard won a best actor nomination for Edna Ferber’s *Cimarron*, which was named best picture of the year in 1931.

Usually when Howard was interested in someone, he invited the person, male or female, to “come fly with me.” In the case of Richard and Lois, he often invited both of them to fly with him simultaneous ly, at one point taking them to San Francisco, where they shared a suite with two bedrooms. Perhaps by inviting them as a couple, he diverted the suspicions of Billie Dove.

Howard often talked about putting Richard Dix under personal contract, but nothing ever came of that. In 1927, Richard had been Paramount’s topmoney-maker, earning an impressive salary of \$4,500 a week.

Where was Billie Dove all this time? She was busy playing the lead in her first movie for Howard, and also avidly pursuing both golf and flying lessons. To teach her to fly, Howard hired J. B. Alexander, still one of the best pilots in California. And for her golf lessons, Howard hired a handsome RichardDix young golf pro, Roy Wilde, known at the time as one of the best golf instructors in California. Standing six feet two inches and hailing from Lincoln, Nebraska, Wilde had blond hair, blue eyes, and what was called “the perfect physique.” Actors, directors, and producers seemed to be constantly telling him that he “should be in pictures.”



Richard Dix

Both as a golf instructor and as a social ornament at their parties, Wilde was eagerly sought out by the Hollywood elite. Ever the sexual opportunist, Roy slept with both men and women. It is believed, but not known for certain, that Howard had an affair with Roy. They were often seen in the sauna and showering together, and Howard invited him to Muirfield for several weekends.

Billie Dove's busy schedule of movie-making, golf, and flying lessons left Howard more available for Lois and Richard. Howard never did much talking, but always seemed a fascinated listener as the stars told him of their early struggles in motion pictures. Lois was nine years older than Howard, and Richard was twelve years older.

Howard was particularly fascinated with stories about Rudolph Valentino, with whom Lois had co-starred in his 1924 flop, *Monsieur Beaucaire*. Lois always claimed that Valentino told her that he'd never slept with either of his two wives, Jean Acker and Natacha Rambova.

What intrigued Howard even more were tales about the battles Lois had with her director, Irwin Willat, at Paramount during the 1925 filming of *Rugged Water*. "He's a complete sadist," Lois told Howard. "Billie Dove was a fool to marry that monster." Although he'd heard such stories before, Howard was also amused at how Cecil B. DeMille, a foot fetishist, had worshipped Lois's toes in 1922 during the filming of *Manslaughter*.

Many years later, from the premises of her elegantly decorated Sutton Place apartment in New York City, Lois recalled Howard with both amusement and sadness. "I think he was a very lonely man," she claimed. "Believe it or not, he had a hard time forming a relationship with man or woman. At the time I met him, Richard and I were planning to be married. I'm sorry we didn't go through with it. Louella Parsons was always ranting that Billie was the love of Howard's life. But I had my suspicions. I noticed that he could have been with Billie a lot more frequently if he'd really loved her all that much. Although I'm sure they were lovers, they spent a lot of time away from each other during the so-called white heat of their affair. If Howard Hughes ever had a love of his life, it was Cary Grant. It was most definitely not Billie Dove. And certainly not Katharine Hepburn."

"I think Howard was physically attracted to me," Lois said. "He made that very obvious, time and time again, including one occasion in my dressing room when he made a clumsy attempt to seduce me. Frankly, I think he was more attracted to Richard than to me. Richard once admitted to me that in his early days in Hollywood, he'd had sex with men, although in the main he was a great ladies' man. Even so, he spent a few private weekends with Howard."

She recalled her final meeting with Howard after the wrap on filming for *The Age for Love*. "Richard and I were having a rather romantic evening at my place when the doorbell rang. Answering it, I was surprised to see Howard standing on the doorstep looking rather forlorn. Of course, I invited him in."

"Richard and I were planning a night with just the two of us, but Howard stayed and stayed, talking about anything, about nothing at all. Finally, when it was three o'clock in the morning, Richard asked him to leave. He looked very disappointed. It was like we hurt his feelings. Later that morning, Richard and I talked it over. Both of us believed that Howard had come over to join us in bed. He didn't exactly ask, but he made it obvious. I guess you might say we turned him down. He was insulted, because he never saw either one of us ever again."

Howard decided to humiliate Bogart once or twice again for his attempt to seduce Billie. Fearing trouble if he didn't respond, the young Bogart arrived at Muirfield mansion and was ushered into a garden-like living room by a male servant. Bogart later reported in detail the angry exchange he heard between Howard and Jean Harlow to his friend, Kenneth MacKenna.

As Bogart came into the room, he looked at Jean, who was dressed entirely in white, including her stockings and her shoes. Howard was seated serenely in a Queen Anne armchair, the wings evoking some heavenly throne. Both Jean and Howard just briefly acknowledged Bogart's presence.

"Bogart," Jean said, "I don't care if you hear this or not." A mask of contempt came across her slightly puffy albino face as she looked over at Howard. "I was just telling this fairy here that I'm god damn tired of working for one hundred dollars a week on a five-year contract. I want out!"

"I'm forced to lend you out to other studios," Howard said, "because I have nothing for you now. Any more movies I produce will call for a real actress. You can't act and you can't be directed. You're nothing but a one-dimensional vamp. You can wear low-cut gowns, seduce men, smoke, and drink—that's it."

"In *Hell's Angels*, I did everything you asked me to. I really suffered. Standing under those bright lights sixteen hours a day until I got Klieg eyes. I laid around with burnt eyeballs for six weeks."

"During which you were sent a weekly paycheck from my office," Howard said. "Don't forget that."



Humphrey Bogart

“Who could forget your crummy little check,” she shouted at him. “Not even enough to pay the grocery bill.”

“It’s enough for you to live on,” he said. “But you’re supporting your mother and that Wop lover of hers.”

“Yeah, I’ve got a family to take care of—that’s true,” she said. “I’m also the biggest name in pictures. And the most underpaid. You found that out on that fucking train ride we took East. Big names were aboard that train. That French fairy, Maurice Chevalier. Miss Billie Dove, most beautiful woman on earth. And the richest man in America. Mr. Howard Hughes of Texas. But tell Bogart who the public turned out to see at every stop we made. Jean Harlow! I’ll say it again, you deaf faggot. *Jean Harlow*. That’s star power, baby, and don’t you forget it!”

“Okay, okay,” he said, growing impatient with her. “You’re a fucking star. So what? Do you think you’re the only star I’ve ever known? The only star I’ve ever fucked? I can sign up any star in Hollywood I want. I can fuck them too. When Howard Hughes calls, they come running.”

“That’s not because you’re such a great lay, baby,” she said. She glanced at Bogart who was already deep into his second drink.

“I’ve had better lays from gas jockeys I pulled into the back seat of my car while they were filling up my tank,” she said. She looked at Howard. “Did I make you jealous? Little baby Howie here specializes in gas jockeys. It’s his favorite form of amusement. I think the smell of gasoline on their sweaty male bodies is an aphrodisiac to him.”

“Shut your fucking face, you bitch,” Howard said.

“Because of the contract,” she said to Bogart, “he keeps me chained to him. All he does is lend me out.”

“At least you got to fuck both Johnny Mack Brown and Clark Gable in *The Secret Six*,” Howard said. “There were some fringe benefits to that job.”

“Yeah,” she said in shrill contempt. “You’d kick Gable out after one night. What a disappointment. But Johnny boy is your type.”

“I heard when you fucked up that shitty little boxing flick, *The Iron Man*, you even seduced Lew Ayres, and most of the time he’s a pansy,” Howard charged.

“Don’t put Lew down,” she said. “He might take it up the ass, but he can also get it up for a woman.” She went over and placed her face right up against Howard’s. “That’s something no mere woman can count on Howard Hughes doing for her. The tall, rich Texan and his very unreliable erection.”

Impulsively he slapped her face. She backed away from him, rubbing her cheek, and walked toward Bogart at the bar. “Impotent men like to beat up on women. They figure if they can’t fuck them, they can always beat the shit out of them.”

Bolting down a drink, Jean stood on wobbly white high heels to look over at Howard. “I happen to know you got one thousand big ones a week for lending me out for *The Public Enemy*.”

“I also raised your salary to two hundred a week,” he said. “But until you came along, I’d never heard the word tramp used on the screen before to describe a woman. Tramp used to mean Chaplin’s *The Little Tramp*. But in your case, the word fits.”

It was Jean who slapped Howard this time. He stood back from her but didn’t strike her.

She burst into tears. “Please, Howard, allow Joe Schenck to transfer my contract over to Goldwyn. You have no roles for me, no future plans. It’s obvious: we’re going nowhere together as a team.”

As if to pay her back for that slap, he looked at her cruelly. “Goldwyn’s not interested. He’s already turned you down. He also got a call from Darryl Zanuck at Warner’s. He told Goldwyn you’re the worst actress in Hollywood. He said directors have to cut many of your scenes because you simply can’t act them out. Maybe Mayer will go for you.” Suddenly, he grabbed Jean by her platinum hair. He yanked a strand, as if holding it up for Bogart to inspect. “What do you think?” he asked. “A woman whose fame lies in the color of her bleached hair.”



Lew Ayres

“Hey, pal,” Bogart said, “let’s cut out the rough stuff.”

Jean ran to the other side of the room where she seemed to summon her strength. She walked back to confront Howard. “So you won’t give in to my demands.” She placed her hand on her hip as she did in the movies. “If I’m gonna go work for Louis B. Mayer in the future, I’m gonna have to get used to dealing with bigger shits than you. I think you’d better listen to me.” She lifted her chin up toward Howard’s face and glared defiantly at him. “Or else...”

“What else?” he asked. “You think you can blackmail me? Others have tried. When you’ve got money, the whole world is trying to blackmail you. What are you going to do? Call Louella Parsons and tell her we had an affair. Parsons already knows that.”

“No,” she said. “I’m not calling any one columnist. Tomorrow morning, I’m calling a whole god damn press conference. I’m gonna announce to the world the fact that I’m pregnant. And...” She paused, looking at Howard with a certain kind of glee. “And I’m telling all the boys who show up with their cameras that Howard Hughes is the father. On one of the few nights he could get it up for a woman, Hughes became the papa of my bastard baby. I’m carrying around little Howard Hughes Jr. in my gut.”

“Wouldn’t it be Howard Hughes the Third?” Bogart corrected her.

Howard called Dr. Verne Mason to sedate Jean for the night. Afterward, he ushered Bogart to an upstairs bedroom where Billie Dove waited impatiently. Beautifully dressed and made up, she hardly acknowledged Bogart but turned her immediate attention to Howard instead. “What have you decided to do?”

“I’m going to buy the bastard off,” Howard said. “Not with the million dollars he’s demanding, but with half a million. All in cash.”

“Irwin, that prick, will be fixed for the rest of his life, and may he choke on it,” she said.

As Bogart was to learn, Willat had already been paid \$350,000 for allowing Billie to divorce him. But Willat was now making yet another, all-new demand for yet another payment, this one totaling \$500,000. And Bogart, to his chagrin, was being coerced into accompanying Billie across town to Willat’s bungalow to retrieve it.

“Bogart will take you there,” Howard said to her. “Make sure you have all the evidence before you turn the money over to him. Also, my lawyers want him to sign a document. See that Bogart witnesses it.”

“I know the bull-necked son-of-a-bitch very well,” she said. “You’re worried that he’ll keep hitting you again and again. But I think this is it. Irwin got a total of \$850,000 thanks to me, all in cash. It doesn’t matter if he never directs another film. He’s a lousy director anyway.”

“You’re turning out to be an expensive bauble,” Howard said in a voice with a sharp bite.

She picked up a hairbrush from her vanity table and threw it at him. “I’m not a god damn bauble. Your first payoff to Irwin saved you a hell of a lot more money than it cost you. If Willat had contested his divorce from me, and named you as an adulterer, Ella Rice would have taken far more than a million dollars from you in that divorce settlement. And this payoff tonight has nothing to do with me. It’s payment for your own mistakes. If my boyfriend, Mr. Howard Hughes, didn’t have a fondness for plugging young men in the ass, he wouldn’t be in the trouble he’s in now.”

Her words angered him so much he looked as if he wanted to strike her. Before storming out of the room, he turned to Bogart. “She’ll tell you what to do.”

In the middle of the night, Bogart drove Billie across town to Willat’s bungalow where the blackmail money was paid. The director turned over all his evidence and never again pressed Howard for more cash.

In spite of the commercial failure of *The Age for Love*, Howard moved quickly forward with yet another picture, *Cock of the Air*, for Billie. Once again, he brought back Robert Sherwood to write the scenario. To save money on the aerial scenes, he planned to draw on the massive inventory of out-takes for *Hell’s Angels*. Cast opposite Billie was Chester Morris playing a dashing young American aviator modeled to some degree on Howard himself. “Cock of the Air,” Howard said smugly to Dietrich. “The story of my life.”

Because of censorship issues, the steamy love scenes that Howard had arranged between Billie and her leading man largely ended up on the cutting-room floor.

Biographers have long speculated about why Billie Dove left Howard Hughes. The other “Billy,” actor William Haines, who had come back into Howard’s life and was seeing him regularly, had a strong opinion decades later.

“The great love affair between Billie Dove and Howard was exaggerated,” Billy claimed. “But at least it was genuine, unlike all that phony baloney years later about his so-called hot affair with Katharine Hepburn.”

“Before their break, Howard wasn’t seeing a lot of Billie anyway,” Billy claimed. “He was beginning to treat her like Ella Rice. Stash her away somewhere and then leave her for days at a time. Billie, however, wasn’t submissive like Ella. Billie was a woman with a strong libido and a lust for action. When Howard was away for long periods with his boyfriend of the moment, Billie also had a boyfriend or two to pass the hours away.”

Billy Haines claimed that Howard told him that his handsome golf pro, Roy Wilde, revealed to him one day that he’d come down with the clap. “That sure put an end to germ-obsessed Howard’s involvement with that one. If there was one thing Howard was really afraid of, it was venereal disease.”

A week later, Howard drove to the golf course unexpectedly. Billie had gone there earlier for a lesson from Roy, driving Howard’s Rolls Royce Silver Cloud. “She took lessons from him all right,” Billy claimed. “Howard found them in the back seat of his Rolls going at it like rabbits. No doubt Roy was sharing some of that clap with Billie. Howard never touched her again. I think he regarded her as unclean from that point onward. Tainted merchandise. Now you know why Billie Dove never told the press why she left Howard. Actually it was the other way around. He dropped her.”

After some time had passed, Howard ordered his attorney, Neil McCarthy, to buy out his contract with Billie. He had dropped all plans to finish the other three pictures with her, even though she had a contract. McCarthy drew up an agreement that awarded Billie \$255,000 for the unmade films. Privately, Dietrich let the matter rest for a few months, finally settling the matter with Billie’s attorney for only \$100,000. Dietrich claimed that Howard never mentioned the contract or the name of Billie Dove again.



Billie Dove and Chester Morris in *Cock of the Air*.

The fatal blow to Billie's career came shortly thereafter. Even though she'd lost money for Howard in both of the films he'd made with her, William Randolph Hearst cast her in her final film, *Blondie of the Follies*, in which she co-starred with Marion Davies. Billie was cast as a gutsy showgirl competing with Marion for the love of a playboy, as played by Robert Montgomery.

Seeing the rushes, Hearst feared that Billie was stealing the picture from his beloved mistress, and ordered that her best scenes be cut. Billie later claimed that Hearst also ordered his cameraman to photograph her badly.

Billie Dove remained a pilot, a painter, and a poet, but said goodbye to Hollywood forever. After her affair with Howard ended, she married wealthy Bob Kenaston, a ranger and a real-estate investor. She even said no when David Selznick offered her the role of the bordello keeper, Belle Watling, in *Gone With the Wind*.

Born at the dawn of the 20 th century, Billie Dove almost lived to see the millennium, dying of pneumonia on the last day of 1997 in Woodland Hills, California.

Still coerced into doing Howard's bidding because of his fear of exposure, Humphrey Bogart was ordered to drive Jean Harlow to Tijuana for an abortion. After Howard gave him five thousand dollars in cash, Bogart headed south with the pregnant blonde bombshell.

Bogart later told his closest friend at the time, Kenneth MacKenna, that out of compassion, and perhaps infatuation, for the star, he had proposed marriage to Jean sometime during the trip, promising that he'd maintain that he was the father of her soon-to-be-born child, and that he'd divorce the woman he was married to at the time, Broadway actress Mary Philips.

Although she appears to have led him on, Jean had no intention of ever marrying Bogart. Without warning, in the middle of the night, she impulsively left the bedroom of the hotel in Tijuana which she shared with Bogart and checked into a clinic in Tijuana to have the abortion, as she had always intended.

Two hours later, the distraught manager of the hotel pounded on the door of Bogart's room, informing him that the abortion of "your girl friend" had been botched. She was bleeding severely, and barely holding onto life.

At the hospital, after Bogart learned firsthand of her dangerous condition, he called Howard in Los Angeles. Within hours, Howard arranged the best medical assistance available for the stricken star, sending a large black limousine with curtained-off windows to pick her up in Tijuana, and to move her to a hospital in San Diego, where he demanded that she check in under an assumed name. He then arranged to have Dr. Verne Mason flown to San Diego as her personal physician.

Bogart's role as messenger boy had come to an end. "You really fucked this one up, asshole." Howard told him on the phone before slamming down the receiver.

In one of Howard's rare acts of compassion, he stayed by Jean's bed in San Diego, renting the hospital room next to her, and buying the best medical care available in San Diego. To supplement the services of Dr. Mason, Howard then arranged for a widely reputed German-born specialist, Dr. Herbert Mueller, flown in from Los Angeles, for some additional "emergency repairs" on Jean, whatever that meant.

The details of Howard's next days with Jean, urging her on the road to recovery, were never recorded and will never be known. But Howard told Dietrich that her life at one point "hung by a very slender thread." Since Jean had wanted the baby, and since Howard had pressured her into having the abortion, he felt responsible for her disaster.

When she had recovered sufficiently to travel overland, Howard ordered the biggest limousine in Los Angeles and had it specially equipped for her comfort. With a skilled chauffeur to drive them and with Howard issuing orders to avoid bumps in the road, Howard rode all the way back to Los Angeles with her. Somewhere during that ride, he agreed that he would stop exploiting her by lending her out for fat fees while keeping her on her small salary and pocketing the difference.

"You're going to be a big star," he allegedly told her, "and you're entering your peak earning power. I'm not going to stand in your way."

He did not go back on his promise, as he had done with so many other young stars. When MGM offered Jean a promising contract with some of its best roles, Howard agreed to sell her contract to Louis B. Mayer for an astonishingly low forty thousand dollars. He told friends it was for sixty thousand dollars. In the next few years, when he watched her star rise to the highest level in Hollywood, he told Dietrich that he regretted his decision. "Never again will I let sympathy get in the way of a business decision."

Before leaving Jean off at the home of her overly protective mother and sleazy stepfather, Howard promised that "I'll be there for you if you ever get in trouble and need me." That was an offer she would take advantage of in her immediate future.

Howard watched intently from afar as her live appearances at movie houses drew record-breaking audiences across the country. And although he was no longer sleeping with her and wasn't really jealous, he still wanted to know the private details of her love life. His spies supplied him with ongoing lists of Jean's bedfellows. Among them were Lew Ayres, husband of Ginger Rogers, her stepfather and manager, Marino Bello, Clark Gable, Howard Hawks, William Powell, and James Stewart ("when it comes to kissing, Jean is the best"). Howard also learned at one point that she was

having an affair with the long-winded North Carolina author, Thomas Wolfe. Howard had known of her attraction to gangsters, and it came as no surprise that she was also sleeping with his own friend, Benjamin (Bugsy) Siegel.

Extending a rare privilege to Jean, Howard would make himself available to receive calls through her upcoming marriages in the years ahead—first to Paul Bern, nicknamed “Small Dong,” and then to cinematographer Harold Rosson, nicknamed “Long Dong.”

Of her many future relationships, the Bern marriage was the most troubling for Howard. Through his long association with Billy Haines, Howard had met Bern when he first arrived in Hollywood. He called Jean and warned her not to marry him, claiming that Bern was basically a homosexual with “the smallest dick in Hollywood.” Howard also claimed that Bern was completely impotent with both men and women. “Not only that,” Howard added, “he’s pot-bellied and practically bald.”

Jean was known for her quick temper, and apparently she was furious at Bern on the day Howard called.

“I’ll never marry that son-of-a-bitch,” an angry Jean shouted back at Howard. “I hate Paul Bern. What an asshole!” Bern, in Jean’s view, had been spending far too much time with Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford, and Norma Shearer. But with an almost child-like emotion, she quickly forgave Bern.

Howard, along with the rest of Hollywood, was shocked to read on July 3, 1932, of Jean’s wedding to Paul Bern. Louis B. Mayer didn’t attend, but Irving Thalberg, Norma Shearer, David and Irene Selznick, and John Gilbert showed up.

As Howard rightly predicted to Dietrich, “It’ll be the most disastrous marriage in the history of Hollywood.”

Los Angeles, 1931

With two Billie Dove flops and a broken romance in his very recent past, Howard continued to forge ahead making movies. He immediately began pouring his energies into *Sky Devils*, a lightweight melodrama about aviators and their love interests. Its production would be relatively inexpensive thanks to its ability to recycle some of the dogfight sequences from *Hell's Angels*.

Ironically, excess footage from *Hell's Angel* that wasn't used in *Sky Devils* would eventually be sold, as the years went by, to other film makers. They included the producers of *The White Sister* in 1933 and the producers of *Army Surgeon*, produced as late as 1942 when America had entered yet another war.

Sky Devils was conceived by Edward Sutherland, who became the director. The very clever wit, Robert Benchley, was called in to help shape the script, and he was assisted by writers Carroll and Garrett Graham, authors of *Queer People*, who peppered the script with bisexual references.

For the lead, Howard wanted the up-and-coming stage actor, Spencer Tracy, who had recently arrived in Hollywood. Howard admired Tracy’s acting ability but detested him personally, calling him “nothing but a cheap Irish drunk.” These two Hollywood bisexuals didn’t bond at all. What impressed Howard about Tracy was his seductions of beautiful women, which would become legendary, and his ability to capture some of the handsomest men in Hollywood, notably Lew Ayres, Johnny Mack Brown, and George O’Brien.

Sutherland initially thought that Howard and Spencer Tracy would have a lot in common. When asked, Tracy said, “I’ve got enough problems of my own. I don’t want to look inside Hughes’s head. That would make me drink even more than I do.” One of the reasons that Tracy might have detested Howard was his objection to Howard’s exploitation of his friend Bogart. Tracy and Bogart had recently become good friends, and Tracy had nicknamed him Bogie, which stuck, of course. Ironically, Tracy and Howard would become rivals in years to come, eventually vying for the affections of Katharine Hepburn.

For the “second banana” role in the film, Howard cast a Broadway actor, William Boyd, in the part. This was not the same “platinum blond” William Boyd (the future Hopalong Cassidy) who had co-starred in Howard’s production of *Two Arabian Knights*. To distinguish between the two rival actors with the same name, the *Sky Devils* co-star was referred to in the press as William “Stage” Boyd, because of his extensive previous experience on Broadway.

Howard still had to cast the female lead in the film. Jean Harlow wanted the part but he turned her down because of her strong image associations with *Hell s Angels*.

In a very short time, Howard would cast the lithe and leggy Ann Dvorak as the star of *Sky Devils*. How they met became a Hollywood legend.

Early one evening at Muirfield, Howard called Joan Crawford, who had frequently rebuffed his advances in spite of frequent invitations. In the wake of the Billie Dove debacle, Howard had re-activated his pursuit of Crawford. To his surprise, she agreed to take his call one afternoon. Not only that, but she promised to visit him at Muirfield that upcoming Saturday night.

Unknown to Howard, Crawford had become intimate buddies with Dvorak. They were rumored to be lovers. Both women were bisexuals who sometimes shared their men. Hoping to get rid of Howard once and for all, Crawford called Dvorak and asked her if she’d go to Muirfield in her place. “He’ll be expecting me, but he’ll get you as a consolation prize,” Crawford told the younger actress and chorus girl. In a spirit partly of fun, partly of adventure, and not having a date for the night, Dvorak, who wasn’t more than nineteen at the time, agreed to show up that evening at Muirfield wearing “the sexiest dress I own.”

At the appointed time, the teenager was ushered into Howard’s living room by his housekeeper, Beatrice Dowler. Dvorak had a lean, sharp face that was not altogether pleasing to Howard, and he didn’t like what he would later call “her New York nose.”

In contrast, he was very impressed with her figure, showcased in a red silk gown, the only one she owned at the time. That dress clung to her like a Jean Harlow fit. He’d seen women who were more beautiful, but rarely one with such raw sex appeal. The cleavage of her gown extended virtually to her hips. With the wrong movement on her part, one of her bare breasts might pop out, as she wore no brassiere.

She sat across from Howard and ordered a Scotch from Beatrice. He didn’t like his women to drink but said nothing. No mention was made about how he had been expecting Joan Crawford and not Ann Dvorak. He couldn’t help but notice that her gown was split up to reveal a creamy thigh, and he was certain that she wasn’t wearing a stitch of underwear. He practically wanted to seduce her on the spot. Howard was later to relate all these details to both Noah Dietrich and Billy Haines.



Ann Dvorak

As he talked to her, he found her very direct and outspoken. Although still a teenager, she seemed worldly beyond her years, and he suspected that he was not the first man she had ever seduced.

“The way she kept lifting those creamy thighs gave me an immediate erection,” Howard told Billy.

As the night wore on, Howard later claimed that Dvorak revealed a ferocity of ambition unequalled since Joan Crawford and her sometimes lover, Barbara Stanwyck, hit town.

She expressed her gratitude to Crawford. “When I was one of the hoofers in *Hollywood Revue of 1929*, I met Crawford and she helped my career a lot.” Dvorak confided to Howard. “She told me a gal has to fuck both the director and the producer on a film.”

Howard leaned back to study her more closely and get a better look up her dress. “In the case of my next film, and if you’re looking for a part, you need to fuck only the producer.”

“You’re my kind of guy, and a handsome fucker at that,” Dvorak said. “And I know from experience that guys built like you have big cocks.” At least that is what Howard later claimed she said. Neither Dietrich nor Billy Haines were given any more details of that evening at Muirfield. Dvorak herself would later recall the romance. “On the first evening I met him, Hughes spent a lot of time telling me how, for five million dollars, he’d bought an amazing sixty-five movie houses in southern California, his native Texas, and redneck Oklahoma. All of this expansion was occurring at a time when millions of Americans were standing in bread lines or polishing red apples to sell on the street.”

After her first night at Muirfield, Ann Dvorak emerged with the female lead in *Sky Devils*. Not only that, but Howard awarded her with a much-coveted exclusive contract as well.

Although he was hysterically busy launching motion pictures, Howard still found time to become Hollywood’s party boy. As a bisexual, he lived in two entirely different worlds. One of those worlds was exceedingly macho. Howard became the leader of Hollywood’s first “rat pack,” hanging out with wolves who pursued young starlets, most often blonde.

In the early 1930s, his name was romantically linked to some fifty women. They included established actresses such as Ginger Rogers and Nancy Carroll, starlets, chorines, party girls, and East Coast debutantes. It is highly doubtful that he had sex with most of these beautiful young women, many of whom were just “arm candy” (today’s term) for public show.

Meanwhile, Howard’s homosexual universe centered around Billy Haines and the popular transvestite clubs of that era.

One of the key players in Howard’s “rat pack” clique was Johnny Maschio, once an assistant director for Cecil B. DeMille, and later, a well-known Hollywood agent. Two other major players included yet another agent, the good-looking Pat DeCicco, and his charming, but relatively unattractive cousin, Albert Broccoli, nicknamed “Cubby.”

Cubby later claimed that he first met Howard while he was sitting alone at the exclusive Colony Club, a members-only meeting place for the Hollywood elite. Cubby, to relieve his boredom, began to spin a silver dollar he’d won in Reno. “A tall, lean character was seated four bar stools along the counter,” Cubby claimed. “He’s watching me and the spinning dollar. ‘Heads or tails?’ he asks. ‘Heads,’ I say. I lost and he (Howard Hughes) took the silver dollar.”

Several generations previously, in Italy, the ancestors of Cubby Broccoli had genetically engineered a new vegetable, broccoli, which they named after their family, by pollinating cauliflower with rabe. Before coming to Hollywood, Cubby worked as a coffin maker.

He is known to modern audiences as the man who brought James Bond to life on the big screen, producing seventeen box-office hits based on the British superspy’s exploits, including *Octopussy*, *Live and Let Die*, *Diamonds are Forever*, *Thunderball*, *Goldfinger*, and *From Russia With Love*.

Cubby Broccoli’s cousin, Pat DeCicco, is known today for marrying two famous women: the film actress, Thelma Todd in 1932, and heiress Gloria Vanderbilt in 1941. Both of these women were former girlfriends of Howard. Luckily for biographers, Cubby and Pat are both excellent off-the-record sources for information about many of Howard’s sexual involvements during the Thirties.

Since Howard was shy with women, Pat began operating as his front man and pimp. The relationship between the two men grew extremely close, and there was widespread speculation in Hollywood about the degree of intimacy associated with their friendship. Pat was, at least as far as is known, heterosexual, but he was also exceedingly sexy and handsome, a combination which sometimes targeted him for homosexual propositions. And he was usually willing to do Howard’s bidding, whatever the request.

“If Howard expressed an interest in a woman, Pat saw that he got her for his friend,” actor Alexander d’Arcy once recalled. D’Arcy was a Johnny-come-lately to Howard’s Rat Pack, having become a member in 1935. Born in Egypt, D’Arcy was usually awarded roles as a supporting player in Hollywood, often portraying “oily” types. He’s best known today for appearing with Marilyn Monroe in *How to Marry a Millionaire*.

“Pat didn’t have to work hard to get women for Howard,” Cubby said. “For the most part, the women flocked to Howard. All Pat had to do was get their phone numbers and write down their names. For budding starlets at the time, bedding Howard Hughes was a feather in their cap. In later years, it

was tantamount to a woman claiming she'd slept with John F. Kennedy."

Howard, often seen alone with Pat or else accompanying a beautiful young woman, was spotted at the most exclusive restaurants in Los Angeles. Pat and Howard were seen placing bets at both the Santa Anita and the Hollywood Park racetracks. Sometimes Pat went alone with Howard on cruises aboard his private yacht. At other times they were accompanied by starlets.

James Campbell, once assistant manager of the Hotel Del Coronado, a movie star hangout near San Diego, recalled that Pat and Howard would sometimes check into a suite alone at his posh hotel and not emerge for the rest of the weekend. "The staff just assumed they were lovers," Campbell claimed. "Many times they brought women down from Hollywood with them, but never anybody famous."

Pat's nickname for Howard was "Lambie."

D'Arcy later said that Pat was "the straightest man in Hollywood. He loved women as much as I did. But I wouldn't have put it past him to drop his trousers for Howard. Pat would fuck a rattlesnake if he thought it would advance his career. Don't get me wrong. I loved the guy. But he played a dangerous game, especially when he got mixed up with the mob. He may have been more involved in Thelma Todd's murder than the police thought at the time."

It was through Pat, a close friend of Lucky Luciano, that Howard began a history of acquaintances with various notorious gangsters, including Bugsy Siegel.

One woman he dated post-Billie Dove was June Lang, whom he met when he was escorting Marian Marsh to the Cocoanut Grove. June caught Howard's attention by tossing a sugar cube at his head. In minutes, he'd dumped Marian and was whirling June around the dance floor. She later commented on their so-called romance. "I found him sexless. He never even tried to kiss me." She dumped him after a few dates.

In 1939, June married Johnny Roselli, the gangster, although she allegedly did not know about his mob connections at the time she fell for him. He was passing himself off as an aspirant movie producer. When she did find out, she urged him to go legit. But he never really did. The scandal of her involvement with this gangster, whose decomposed body was found in 1976 in a 55-gallon steel drum floating in a bay off the coast of Florida, derailed her career, but she continued in minor roles until 1947.

On nights he wasn't with his macho buddies, Howard spent the evenings going with Billy Haines to such so-called "pansy clubs" as B.B.B.'s Cellar, operated by a flamboyant drag queen, Bobby Burns Berman. His revue of a dozen comely boys attired in women's gowns was the hottest show in town.

New arrivals from Germany, Josef von Sternberg and Marlene Dietrich, were among the frequent patrons of this club, as were Constance Bennett, Joan Crawford, Norma Talmadge, Edmund Lowe, and Lilyan Tashman. Even Greta Garbo was said to have made a mysterious appearance at B.B.B.'s Cellar.

One night Howard appeared with Billy Haines at Jimmy's Backyard on Ivar Street. It was operated by Thomas Gannon, who must have been paying off the Los Angeles Police Department to keep it open. Other "pansy clubs" opened and closed with distressing regularity. In the midst of the Depression, patrons of the club were having a gay old time.

Gannon hurried to greet Howard, informing him that the whitewashed walls of the club "are to suggest the moral purity of my clients." In contrast, Gannon noted the carpet. "It's in virgin's blood red, dear heart," he said to an amused Howard.

Howard spotted Humphrey Bogart sitting with Lilyan Tashman and her husband, Edmund Lowe. Rumors were circulating that Bogart, at the time a young Broadway actor, was a frequent houseguest of this notorious couple. Tashman was fresh from an affair with Greta Garbo, and Lowe was fresh from affairs "with every hot young male actor in Hollywood."

Seeing Howard, Bogart got up and quickly introduced him to Tallulah Bankhead, the lover of his first wife, Helen Menken, from their Broadway days.

"Let's get together some night, dah-ling," Tallulah said to Howard in front of the table of guests, "and suck each other's cocks."

Hardly used to potty-mouthed women, despite his earlier contacts with Carole Lombard, Howard appeared shocked upon meeting Tallulah.

"You've got yourself a deal," Howard said jokingly, although embarrassed by her outrageousness.

"But, first, I've got to get over the clap," Tallulah said. "Got it from that divine Gary Cooper. I hope he doesn't give it to you, too."

"No fear of that," Howard said. "I don't go that route."

"Don't kid a kidder, dah-ling, like your old mama Miss Tallu of Alabama. *I know everything.*" She asked Howard to join her table, claiming that she was expecting the biggest star on Broadway. "She's just arrived in town, dah-ling," Tallulah said, "and I didn't have time to arrange an escort for her." Knowing Howard's fondness for dating big-name stars, she asked, "Since you're free, dah-ling, the pleasure shall be all yours."

"Is she really a big star or are you exaggerating a bit?" Howard asked.

"Trust me, angel, the biggest! Her grace, charm, and classic beauty would make a puppy dog out of a Tyrannasaurus Rex."

Howard agreed to go in his limousine, pick up this divine creature, and bring her back to Jimmy's.

An hour later all heads turned in the direction of the door. Howard was making his entrance with his date for the evening.

It was matronly Ethel Barrymore.

There was a silence in the room except for the demonic cackle of Tallulah herself.

In the backyard of Jimmy's Backyard, Bogart stood snorting cocaine with Howard. "I've been rough on you, Bogart, and I know it, but we'll call a truce. I just wanted to teach you a lesson. You won't be the first man—or the last—I need to teach a lesson to."

"So, I'm off the hook, pal?" Bogie asked.

"Absolutely," Howard said. "I'll destroy those pictures of you." Because you delivered George O'Brien to me, I owe you a favor."

"Not to mention the Harlow thing," Bogart said.

"Sorry you messed that up, and I'm sorry you brought up the subject," Howard said, snorting back more cocaine. "By the way, some accounting is in order. I gave you five thousand bucks, with the instructions that you were supposed to pay Harlow's medical expenses. But the way things worked out, I

paid most of the bills myself directly from L.A., and you've still got the money."

"I still have more than four thousand of what you gave me," Bogart said. "But I was hoping that since you have so much money, and I have so little, you might let me keep it."

Howard seemed to think a minute. "Considering that George O'Brien thing you brought to my door, I'll call it even."

"Hot damn!" Bogart said. "I'm gonna need the money. Fox is not gonna renew me. Perhaps you'll put me under personal contract."

"You're not my type," Howard said. "The only way you could get any more money out of me at this point is to come up with something better than George O'Brien."

"If I could top myself," Bogart said. "I mean, come up with the handsomest stud in Hollywood, do you think you could spare another five thousand? You see I'm going back to New York, and I hear ninety percent of the actors along Broadway are waiting in line at the soup kitchen."

"I don't think you could do it," Howard said. "O'Brien would be a tough act to follow."

"What about Johnny Mack Brown?"

Howard looked stunned. "You're bullshitting me. He's available?"

"I took the liberty of discussing you with him," Bogart said. "He's ready, willing and able. Just waiting for your call."

"You have Johnny Mack Brown delivered to my house on Saturday night and the five thousand bucks are yours."

"You've got yourself a deal, pal," Bogart said shaking his hand.

"The best thing about money is that it can buy the unobtainable," Howard said.

"Maybe we'd better be getting back to the party," Bogart said. "Tallulah might send a posse out looking for us. Or, knowing her, spread rumors that we've sneaked off together to have sex."

"You wish," Howard said. "Where I'm concerned, you can only dream. But as a consolation prize, I'm offering you an evening on the town with me and Ethel Barrymore."

"That's not so bad," Bogart said. "I'd love to get to know Ethel Barrymore. Maybe she'll cast me in a play with her. I need the work."

"Ethel it is for us tonight," Howard said, taking one final snort of cocaine before facing the crowd inside. "But the deal is, if Ethel demands that one of us fuck her tonight, you've got to do the honors."

CHAPTER NINE

Los Angeles, 1932

After three flops in a row (*Sky Devils* hadn't really prospered), the film industry had begun to view Howard as a has-been. To prove them wrong, Howard launched what would eventually be interpreted as two of the most prestigious pictures of the early talkies—*The Front Page* and *Scarface*.

The best writing team in the business, Ben Hecht and Charles McArthur, had scored a hit on Broadway with a zany play about the newspaper business, *The Front Page*. Howard bought the screen rights to the play for \$125,000, an astonishing figure back then. A few years later, the rights to *Gone With the Wind* would sell for only \$50,000. Hecht and MacArthur then demanded an additional \$80,000 to write the scenario. Howard balked at this final demand, hiring two lesser known writers, Bartlett Cormack and Charles Lederer, instead.

For *The Front Page*, he brought back his favorite director, Lewis (Milly) Milestone, who had won an Oscar for his direction of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The overriding fear was that *The Front Page*, a one-set film, would look like a Broadway play. Milestone overcame that hurdle by using a tracking camera to keep pace with the "machine-gun" dialogue on screen. The grotesquely ugly Louis Wolheim, who had played the lead in *Two Arabian Knights*, was cast as the lovably conniving newspaper editor, Walter Burns, but only three weeks after filming began, he collapsed on the set. He was taken to a Los Angeles hospital where a doctor informed Milestone that Wolheim was "eaten up with cancer." He died a few days later.

Adolphe Menjou, the dashing but sarcastic actor with a mustache evocative of a stage villain from a Victorian play, was cast subsequently as the lead.

Menjou and Howard detested each other on sight, in spite of their shared right-wing views. Behind Howard's back, Menjou called him a "cocksucking pervert." Howard was kinder to the actor, suggesting that "he looks like a repainted Rolls Royce."



Adolphe Menjou and Pat O'Brien
in *The Front Page*

Howard in the twenties had followed the example of Big Howard, often appearing in bespoke tailoring. But by the time *The Front Page* was released, Howard had adopted his sloppy dress code for life. His suits looked like he'd slept in them, which he probably had. Menjou, on the other hand, was famous for his sartorial style. Thinking that Howard knew nothing of tailoring, the actor foolishly suggested that he could help Howard improve his wardrobe. Taking one cynical look at Menjou, Howard spoke not a word but walked away from the set, never to speak to the actor again.

Cast in the second lead, that of a newspaper reporter named Hildy Johnson, was the New York stage actor, Pat O'Brien. Milwaukee-born Irish, and a drunk much like his best friend, Spencer Tracy, O'Brien also didn't impress Howard, although he'd agreed to the casting.

When he met Howard for the first time, O'Brien tried to impress him to no avail. First, he told Howard that he'd seen a stage version of *The Front Page* performed by an all-black cast in Hoboken, New Jersey, for a tails-and-white tie crowd. Howard didn't reveal his distain for blacks, and said nothing. Trying to connect, O'Brien quipped, "California's a great place to live if you're an orange," a line he stole from comedian Fred Allen. Again, Howard wasn't impressed. Like his friend Spencer Tracy, O'Brien didn't click with Howard.

Milestone introduced him to his two leading ladies. Famous today for the way James Cagney smashed a grapefruit into her face, Mae Clarke was cast as a prostitute, and Mary Brian played Pat O'Brien's sympathetic girlfriend.

Howard was less than enthralled with Mary Brian. "She's a nice girl," he told Milestone. "A nice, open, honest face. Nice smile. Nice teeth. Nice blue eyes. She has the same emotion in every scene. Nice."

"But she's from Texas like yourself," Milestone said.

"She's not like any Texas broad I've ever met," Howard said before turning away.

Mary Brian would re-enter Howard's life unattractively once again several years later, when Howard's lover, Cary Grant, announced that he was going to marry her, angering Howard. In later life, her career over, Brian took up painting portraits as a hobby. One of her first paintings was of Howard, depicting him as a giant prick. She ultimately got her revenge on both Cary and Howard simply by outliving them, dying in the final hours of 2002.

Howard found the film's other leading lady, Mae Clarke, a bit more to his liking. "Clarke should always play whores," he said to Milestone. "Unhappy ones." In a way, he was right, as the role of the hooker in the 1931 version of *Waterloo Bridge* became one of her more memorable pictures until, nine years later, Vivien Leigh took over the role, making it her own. In Leigh's version of the film, she was cast opposite Howard's future boyfriend, Robert Taylor.

Howard was mildly titillated to learn from Milly Milestone that Clarke was a bisexual like himself. She'd had an affair with Barbara Stanwyck in New York in 1926 when they'd appeared together in the stage drama, *The Noose*.

Howard accurately predicted that both Clarke and O'Brien would be awarded with star parts for only a few more short years before fading. "This film belongs to the boys," Howard said to Milestone. "The ladies are just for window dressing. Any actress in Hollywood could play these parts."

Uncharacteristically, Howard didn't interfere in the production of *The Front Page*, letting the very talented Milestone direct as he saw fit.

Taking him at his word, the director arranged for the establishment of a bar, a few steps from the sound stage, where both crew and actors could take a drink whenever they wanted. That ran up a big bill for Howard. Milestone didn't like to get up before noon, so he scheduled his daily filmings to begin every afternoon at one o'clock. Often, after a dinner break, they would resume shooting until one o'clock the next morning. A genuine craps table was set

up off set, and there was a continuous game going on throughout the entire shoot.

Almost from the moment the film was released, Howard knew he had a hit. *The FrontPage* became the quintessential newspaper movie and inspired a host of other films, even remakes. Starring Rosalind Russell and Cary Grant, *His Girl Friday* did even better box office in 1940 than Howard's 1931 hit. The director of *Ms Girl Friday* was none other than Howard Hawks, Howard's on-again, off-again friend and sometimes rival.

Much to Rupert's green-eyed envy, *The FrontPage* was nominated for Best Picture, Menjou for Best Actor, and Milestone for Best Director. The only sour note was the film's banning in Chicago. Local politicians didn't like the premise that they were crooks.

Milestone later recalled, "What's more interesting even than the casting of Pat O'Brien and Menjou in the lead roles was my original cast. Howard Hughes nixed both of the actors I wanted instead of O'Brien—James Cagney and Clark Gable."

On their first meeting, Clark Gable and Howard hit it off. In many ways, the ruggedly handsome and masculine star was Howard's type. Billy Haines had already told Howard that he'd "had" Gable back in 1925 when he was a struggling bit player. The almost aggressively heterosexual Gable had allegedly told Haines, "I'll do anything to become a star—and I mean *anything!*" Now that Gable's star was on the rise, Billy wondered out loud if that offer were still true.

Howard had already admitted to Billy that he was attracted to the actor's good looks and devilish grin, two characteristics that would eventually turn him into the most widely recognized male sex symbol of the Thirties.

Milestone arranged the meeting after learning that Gable was available and that he wanted the role of the newspaper reporter, Hildy Johnson, in *The Front Page*.

The director later recalled the first encounter between Gable and Hughes: "Howard was not a talkative man but he was chattering away with Gable. They seemed to speak the same language. Whether the stories were true or not, Gable was spinning yarns about his days as an oil wildcatter that must have evoked memories of Big Howard for Howard Jr. Gable also claimed that he'd been a garage mechanic, and Howard had a long history of being attracted to men in that field. Then Gable claimed to have been both a lumberjack and a telephone lineman."

After they had been talking for about fifteen minutes, and again according to Milestone, Gable said, "Howard, you and I have the same goal in Hollywood."

"And what might that be?" Howard asked.

"To become the two biggest shits in Tinseltown and to fuck every big movie star out here."

From across the desk, Howard set down his glass of milk and smiled at Gable. "You're my kind of man, Clark."

Gable could not have been unaware of the intense scrutiny he was getting from Howard. For the occasion of their meeting, he had put on casual riding breeches and a battleship gray turtleneck sweater.

Finally, Howard called attention to Gable's looks. "I've seen you on screen before. You somehow look different. Like you've changed."

"I'm a new man," Gable said. He flashed a smile showing his teeth. "New dentures. Some faggot over at MGM insisted I part my hair on my left. He kept that natural cowlick I have. In photographs they let it break loose and dangle over my right eye. That's supposed to make women cream in their bloomers. They also plucked my eyebrows. I ain't Joan Crawford yet, but I'm getting there if they come at me with those tweezers again. I work out every day in the studio gym. The goal is broader shoulders and trim waistline. Women go for that."

"And others," Howard said quickly.

"What was that again?" Gable asked.

"Never mind."

"I've got a rival over at MGM," Gable said. "Johnny Mack Brown. He's about twenty-six or so. Irving Thalberg is pitting Johnny boy against me. They're giving him the big push with rugged he-man promotion like they're doing with me. **I**He's a good-looking fucker like me and has a lot **H**going for him. One of us is going to win out."



Clark Gable

Totally left out of the conversation, Milestone hastily added, "It's going to be you, Clark. I know Johnny. He's got that languid southern drawl. You don't. Your voice will record better. I hear MGM is lining up all its big stars to appear with you. If you aren't bedding them now, you'll soon be starring opposite—on and off the screen—the usual suspects: Jean Harlow. Norma Shearer. Joan Crawford. Greta Garbo."

"I hear Garbo's pussy is so big that any man who fucks her falls in," Gable said. "Bring 'em on. I'll sleep with all of them, although any gal in bed with me isn't going to get much sleep. The gals don't have to be big name stars. Hash slingers or call gals, all pussies are dark at night. One woman is just like another to me. Love 'em and leave them. In some ways, and I'm sure you agree, call gals are better. Unlike call gals, the good girls stick around

and want a big romance. I want to keep moving. A different one every night will suit me fine. And despite my past or future marriages, I'll never be faithful to just one pussy."

"You do have a graphic way of speaking," Howard said. "You'd be perfect cast as a newspaper reporter."

Milestone claimed that Howard invited Gable to fly with him that weekend to San Francisco, and the actor accepted. He never learned any details of that trip. Howard never spoke to him about what happened.

But when Howard came back into his office the following Monday, he angrily announced to Milestone that Gable was not going to get the role. The director really wanted Gable for the part, but Howard would not hear of it. Finally Milestone asked why. "His ears are so big they make him look like a taxi with both doors wide open," Howard said. Milestone recalled Howard making a final enigmatic comment before dropping the subject. "Besides, his tits are too small."

Although he tried, Billy Haines never learned the details of that weekend. However, he told such pals as Joan Crawford and Ramon Novarro, plus countless others, what he suspected the problem was.

"Clark's the worst lay in Hollywood, and amazingly he'll admit that himself," Billy later said. "His foreskin is so tight it's difficult for him to draw it back over his glans. He also doesn't keep that little charger clean. Not only that, he's a premature ejaculator. Not Howard's cuppa!"

Before the end of the decade, when gossipy George Cukor was directing Gable as Rhett Butler in *Gone With the Wind*, he kidded his star about his involvements with Howard and Billy Haines. Vivien Leigh later claimed that Gable never spoke to Cukor again as long as he remained on the picture. Soon, partly because of Gable's lobbying, Cukor was replaced with director Victor Fleming.

With Gable not cast in *The Front Page*, Milestone called Darryl F. Zanuck and asked if James Cagney would be available. Zanuck said Cagney was available.

The next day, Cagney was ushered into Howard's office. Before the two men were introduced, Howard gave a fast appraisal of Cagney. "Throw this fucking little runt out of my office!" Howard shouted.

Its lifespan would be short, but Howard drifted into a quickie romance with the sexy screen vamp, Nancy Carroll, in the wake of his split from Billie Dove. "It was love on the rebound," as Louella Parsons claimed.

At the time, Nancy was in the dying throes of a romance with Joseph Kennedy, who had taken up with her after splitting from Gloria Swanson.

Bubbly and button-cute, Nancy was a red-haired former chorus girl who was making it big in the early sound era. In fact, as viewed by film historians today, she was the first movie star to emerge strictly from talking pictures. Stars whose voices recorded properly sometimes managed to rescue their careers. Others, whose voices were wrong, were replaced by actors imported from Broadway, where presumably they already knew how to speak.

At the time, Howard made it a point to see every major film released, and he was impressed with Nancy's singing and dancing in *Follow Thru*, a frothy 1930 musical shot in Technicolor that is remembered today only for introducing the hit song, "Button Up Your Overcoat." In the film, her hair came out a bit too fire engine red, but her skin photographed beautifully, a stunning peaches-and-cream complexion setting off the cuteness of her face. Her baby blues sparkled. It is said that no one in the history of Hollywood ever had eyes as blue as Nancy's. Howard's former "date," Ethel Barrymore, told her decorator, "I want draperies of a special shade of blue—the blue of Nancy Carroll's eyes."

After seeing the film, *Abie's Irish Rose*, Howard told Noah Dietrich, "That's one pert nose on that Nancy Carroll. I think it's the sexiest nose in Hollywood. Even sexier than the nose of Myrna Loy."

"But you can't make love to a nose," Dietrich protested.

"There's a lot that can be done with a human nose," Howard mysteriously countered.



Nancy Carroll

He had met Nancy at several Hollywood A-list parties. She was at the peak of her career when he was first introduced to her by Louella Parsons at the Roosevelt Hotel. Howard had another date that evening, and so did Nancy. But they kept encountering each other. One night Nancy slipped him her telephone number, and he called her four days later.

At the time of their first date, Nancy, amazingly, was the most popular actress in pictures, but that lofty position would last only as long as it takes for a sickly butterfly to expire. She was proficient both as a sparkling comedienne and as an actress in melodrama. With her Cupid's bow mouth, she was the gamine darling of the Depression.



At home with Cary Grant (left) and Randolph Scott

Her performance in the recently released *Devil's Holiday* had won her an Oscar nomination. In *Devil's Holiday*, Nancy had been cast as a gold-digging manicurist.

Ironically, at the time Howard asked Nancy out on their first date, she had been cast in *Hot Saturday* with two leading men—Howard's current lover, Randolph Scott, and his future lover, Cary Grant.

In 1963, two years before her death, the author of this biography was introduced to Nancy Carroll in the lobby of a Broadway theater. Introductions were made by Stanley Haggart, her old-time friend from the 1930s. They recalled some hilarious story about the two of them, along with four other actors and actresses, being in the same bed in some Beverly Hills home when the bed caught on fire.

Over dinner that night at Sardi's, Nancy was already a forgotten star of the Thirties. She was candid and outspoken and filled with many regrets, feeling that Hollywood had tossed her aside at her prime.

"Gloria Swanson, the bitch, always claimed that Howard never had any real interest in me," Nancy said, "but that he pursued me because I was the mistress of Joe Kennedy. If there was one man on the planet Howard hated, it was Joe Kennedy. I never knew the reason for such hatred. But it was there and it was real. On our first date and after only a drink or two, Howard lit into Joe and attacked him viciously. Joe was a son of a bitch. But, as I was soon to learn, Howard was a son of a bitch too."

She admitted that her affair with Howard lasted for only three nights. "Unknown to me at the time, Howard suffered from constipation. Totally nude, he excused himself, picked up a magazine on aviation, and disappeared into the bathroom of the master bedroom at his Muirfield home. I had worn an expensive piece of black lingerie that night and was waiting for him in bed. On the previous two nights, he'd proven that he was a proficient lover. Unlike Joe Kennedy, Howard had the equipment to please a woman. In that bed, I waited and waited until an hour had gone by. I was always known for my hot Irish temper. When I could take this neglect no more, I got up, put on my evening gown, and stormed out of the house, driving off into the night."

What happened to her lover? Howard had sat and sat on the toilet. Engrossed in his reading, he completely forgot about the seductive star languishing in his boudoir.

"It wasn't quite the end of us," Nancy said. "A stunningly gorgeous dia-mond-and-ruby necklace arrived at my house, and I was willing to forgive Howard," the aging actress said at Sardi's. "In fact, I felt indebted to him after I accepted it. Actually, I found him very handsome and at times charming. When he called to invite me to go dancing with him at the Cocoanut Grove, I accepted."

"But that evening was a disaster too," Nancy claimed, "and I swore off on Howard Hughes forever. At first things went swimmingly. I looked gorgeous as we danced around the floor together. The trouble came when I excused myself to go to the powder room. I left Howard talking in the corner with a very debonair George Raft. That surprised me somewhat because I thought Howard and George hated each other because of their mutual jealousy over Billie Dove. But I guess they had both recovered from Dove because Howard soon cast George in a star part in *Scarface*"

At this point, George Raft himself picks up the story. While working at a casino in London, he accepted an invitation for dinner from Stanley Haggart and the author of this biography, and said he remembered that night at the Grove very well. "When Nancy went to the can, Hughes was talking *Scarface* with me. He said that Howard Hawks wanted me to play a secondary role. I told him I was interested, although the bastard was offering me only five hundred dollars for the part. Desperate for the role, I agreed to that measly bit."



George Raft

Raft remembered that he detected Howard's attention being diverted. "He was no longer listening to me—that is, if the bastard could hear anything I said anyway. He kept staring at a blonde a few tables away. She had platinum hair, but not as white as Jean Harlow's, who I was fucking at the time. She was about twenty-one. Even from afar, I could tell this was one sassy dame—call it brassy. She sure commanded attention. She was escorted by her producer, Mervyn LeRoy. They were making *42nd Street* at the time. Most Hollywood wolves stayed away from her since she was out with LeRoy. Hughes headed for her table. The rest is Hollywood history."

“Don’t tell us,” said Stanley Haggart. “Ginger Rogers!”

“Who else?” was Raft’s deadpan response.

When Nancy returned from the toilet, she asked Raft about what had happened to Howard. “Surely he’s not gone to the toilet again. If so, we’ll be here all night.”

Raft merely nodded to the table where Howard sat talking to Ginger Rogers. “I remembered that hot-tempered little Irish lass storming out of there. Nancy never saw Hughes again.”

The Nancy Carroll/Howard Hughes romance ended that night except for this final postscript: Ten days after the fiasco at the Cocoanut Grove, Howard received a call from Joe Kennedy. “I hear you’ve been seen out with Miss Nancy,” he said in his mocking Bostonian voice. Howard later reported the details of the talk to Noah Dietrich.

At first Howard thought it was the call of a jealous lover, but at the time, he didn’t understand the personality quirks of Joe Kennedy.

“Miss Nancy likes to play-act at being my naughty *Back Street* woman,” Kennedy said. He was referring to a popular Fannie Hurst novel, *Back Street*. Released in 1932, this film is the classic tale of the “noble” mistress of a married man who must slip away from a wife he doesn’t love for visits to his real love on the “back streets of life.” Earlier, Nancy had tried out for the role of the mistress, losing it to Irene Dunne.

Before Howard could protest that their involvement was over, Kennedy said, “I want you to take the bitch off my hands. I’ve said *adieu* to Swanson, and now it’s *adios* to Miss Nancy Carroll. You’ll enjoy her if you like red pussy, and she’s tighter than Gloria.”

He abruptly hung up the phone on Howard.

At that 1960s dinner at Sardi’s, Nancy said, “It’s just as well that old Joe dumped me. I heard later that he went back for one final conjugal visit to Rose’s bed. The fulfillment of that marital duty led to the birth of Edward Moore Kennedy. My money’s on Teddy as the next president of the United States.”



Ginger Rogers

In Ginger Rogers, born Virginia Katharine McMath in Independence, Missouri, in 1911, Howard found an actress whose right-wing views made him look like a liberal. She was fast with the quip or the wisecrack.

When Ginger, a WAMPAS Baby Star of 1932, extended her hand to Howard at the Cocoanut Grove, he held it for a very long time, ignoring host Mervyn LeRoy’s introduction to the rest of his table, which included his mother.

Gaining notice on the theater circuit in Texas and Oklahoma, Ginger, a fast-rising star, had toured with her act, “Ginger and the Redheads.” At the time of her meeting with Howard, she had divorced her childhood sweetheart, Jack Pepper, whom she married in 1928 when she was seventeen years old. The marriage lasted only ten months during which time they toured together in an act entitled, “Ginger and Pepper.” “Ain’t that a cute name?” Ginger always asked anyone remotely interested.

Howard finally released the hand of this beautiful woman who was on the dawn of a celebrated film career with dancing partner Fred Astaire. She was decades away from taking a job, as she eventually did, as a fashion consultant for the J.C. Penney chain.

Ginger later wrote that during her night out at the Cocoanut Grove, which had one of the best orchestras in town, “I noticed a very tall gentleman on the dance floor looking at me. His face seemed stern, mask-like, almost as though he was trying to keep his feelings hidden. The severity of his expression was alleviated by a half-smile that played around his lips every time his glance caught mine.”

That flirtatious beginning set the stage for one of Howard’s longest and most enduring affairs with a Hollywood actress, although the romance would be on-again, off-again, and would even survive Howard’s sexual attraction to her second husband, Lew Ayres.

Amazingly until she was told by LeRoy, Ginger didn’t know who Howard was. Even though newspapers were constantly running his picture, she didn’t recognize his face. Both LeRoy and Ginger thought Howard was a rich Texas oilman. As long as she dated him, she never knew the source of his wealth. As late as the 1950s, she was still referring to him as an oilman.

At the Cocoanut Grove on that long-ago night, Ginger remembered Howard approaching LeRoy’s table of guests, getting a chair for himself, and just “squeezing in.” Ignoring her, he launched into shop talk with LeRoy, claiming that he wanted him to direct a picture for him one day.

When the orchestra struck up the music after a fifteen-minute break, Howard rose to his feet and asked Ginger to a slow dance, cheek to cheek. Glancing at LeRoy for permission, Ginger agreed. Before Howard left the table, LeRoy warned Howard that he might not be able to keep up with Ginger. She, however, found his dancing quite passable. “At least he kept up with the beat.”

Although she was supposedly “mad about the boy,” meaning Mervyn LeRoy, Ginger still had a roving eye, later claiming that she found Howard “almost handsome” and also wondering “what he’d be like as a date.”

After the dance, Ginger returned to table to find that the other guests of LeRoy’s had stayed on the floor to dance a slow waltz, the second number. LeRoy had apparently disappeared, perhaps to go to the men’s room. “Cigarette me, big boy,” Ginger said to Howard. He didn’t know it, but that was a soon-to-be famous line from her picture, *Young Man of Manhattan*. She’d appeared opposite Charles Ruggles, the star of the picture being the Parisian actress, Claudette Colbert. To her dying day, Ginger claimed that Colbert had made a pass at her during the making of that film.

At the time of her meeting with Howard, Ginger had been cast as the sassy, wisecracking, leggy chorine of *42nd Street* and would soon film the famous number, “Shuffle Off to Buffalo.” Ginger played Anytime Annie (“the only time Anytime Annie said no, she didn’t hear the question”).

That night Ginger also told Howard that she’d been cast in *Gold Diggers of 1933*. “It’s not typecasting,” she said. “Ginger Rogers is no gold digger.”

As she spoke to him, he found a slightly abrasive edge to her voice. “Everybody around you seems impressed with your money,” she said. “Not me! I’m going to make it on my own in Hollywood without the aid of any man or his money. Men won’t have to buy me. I’ll buy them!”

“I like her a lot,” Howard told Dietrich the following day. “I’m tired of women with blue eyes. Ginger has green eyes. She’s a bit brittle, though.”

At the time of her meeting with Howard, all the fan magazines were predicting that the wedding of Ginger to Mervyn LeRoy, the Warner Brothers director, was imminent. Ginger would later claim that it was on the night that she was dancing with Howard that she expected a marriage proposal from LeRoy later that evening. It never came.

What did come was a call from Louella Parsons a few days later, informing Ginger that LeRoy had called her and revealed his true plans. He was going to marry Doris Warner, daughter of his studio boss.

Ginger said she retreated to her bedroom to nurse her wounds. “If I weren’t so damn mad at Mervyn, I would have had my heart broken.”

It was the same bedroom that Ginger’s mother, Lela Rogers, entered three days later. “Howard Hughes was just on the phone. Do you know him?”

Ginger told her that LeRoy had introduced him to her at the Cocoanut Grove. “He’s calling with an invitation for you to attend the premiere of his movie, *Scarface*,” Lela said. “He said he’d call back in five minutes to hear what your answer is.”

The answer was yes. Although the premiere of *Scarface* was hardly the elaborate production that *Hell’s Angels* was, she was excited by the invitation. It would be the first of many Hollywood premieres with various men that she’d attend.

The premiere would mark the beginning of one of the most important affairs in either of their lives.

On the night of the *Scarface* premiere, Howard arrived at the theater in a long black limousine. Before walking down the red carpet, he helped Ginger from the rear. She looked stunning, dressed in white satin with an ermine wrap.

A radio announcer, a harbinger of Joan Rivers, told the breathless world, “Ladies and gentlemen, Howard Hughes has just arrived. He’s escorting the lovely Miss Billie Dove.” An assistant whispered something into the announcer’s ear. “Correction, ladies and gentlemen, Howard Hughes is escorting the lovely and vivacious Ginger Rogers tonight.”

In subsequent weeks, Ginger would learn the full story of Howard’s travails in bringing *Scarface* to the screen.

True to his promise, Bogart delivered companionship to Howard in the handsome frame of Johnny Mack Brown, one of the era’s most sought-after leading men. As for the competition at MGM between Clark Gable and Johnny Mack Brown, Howard’s opinion was expressed to Noah Dietrich. “For my money,” he said, “I’m betting on Johnny boy. He’s got sex appeal. Gable doesn’t.”

Perhaps Howard was motivated by competition with his sometimes mistress, Jean Harlow, knowing she’d enjoyed the charms of both actors during their collective filming of *The Secret Six*. The film’s title brought a laugh to wicked Billy Haines. “In Gable’s case, the film should have been retitled *The Secret Five*.” Johnny Mack Brown had another suggestion. “If the film were about me, it should’ve been called *The Secret Nine*”

All-American Johnny Mack Brown was one of the greatest halfbacks ever to play for the Crimson Tide at the University of Alabama. Although he had been offered a career in professional football, he chose drama instead, hoping to become a romantic leading man in Hollywood. In 1928, Louis B. Mayer, impressed with his looks and his prowess on the gridiron, offered him a contract at MGM. But after seeing his lackluster screen test, the studio boss ordered him to take acting lessons immediately.

Evidently, the acting lessons helped, because soon Johnny was appearing in such films as *Our Dancing Daughters* with Joan Crawford, with whom he had an affair, followed by another affair with Norma Shearer. Those were relatively harmless compared to the affair he’d had with Marion Davies when they had co-starred together in *The Fair Co-Ed*. In those days, it was very risky for an actor to incur the ire of her patron, William Randolph Hearst.

Like many pre-code actors of his day, Johnny also had a homosexual streak in him. He had settled into a more or less ongoing relationship with the bisexual actor, Spencer Tracy. And Billy Haines had had sex with Johnny when they made *Slide, Kelly, Slide* together.

With his future at MGM in doubt, and Gable gaining on him almost weekly, Johnny had a good reason to meet Howard, even if he was being dangled as a meaty prize. He was hoping that Howard would sign him to a long-term contract and put him under personal management.

Arriving exactly on time one Saturday night at Muirfield, Johnny was shown inside by Beatrice Dowler and offered a drink. She told him that Howard would be notified that he was here and would join him shortly. After about an hour and no Howard, Johnny grew impatient. He went to see Beatrice, who told him, “Oh, Mr. Hughes is still out in the garage, tinkering with one of his engines.”

“That’s not very flattering,” Johnny said, asking to be shown the garage.

Out back, Johnny went into the garage to find a pair of long, lanky legs sticking out from under a Duesenberg. In a slow but charming accent he’d been rehearsing since his birth on September 1, 1904, in Dothan, Alabama, Johnny introduced himself to Howard.

Howard must have been immediately intrigued with Johnny’s masculine presence, charm, and good looks. At the time, Johnny was extraordinarily handsome, with a male beauty that would last for only a few short years.

A special dinner had been prepared for Johnny, all his favorite Southern dishes, although Howard stuck to his steak and peas. To Johnny’s surprise, Howard’s after-dinner entertainment involved taking Johnny into his private screening room where he ran the actor’s 1930 film, *Billy the Kid*. “He [Hughes] was utterly fascinated by the character of Billy the Kid,” Johnny said years later. “I told him that the great cowboy actor, William S. Hart, had personally trained me for the role. He was amazed that for added realism I used the actual pistols that were once owned by Billy the Kid.”

In retirement in the early 1960s and obese beyond recognition, Johnny said, “I had no idea that Howard was picking my brain and was planning even

back then to make his own film called *Billy the Kid*. Of course, the title was later changed to *The Outlaw*. ”

Johnny talked freely of his career, but refused to discuss any personal involvements with Howard or Marion Davies. “Hughes made a lot of promises about getting my career as a leading man launched, but he could have been talking to the Texas wind. He did nothing for me.” The aging cowboy actor denied any romantic entanglements with either Howard or Marion. He did admit his suspicion that Hearst, believing “those god damn lies,” sabotaged his career as a leading man at Metro, enlisting a powerful ally, his friend Louis B. Mayer.

Johnny and Howard became instant companions after that first night at Muirfield. In the weeks to come, Howard used the airplane as his tool of seduction, as he would do time and time again with girlfriends and boyfriends. He flew Johnny to Arizona, to San Francisco, and even to Mexico for off-the-record weekends.

Beatrice Dowler remained convinced that Johnny had an affair with her boss. “I know for a fact that they slept naked in the same bed together at Muirfield.”

The only other clue was provided by Billy Haines. At an all-male party at Muirfield, a drunken Johnny said to him about one of his foremost rivals, “After me, Howard will never speak of Charles Starrett ever again.”

In Johnny, Howard found a certain wit. He always liked the way Johnny referred to John Wayne as “Marion” (his original name), and he took delight in revelations about Hollywood scandals. Johnny told Howard that Marion Davies had said that Hearst could no longer get an erection and had to satisfy her orally.

Two of Howard’s lovers, both George O’Brien and Johnny, in separate dialogues, told Billy Haines that on very rare occasions—usually in the middle of the night—Howard would don a woman’s gown and parade around the house. “I think it had to do with some hang-up with his late mother back in Texas,” Billy said. “I heard she used to dress her son in girl’s clothes. It’s hard for me to picture Howard in a dress. With his long and lanky frame, he must have looked like a scarecrow. George told me he put on women’s clothes with deadly seriousness and never in a spirit of fun. Also, Howard always insisted that I take him to the latest transvestite revues. He even went to bed with some of the more outrageous queens. During most of the 1930s, drag clubs remained a favorite of his. He was seen at the clubs so often that word quickly spread through the Hollywood grapevine that he was a homosexual. He wasn’t. Bisexual would have been a better term because he did have a fascination with women’s boobs.”

When Gable knocked him out of the competition, Johnny searched for a new niche in Hollywood. In 1934, Mae West cast him opposite her in *Belle of the Nineties*. Before getting the part, he had to visit her apartment, where she told him “to drop drawers for a little inspection, and it had better not be little!”

After Mae, he drifted into “oaters” (low-budget Westerns) at Poverty Row studios as his career gradually wound down.

As Howard continued to collect trophy lovers, both male and female, he also launched himself aggressively into the making of *Scarface*, hoping for a hit to restore his tarnished reputation in Hollywood.

Howard bought the screen rights to the gangster novel, *Scarface*, from the novel’s author Armitage Trail. For its adaptation to the screen, Howard hired screenwriter Ben Hecht, who added some very odd clauses to his contract.

Hecht demanded to be paid one-thousand dollars a day in cash and promptly at six o’clock every afternoon. Perhaps Ben had heard that Howard was strapped for cash. Surprisingly, Howard agreed to those demands.

He had read something about the Borgias, and decided he wanted the film to be based on Cesare Borgia’s incestuous desires for his sister, Lucretia. “Incest is something I know about,” Howard told Hecht. “My uncle, Rupert, had a long-term sexual relationship with his sister, Greta. My aunt.”

To further confuse matters, Howard wanted the story updated to a Chicago setting depicting crime czars battling over bootleg liquor territory. The lead character, Tony Camonte, would obviously be based on gangster Al Capone. An assassin had once attempted to slice Capone’s throat—hence the nickname “Scarface.” Of course, not much of this had to do with the Borgias.

Hecht agreed to complete the script in only eleven days for a total price of \$11,000, a great bargain for Howard since Hecht was one of the most highly paid scriptwriters in the business.

Two weeks later, a first draft of his script had fallen into the hands of Capone, who dispatched two of his most violent henchmen to call on Hecht in Los Angeles. Hecht remembered that the goons barged into his hotel room after midnight. In Hecht’s words, they looked as ominous as “any pair of movie gangsters, their faces set in scowls and guns bulging in their coats.”

“Is this stuff about Al Capone?” one of the hoods demanded to know.

Hecht assured him that the film was about another gangster he’d known in Chicago, Deanie O’Banion, “the last of the first-class killers.”

“If this stuff ain’t about Al, why are you callin’ it *Scarface*?” the first henchman demanded. “Everybody will think it’s Al.”

“That’s the reason,” Hecht said. “Al is one of the most famous and fascinating men of our time. If we call the movie *Scarface*, everybody will want to see it, figuring it’s about Al, which it isn’t. That’s called showmanship.”

Believe it or not, the gangsters seemed to buy that, but demanded to know, “Who’s this fella Howard Hughes?”

“The sucker with the money,” Hecht said.

“Then to hell with him.” The gangsters left Hecht’s room and never showed up again.

Even though Howard was still in litigation with Howard Hawks, claiming that the director plagiarized his script of *Hell’s Angels* in his competing aviation movie, *The Dawn Patrol*, he still wanted Hawks to direct *Scarface*, feeling he was the best in his field.

That lawsuit had caused a further rift between Howard and his uncle Rupert. *Dawn Patrol* had been written by John Monk Saunders, who was then married to Avis, Rupert’s stepdaughter.

Howard reached Hawks when he was playing golf at the Lakeside Country Club. He asked to be allowed to come and play the game with Hawks, but the director refused. When Howard’s lawyer, Neil McCarthy, called Hawks and agreed to drop the suit, Hawks agreed to play eighteen holes with Howard. Later, he claimed he beat Howard by shooting seventy-one. Before the end of the game, Hawks had agreed to direct *Scarface* for \$25,000.

Hawks suggested James Cagney or Edward G. Robinson to play Tony Camonte. But Howard rejected the idea, since they were already associated with gangster movies, and he wanted *Scarface* to be more original than that type casting would suggest. Irving Thalberg wanted the role for his contract player, Clark Gable, but Howard nixed that idea. “I don’t care to speak to Gable for the rest of my life.”

Finally, the agent, Al Rosen, pitched the Austrian-born actor, Paul Muni, who had made a name for himself in the Yiddish Art Theatre in New York.

At first, Muni turned down the idea, fearing he would be miscast. The choice of Muni was an odd one for both Howards, each of whom was anti-Semitic. Finally, Howard offered the actor \$20,000 but he held out and got \$27,000.

When Hawks actually met Muni and saw how thin he was, he told wardrobe to make him wear a padded suit for more bulk. For the role of the top gunman, Guino Rinaldo, Howard wanted George Raft, even though this part-time gangster, part-time actor, had been the lover of Billie Dove. If Howard had any doubts about casting a former rival in the film, it disappeared when Raft agreed to do the picture for only five hundred dollars. “He’s perfect for the part, since he *is* a gangster,” Howard told Hawks. “Let Billie and everybody else see Raft for the sleazeball he is.” Raft was perfectly cast as the oily haired sidekick to Capone, tossing a nickel coin, an act that would become his trademark. The screen character was based on Frank Rio, Capone’s bodyguard.

Scarface’s crosstown rival, Gaffney, was to be played by Boris Karloff, the British actor generating excitement on the screen as *Frankenstein*. For the female lead of Cesca Camonte, sister of the notorious Tony, both Howard and Hawks agreed that Ann Dvorak was the sexy choice, especially when they saw her dancing with Raft at a private party. At the party, Dvorak wore a black silk gown almost cut down to her hips, with nothing on underneath it. Howard had already seduced her, as had Raft. She would soon be bedding Hawks himself.

With Ann Dvorak, Howard began a lifelong fascination with the penile measurements of his rivals in love. Often he would quiz women he was seducing about the exact measurements of his competitors.



Paul Muni and Ann Dvorak in *Scarface*

He did that with Dvorak, demanding to know the size of Raft’s legendary “Blacksnake,” and how his own penis compared in size. When he heard that she was sleeping with the director, he also wanted to know how Hawks measured up. On the golf course, Hawks had bragged to Howard about his “ten-inch pecker.” But the director was such a liar Howard didn’t believe him. He was more assured when Dvorak told him that Hawks had only an average sized penis and was often impotent. Howard must have been grateful that he’d always shown a certain sexual prowess around Dvorak and that she hadn’t learned of his own occasional bouts of impotence.

Like a voyeur, Howard watched the rushes of a hot scene between Dvorak and Muni, playing her brother, over and over again until about three o’clock in the morning in his library at Muirfield. He became visibly moved by the scene, enough so that he drove his Rolls Royce over to the home of the actress. Once there, he demanded entry. Pulling off his clothes, he seduced her in her bed, then got up, put on his pants, and drove off. The next day, sanity prevailed. Even Howard knew that this brother-and-sister scene between Muni and Dvorak wouldn’t pass the censors.

Hawks tried to chase Howard off the set every time he appeared. But one afternoon Howard arrived with two of his assistants carrying live ammunition. He demanded that Hawks use real bullets in the machine guns. At first Hawks objected, claiming one of the cast or crew might get killed, but Howard as producer prevailed.

“I want to see those machine guns spitting real bullets,” Howard said. The decision that day was to have tragic consequences. Gaylord Lloyd, brother of screen comedian Harold Lloyd, visited the set two weeks later to see the action. Positioning himself where he was told not to stand, Gaylord came under attack. A bullet ricocheted dangerously, and he suffered the permanent loss of sight in one eye.

In talking pictures, Howard became the film industry’s strongest advocate of sex and violence. He urged Hawks to put in more car chases (and crashes) and lots of machine gun fire. At one point Howard wanted to release the picture *as Blood and Bullets*.

After the film wrapped, Hawks told his Hollywood cronies that he flew to Chicago and personally showed *Scarface* to Al Capone himself following a lavish dinner in a Chicago hotel. “Capone loved it!” Hawks later claimed.

Such an event never happened. Capone was in Leavenworth Prison, having been convicted of income tax evasion.

In March of 1932 Howard had followed with keen interest the news events surrounding the kidnapping of the infant son of his aviator rival, Charles Lindbergh. Over the radio he’d heard the news that the baby was found murdered before the abductors specified how a fifty thousand dollar ransom payment was to be delivered.

Since he didn’t have any children of his own, Howard himself began to fear that he might be kidnapped and held for ransom—possibly killed. For a while he ordered bodyguards for himself, and summoned in locksmiths to increase the security around Muirfield and to install extra gates for his protection.

Howard had been known for flashing a roll of money in night clubs throughout the city. Noah Dietrich every week sent him at least two thousand dollars in large and small bills. One Saturday when the money was delivered to Muirfield, Howard sent it back. Dietrich called for an explanation. “I’ll no longer carry money on me,” Howard said. “Not one cent!”

“How are you going to buy a cup of coffee or make a phone call?” the perplexed Dietrich asked.

“I’ll borrow a quarter or even a dime from someone,” Howard said. From that day forth, and as inconvenient as it often was, he no longer carried money on him, which often put him at the mercy of strangers.

“It was pathetic,” his night-clubbing friend, Cubby Broccoli, said. “The world’s richest man begging for a dime.”

It was with this new sense of security that Howard accepted an invitation to spend an evening with Tallulah Bankhead at Marlene Dietrich’s house. “We’ve all had the divine Gary Cooper, dah-ling,” Tallulah said to Howard. “Let’s get together and compare measurements.”

Howard had met Marlene at several of the then notorious “pansy clubs,” often when she was on the arm of her director, Josef von Sternberg. But Howard and Marlene never had a close encounter. He was eager to seduce the German beauty because he admired her style, her dress, and her glamour.

Howard arrived early at Marlene’s house, with Tallulah being the tardy guest. He was shown into her living room where the beautifully gowned Marlene, a vision in pink, waited for him.

Howard had seen Marlene as Lola in *The Blue Angel* six times, and he’d confused the character with Marlene herself.

No one knows exactly what they talked about while waiting for Tallulah, but when the Alabama diva was shown into the living room, she found Marlene and Howard discussing what security precautions she’d taken in the wake of the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby. Howard was inordinately interested in the subject.



Miss Tallulah Bankhead

She told him that in mid-May she’d received extortion letters threatening the life of her beloved daughter, Maria, if she didn’t deliver ten thousand dollars. In a written threat, Marlene was told that “if you want to be a screen star, pay, and if you don’t, she’ll be but a loving memory to you.”

The threats to Marlene’s daughter proved to be idle. But hearing about such a ransom note only intensified Howard’s own fears. Marlene seemed to play on his anxieties, as she claimed that the press endangered his life by publishing story after story about how rich he was.

“I’ve never had to worry about that myself,” Tallulah said. “The wolf is always at my door. I’ve never had a decent pot to piss in.”



Marlene Dietrich

Hearing that remark and taking it literally, Howard the next day ordered a gold chamber pot made by Tiffany’s for delivery to Tallulah. At her more outrageous parties, she used to bring out that pot for a public display of a “little tinkle-tinkle from your Aunt Tallu.”

Back at Marlene’s house, Tallulah tried to bring some gaiety to the party by talking about movies. “I always did want to get into Marlene’s pants,” she said, referring to being offered a role Marlene had turned down. “I ask you, Howard, who is the more *Tarnished Lady*? Marlene or me? And, dah-ling, the reason I’m introducing you to this enchanting creature tonight is to make up for my foul deeds in fixing you up with Ethel Barrymore.”

“Miss Barrymore was very nice,” Howard said gallantly.

He was mildly surprised that Tallulah and Marlene were friends, because he felt that Paramount was promoting a feud between them, as it hoped to turn Tallulah into “another Marlene” on the screen.

In his very undiplomatic way, he brought up this subject. Marlene quickly explained. “Paramount has made four million dollars with *Morocco*, *Dishonoured*, and *Shanghai Express*. If Paramount has yet another Marlene, the studio bosses figure they might make eight million dollars.”

“Oh, forget all that silly talk, dah-ling,” Tallulah said. “What utter nonsense, turning me into another Marlene, another Garbo. Hasn’t it ever occurred to anyone that Miss Tallulah Bankhead is completely an American original and can only be herself?”

Sitting on the sofa next to Howard, she suddenly turned to him, placing her hand within striking distance of his crotch. “Enough of what Marlene thinks of herself, and what Tallulah thinks of herself. What do you, a Hollywood producer, think of these two scandalous pussies before you?”

Howard was not known for his insightful remarks. Perhaps inspired by the company he was keeping, he did deliver a rather accurate appraisal. “Both of you are great actresses. But I fear each of you will always be a supporting player to the two most mercurial personalities in Hollywood, Miss Bankhead and Miss Dietrich.”

After that, all Marlene could say was, “Mr. Hughes, it is time the three of us climbed the stairs to hear our bedtime stories.”

“I guarantee you we won’t put you to sleep,” Tallulah promised. “Instead of reading to you, we’ll act out our beddie-poo stories.”

“Indeed we will,” Marlene said. “Mr. Hughes, you are about to become the luckiest man on the planet.”

“I know you’re not the type to write memoirs, but if you ever do, you could devote an entire chapter to this night,” Tallulah said.

That night, Howard Hughes was seduced by both *Fraülein* Dietrich and that volatile bundle of overripe Alabama charm, Miss Tallulah Bankhead.

Marlene came right up to Howard and leaned toward him, giving his right ear a slight bath with her darting, serpentine tongue. “I’ve never been to bed with a Texan. Tonight I want to find out if it’s true what they say about tall, lanky men from the Lone Star State.”

“You won’t be disappointed,” Howard said, taking each woman by the arm and heading to the foyer and the steps beyond.

Looking up at the stairs and then at Howard, Tallulah kissed him lightly on the lips. “I’m sure your mama told you about the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Wait until you see what’s waiting for you upstairs!”

The next day Tallulah told the story of her night with Howard and Marlene to her friend Billy Haines, who then told it to everyone. That month it was the number one topic of conversation at parties, even making it to the dinner table at Pickfair.



Howard Hughes Jr.

From the very beginning of the *Scarface* shoot, Howard faced dire warnings from the censors, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors, chaired by the grotesquely ugly, right-wing fanatic, Will Hays. When this former chairman of the Republican Party saw the first cut of the film, he demanded a new ending and at least thirty minutes of cuts, which virtually robbed the picture of its plot and integrity. He even demanded another title —*Shame of the Nation*.

Hawks urged Howard to defy the board, but he feared losing the Seal of Approval. With \$800,000 of his own money invested in the film, he felt that he’d never earn his money back unless *Scarface* were allowed to be shown in all the cities of America.

Caving in to Hays’s demands, Howard began to tamper with Hawks’s cut, even agreeing to insert “a little sermon in the middle of the film lecturing against the evils of crime.” William Randolph Hearst himself was selected as the actor to deliver that lecture.

When a final cut was made for release, Hawks was furious at Howard for allowing *Scarface* to be mutilated. But Howard was granted his Seal of Approval. Even so, the Censorship Board of New York banned the film for showing in that state. Aided by members of the press, including *The New York Herald-Tribune*, Howard attacked his political enemies who were trying to suppress his film. At the urging of Hays, Howard had opted to kill the more dramatic ending where Tony was mowed down by gunfire on the street, dying a “heroic” gangster’s death. The substitute ending showed Tony turning “chicken-hearted” as he was hauled off to the gallows to be hanged.

When word reached Howard that Hays had vowed that “Scarface will never be shown on the screens of America,” Howard swung into action. Hays said that he could never give his approval to a picture that glorified crime, even though in the past twelve months he had given the Seal of Approval to more than fifty gangster films.

Howard viewed the attempt to suppress his film as part of a conspiracy in Hollywood to destroy him as an independent filmmaker. This was no doubt accurate, and not just a reflection of Howard’s paranoia.

Not all states, including Louisiana, had censorship boards, so Howard decided to open *Scarface* in New Orleans. Playing to a packed house, it premiered at Loews State Theatre in New Orleans. He accurately predicted that the film would get rave reviews. The momentum in both the press and word of mouth began to build. Even such powerful columnists as Walter Winchell were singing the praise of *Scarface* in print. Like a punch in the face of Will Hays, Wilton A. Barrett, executive secretary of the National Board of Review, endorsed *Scarface*.

Howard opted to show the uncut version of *Scarface* to the press at a special screening at Grauman’s Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, where this unadulterated version met with rave reviews.

Eventually, the strait-laced Presbyterian, Will Hays, bowed to mounting pressure and granted the Seal of Approval to *Scarface*. His personal hatred and vendetta against Howard, however, would continue for the rest of his life.

Howard emerged from the fray with a hit picture and a public image as a warrior fighting against unreasonable censorship in America. But when he would return to making pictures, notably *The Outlaw*, he would face his biggest battle yet with the censors.

Although Howard viewed *Scarface* as his greatest achievement in film, even more than *Hell’s Angels*, he would order it locked away in his private vaults for years at a stretch, even when a distributor offered him two million dollars for its re-release. The only way a whole new generation could see *Scarface* was mostly at clandestine screenings with 16mm bootleg copies.

In 1983, after Howard’s death, the Hughes estate made a deal for a remake starring AlPacino. The story was transferred from Chicago to Miami. Will Hays would have died a second death if he’d seen the new Al Pacino version, one of the most violent films ever made and riddled with obscene language.

In Hollywood Howard let it be known that “the pigheaded independent from Texas” was leaving films forever. He resigned from the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, an organization which had treated him badly. He let his friends know that he was turning the industry over to the “king kikes,” a racial slur on Louis B. Mayer, Harry Cohn, and Jack Warner. “I’m taking to the skies and my freedom. No censorship there,” Howard proclaimed to Noah Dietrich.

“All my time will be devoted to aviation,” he told Billy Haines.

“What about sex?” his friend asked.

“I’ll make time for it,” Howard said.

Howard warned Jean Harlow not to marry Paul Bern, but his platinum-haired former star didn’t heed his advice. Howard told his friends that the couple were the two most incompatible people in Hollywood.



Newlyweds:
Paul Bern and Jean Harlow

Although generally liked by the movie colony, Bern had his enemies as well. Some of them called him “the creepy little man.”

Bern married Harlow on July 2, 1932. Even though wed to what many men dreamed about at night, Bern continued to go out on the town for flings at bars frequented by homosexuals. According to Bern’s friend, Billy Haines, he also continued to patronize male hustlers, usually out-of-work actors needing to pay the rent. One hustler known only as “Jack” became one of Bern’s particular favorites.

“Paul wouldn’t talk about Jean,” Billy said, “but he didn’t look like a very happy puppy after the marriage. His skin had become ghostly pale. He was really haggard and had lost weight. He was very distraught and had developed a nervous tick in his left eye.”

The marriage didn’t last long. On September 5, 1932, about two months after the wedding ceremony, Bern was dead. He’d been shot to death in a house he’d purchased for Jean, which she hated, set in the midst of five acres of grounds in Benedict Canyon in Beverly Hills. Bern’s butler, John Carmichael, discovered the body in Jean’s all-white boudoir. Bern was nude and lying sprawled on the floor in front of a full-length mirror. Before the shooting, his body had been drenched in Jean’s favorite perfume, Mitsouko. He’d been shot in the head with a .38 caliber revolver, which was still in his hand.

Was it a suicide? Murder?

As in the death more than 30 years later of blonde bombshell, Marilyn Monroe, Bern’s suicide or murder still remains one of the unsolved mysteries of Hollywood. Only one thing is certain. Virtually everybody associated with Bern’s death, however remotely, lied. No one got the story straight, and, to

make matters even more puzzling, some of the key participants changed their stories over the years, contradicting earlier testimony or claims.

Instead of calling the police, Carmichael alerted Whitey Hendry, head of security at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, where Bern was employed. Within the hour, Louis B. Mayer, accompanied by David O. Selznick and Irving Thalberg, arrived at the scene of the suicide/murder. Under Mayer's direction, they immediately began to rearrange the objects within the house, an action which appeared to involve tampering with evidence. Mayer was convinced that Jean had shot her husband in the head, and that his chief moneymaker had to be protected at all costs. He began to devise a possible scenario before the police arrived. Thirty minutes later, Howard Strickling, head of MGM publicity and known as "The Fixer," also arrived on the scene.

The son of a Presbyterian minister, Strickling knew "where all the bodies were buried," although he hated hearing himself characterized that way. If Clark Gable, driving while drunk, ran over a pedestrian and killed him, Strickling was called in for damage control.

The details of what might have happened that night were supplied by Ilse Lahn, the *doyenne* of the German colony in Hollywood. Eventually, she became a famous literary agent and this author's representative for film property sales. On a rare visit to New York in the 1970s, she talked for hours about the death of Paul Bern, her once dear friend, and why she felt it was murder instead of suicide. At the time of Bern's death, Ilse was not an agent but was working as a dubbing supervisor at MGM.

"Everyone in the German colony in Hollywood at the time knew that Paul had been murdered," Ilse claimed, "and that the killer was Harlow herself. Clark Gable might have thought she was 'a good kid,' but I always detested the tramp and begged Paul not to marry her."

She remembered that when she became an agent years later, Strickling came to her house and wanted to seek her help in finding a writer to co-author a tell-all memoir about his behind-the-scenes role at MGM. "After spending a lifetime of keeping the secrets of the stars," Ilse said, "he seemed to want to unburden himself. Get it off his chest, so to speak."

In his proposed book, Strickling planned to devote an entire chapter to the Bern murder and the subsequent cover-up. Strickling claimed that he found no suicide note but discovered a strange entry in Bern's guest book, which had also been signed—on other pages—by such notables as Gary Cooper and his then girlfriend, actress Lupe Velez.

Dearest dear,

Unfortunately (sic) this is the only way to make good the frightful wrong I have done you and to wipe out my humiliation.

I love you.

Paul.

You understand last night was only a comedy

The note trails off without a period at the end of the sentence as if Bern had meant to write something else. It was never clear to whom the note was written, much less what it was about. If indeed it were a suicide note, an entry in a guest book seemed an improbable place to leave it.

When Mayer was first shown the note by Strickling, he ordered that it be destroyed. Strickling, however, prevailed upon the studio chief to change his mind, claiming that the entry read like a suicide note and would establish suicide as the means by which Bern died instead of a possible murder.

Mayer finally agreed, and then wanted to go even further in establishing a motive. He decided that the note might suggest impotence as the reason Bern killed himself. "He couldn't do his duty as a man," Mayer told Strickling.

Bern's lack of sexual prowess had been the subject of much Hollywood gossip. The famous fan dancer and stripper, Sally Rand, once went on record as saying, "I can speak from experience. I know firsthand and can vouch for it, Paul wasn't impotent."

Yet another girlfriend, Barbara LaMarr, had gone to bed with Bern a year before her early death. She told columnist Adela Rogers St. Johns that Bern had no right to marry any woman. Apparently, in "graphic, technical, and explicit" detail she described how Bern's genitalia had never developed larger than those of a small boy.

In his notorious biography of Harlow, author Irving Shulman has Jean denouncing her husband for having "a dangle half the size of my pinkie."

"Harlow did not discover Paul's deficiencies on their wedding night as so many have assumed," Ilse claimed. "She'd gone to bed with him before and was well aware of his lack of endowment. She knew what she was getting before she married Paul."

Strickling maintained that Bern had told him that he had informed Jean before the marriage that sex would not be important in the relationship. "Instead of sex, I will give you undying love and respect," Bern is alleged to have told Harlow.

Mayer's theory of impotence prevailed and was flashed around the world. It did have one drawback, however. Bern died on September 5, 1932 and the Bern/Harlow marriage occurred more than two months previously, on July 2. Presumably, Bern's impotence would have long been revealed to Jean at that point, since they shared the same bed in the house on Easton Drive.

Although he did not specify the exact nature of his discovery, Strickling told Ilse that Mayer also ordered him to remove a batch of material deemed "lurid," including a dildo. To Strickling, that suggested that Bern might have had intercourse with his new wife via a dildo. "There were also certain photographs not meant for public consumption," Strickling claimed. When Ilse inquired about the whereabouts of the personal property removed from the dead man's house, Strickling said he didn't know where it was concealed.

Amazingly, although the body had been discovered that morning, it wasn't until 2:17 pm that Irving Thalberg actually called the police to come over. No one to this day knows who tipped off the press. But before two detectives arrived at Easton Drive, a Los Angeles newspaper had issued an EXTRA! about Bern's suicide, and it was already being hawked on the streets as a squad car pulled into the driveway.

"There were more cover-ups to come," Strickling told Ilse. "At one point even Howard Hughes got involved."

The whereabouts of Jean Harlow on the night of her husband's murder or suicide remain unclear to this day. Beatrice Dowler, Howard's housekeeper, remembered a distraught Jean arriving in tears at the Muirfield estate to see Howard. He also confirmed to Noah Dietrich the next day that he'd seen Jean on the night of Bern's death.

Presumably for the first time, Howard in his library learned about "the other woman" in Bern's life. She was Dorothy Millette, Bern's common-law wife with whom he'd lived in New York and Toronto. Bern claimed that she had been in a coma for ten years. In spite of no marriage license, Bern always identified Dorothy a struggling actress, as "Mrs. Paul Bern." For ten years, Dorothy was institutionalized. Her condition today would be

diagnosed as schizophrenia. Bern paid for her upkeep in the asylum and, when she was released, continued to send her a monthly check.

After her release, Dorothy wanted to come to Los Angeles and resume her life with Bern, pleading with him to divorce Jean. When Bern refused, she demanded fifty thousand dollars from him so that she could start a new life for herself. Bern agreed to meet with her in the house on Easton Drive. That night, he suggested that Jean spend the night with her mother, Mama Jean. Apparently, he told Jean all about Dorothy and claimed that he wanted to meet with her privately to resolve the question of their “triangle.”



Jean Harlow, Howard Hughes Jr.

Jean later told Strickling that she did go to her mother’s house but impulsively decided that her place was with her husband during his confrontation with Dorothy. Her fear was that if Dorothy claimed that she was married to Bern at the time Jean wed him, she’d be accused of bigamy, which might ruin her screen career.

Jean confided to Strickling that she drove back to Easton Drive. After parking her car, she was walking up the driveway when she heard a shot. She claimed she stood paralyzed in her tracks, afraid to go into the house. Jean went on to assert that she saw an unidentified woman fleeing through the front door. Having never seen Dorothy Millette before, she didn’t know if this were Bern’s “other wife.”

Apparently, Jean revealed a different version to Howard, who told Dietrich that Jean said that she did enter the murder house. She claimed that after she entered the house, minutes after Dorothy had driven away, she discovered Bern shot in the head and lying nude on the floor. The gun, if the reports are to be believed, was lying five feet from his corpse. Jean then stated that she took the gun and placed it in Bern’s hand to make it look like a suicide. She felt that if Dorothy were arrested, the whole sordid story of her relationship with Bern would be exposed in the press along with ruinous bigamy charges. Fearing the consequences, she didn’t want Dorothy to be found to talk to the police.

Jean also told Strickling she drove over to Muirfield to seek Howard’s advice. “I had no one else to turn to,” she claimed.

As Howard would later relate to Noah Dietrich, he didn’t believe a word that Jean said. He felt that she was telling a lie, and that she had been the one who murdered Bern after a violent argument.

Isle Lahn agreed with Howard’s assessment. She claimed that Bern told her that his marriage had been a grave mistake and that he was going to divorce Jean and return to Dorothy now that she was cured. “Dorothy needs me, Jean does not,” Bern is alleged to have said.

“That haughty little darling, Miss Harlow, couldn’t stand being dumped for another woman, and a rather ugly one at that,” Isle said. “Harlow feared that if word got out that America’s leading sexpot couldn’t hold on to her man, she would be ridiculed in the press.”

Whether he believed Jean’s story or not, after hearing it, Howard swung into action. He told Jean to return to her mother’s house, then summoned her doctor, Robert Kinnicott, and ordered him to sedate her heavily. That way, when the police came to question her, she would be in no condition to answer their questions.

District Attorney Buron Fitts issued a subpoena dated September 7 and had it delivered to Jean’s house. Dr. Kinnicott notified the DA that Jean was “too ill for personal appearances.” An inquest was held, concluding that Bern died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. There was no attempt ever made to contact Dorothy Millette. The Paul Bern case was officially closed on September 12.

Friends other than Howard offered to comfort Jean. Clark Gable wanted to seduce her so that she could know what “a real man felt like.” Actress Marie Dressler offered her comfort as well. The platinum bombshell turned down both offers.

Dorothy Millette herself came to a mysterious end. She rode the train from Los Angeles to San Francisco. From there, she boarded the *Delta Queen* for Sacramento. She was never seen alive again.

Her fate remains unknown to this date. A Japanese fisherman later discovered her badly decomposed body in the river. After an autopsy, a coroner’s report labeled her death a suicide like Paul Bern’s. She was known for keeping a diary but before her hotel room in San Francisco could be searched by the police, someone had entered and had stolen the diary.

Ilse blamed Howard Hughes for the mysterious death of Dorothy Millette. Her speculation was that he had hired one of his burly bodyguards to follow Millette when she boarded the ferryboat, and that he had then pushed her overboard where she drowned.

Strickling, during his conference with Ilse about his proposed book, disagreed with Ilse. He claimed that Jean had turned to another trusted friend, the gangster, Abner (Longy) Zwillman, and that two of this mobster’s boys had done the dirty deed. Earlier, Longy had ordered the killing of two of Jean’s blackmailers when they threatened to expose her nude photographs.

Right before his death, Noah Dietrich was pointedly asked his own theory about the death of Dorothy. “I wouldn’t put it past Howard to do this as a favor for Harlow,” he said. “Like many of Howard’s schemes, this one wasn’t thought out too carefully. If Dorothy did kill Bern, then she should have stayed alive. But with her out of the picture, and not able to testify, the blame for the murder might have focused entirely on Harlow, where it probably belonged all along. I’ll go to my dying grave believing what I believe, and that is that Jean Harlow killed Paul Bern following a violent argument, when he told her that he was leaving her for Dorothy. What Harlow wanted with that no-dick creep I’ll never figure out.”

Over the years, speculation continued about Paul Bern’s death. In a magazine article in November of 1960, Howard’s former screenwriter, Ben

Hecht, wrote:

Paul Bern, remembered for having committed suicide as the impotent bride groom of Jean Harlow, the great cinema sexpot, did no such thing. His suicide note, hinting that he was sexually impotent and had therefore “ended the comedy” was a forgery. Studio officials decided, sitting in a conference around his dead body, that it was better to have Paul dead as a suicide than as the murder victim of another woman. It would be less a black eye for their biggest moviemaking heroine, La Belle Harlow. It might crimp her box office allure to have her blazoned as a wife who couldn’t hold her husband. It was a delicate point of the sort that is clear only to the front office theologians of a great studio.

The crime reporter, Hank Messick, had his own scenario as published in his book, *The Beauties and the Beasts*. He claimed that Longy Zwillman drove both Jean Harlow and Dorothy Millette in the same car to the home of Bern. The night turned into a disaster, and Dorothy fired the fatal shot after a bitter argument. Jean “watched in horror!” Then the cover-up began. Messick asserts that Longy then drove Jean to her mother’s house and Dorothy to San Francisco, from which she embarked on that fatal ferryboat ride to Sacramento. Presumably, although this is not made clear, one of Longy’s men had Dorothy pushed overboard into the river.

The Bern/Harlow house was later occupied by Jay Sebring, the premier men’s hair stylist in Hollywood. Until she ditched him for her future husband, Roman Polanski, Sharon Tate, a struggling actress, was a frequent date. One night in 1966 she stayed alone at Jay’s house. She later claimed that the ghost of Paul Bern appeared before her. While fleeing, she saw another figure—either male or female—with its throat cut. Then the apparition disappeared. This was said to be a vision of her own fate when she would meet her death at the hands of the Charles Manson “Helter Skelter” gang.

Howard dropped in to visit the set of the 1931 *Just A Gigolo* to see his friend, Billy Haines, and invite him for an evening on the town that would include dinner and a nightclub. Billy was playing a British nobleman in this little romantic comedy, and introduced Howard to one of the co-stars of the film, the British-born actress, Lilian Bond, cast as Lady Agatha Carrol.

The minor star is remembered today, if at all, for her appearance as Lillie Langtry, the object of Judge Roy Bean’s unyielding desire, in the 1940 film *The Westerner*. She lived a long life, dying in 1991, and her name is still romantically linked to Howard’s even though their so-called romance was short.

A dark, curvaceous beauty, Lilian was at the peak of her career when she met Howard, having been cast in fifteen movies in only twelve months. She would appear opposite such stars as Loretta Young, Nancy Carroll, Charles Laughton, and Boris Karloff, although she never seemed to catch on with the public.

Howard was impressed with Billy’s prediction that she was going to become one of the biggest female stars in pictures. That was her dream, and Howard bought into it.

Decades from the date of their first meeting, Lilian said, “I remember Howard as if it were only yesterday. I thought he was very handsome. Up to then, I had never met any rich man who was handsome.”

“I was hoping to make it big in Hollywood, and for a time my dreams were coming true,” Lilian said. “I was making films so fast I got dizzy. Of course, on looking back, I realize that none of them was particularly great. Even at the peak of my career, I didn’t always get star parts and willingly accepted uncredited roles such as ‘actress on a train’ or ‘girl at the bar.’ Some of my characters were a bit outrageous—one I remember, Dolores Divine I was called. Don’t you love that?”

“Billy and I went out on the town together, but we were just sisters,” Lilian recalled. “I was delighted when Howard joined our party for the evening. And, yes, I went to bed with him on the first date. I don’t know what the rules are today. He wasn’t a particularly responsive lover. Let’s just say he was adequate for the challenge and leave it at that. Billy had told me that Howard had just dumped Billie Dove and was dating Ginger Rogers.”

“I guess that determined our choice of a club,” she said. “I don’t remember the name—something like *The Little Cloud That Cried*. Weird name. I suspected that he didn’t want to take me to some important place like the Cocoanut Grove because Miss Ginger would surely hear about that.”

“We had a good evening,” she remembered, “and after dinner Billy hastily departed on his nocturnal adventures, leaving Howard and me alone together, which both of us welcomed after the introductions were made.”

“The moment Billy left, Howard came on to me like gangbusters,” she said. “He told me that he wanted to sign me to a personal contract—God, how many times did he say that to a beautiful woman?—and even suggested that he was lonely and was looking for a new wife.”

“I had heard that he was the richest producer in Hollywood—a lot of Texas oil money—and frankly I would have been delighted to become the second Mrs. Howard Hughes. What gal in her right mind wouldn’t? Maybe only Katharine Hepburn years from then would say no. But I said ‘girl in her right mind’ which would exclude Hepburn.”

“Before going to bed with me, he insisted that we bathe together,” she said, “and he bathed me like I was a baby girl or something. That was one clean man. He wanted to make sure everything was washed. It was years later that I learned that he had previously contacted a venereal disease—I don’t think it was syphilis—and was perhaps worried about infecting himself again. I really don’t know.”

“He was so thorough I made a joke, which seemed to irk him,” she said. “I told him that I had heard Charlie Chaplin was so afraid of venereal infection that he coated his penis with iodine before entering a woman. I jokingly suggested that to Howard, but I should have realized that he wouldn’t find it funny.”

She claimed that Howard dated her for only a few short weeks. “We got together one night a week for our ritual bath. Of course, I was already thoroughly bathed and perfumed before meeting him. He discussed several film projects with me. If I remember, he wanted to make a film about Zeppelins. He was hoping to score a big hit like he did with *Hell’s Angels*. He told me that he’d cast me in the female role, and the part would do for me what Jean Harlow’s lead did for her in *Hell’s Angels*. Fool that I was, I believed him.”

She said that at the time she dated him, he was more obsessed with aviation than movies. “I remember once we drove high into the hills above Los Angeles and enjoyed an incredible view. He wasn’t paying much attention to me, but kept looking up at the sky. I’ll always remember him saying, ‘Up there I’m the master of my universe, my own man. Down here I have too many battles to fight with too many shithheads. Of course, being a pilot is great for your love life. If there is anything about a man that a woman goes for, it’s learning that he’s a pilot. After she hears that, the night is mine.’”

“My great disappointment came when some damn newspaper wrote a story that Howard was finished with films—no more movies,” she said. “It

was then I knew that all this talk about launching my career would not amount to anything. I had fallen for the old line. Even knowing what I know now, I still would have dated him. It was fun while it lasted. You can write me up as one of his many, many trophies.”

“The end came suddenly when two dozen American Beauty roses arrived at my doorstep,” she said. “Not only that, but a beautiful brooch. He said that it belonged to his mother, but it looked like something one of his assistants had picked out the week before at Tiffany’s. The brooch was eventually stolen from my dressing room, but I at least have my memories of Howard and what might have been.”

As a final note, she added, “I bet our Zeppelin film would have cleaned up at the box office. Oh, yes, did I mention it? Howard asked me to marry him, and I accepted. A lot of good that did me!”

Both Billy Haines and Ramon Novarro claimed credit for introducing Howard to his short-lived fling with the beautiful southern belle from Tennessee, Dorothy Jordan, who was only a year younger than Howard.

Dorothy had first gained recognition when she’d danced on Broadway with the Astaires in *Funny Face*. Very gay-friendly, before the term was invented, she’d also appeared on stage with the slightly effeminate hooper, Clifton Webb. Going to Hollywood, she’d become a leading lady in the silents in the late Twenties and in the days of the early Talkies.

She is still seen on the screen today at showings of the famous 1930 film, *Min and Bill*, which starred Marie Dressler. At the time Howard met Dorothy, she was appearing in *Bondage*, playing a resident in a home for unwed mothers.

She had co-starred with Billy in *Tailor Made Man* in 1931, and had appeared opposite Ramon in three films, including *In Gay Madrid* in 1930. Howard had seen only one of her films, *The Lost Squadron*, with Joel McCrea and Richard Dix, and had been impressed with her clean-cut, wholesome beauty.

When Dorothy learned that he hadn’t seen her star opposite Bette Davis in *Cabin in the Cotton* (“I’d love to kiss ya but ah just washed ma hair”), she insisted that he drive her to Pasadena where the film was still showing at a small cinema.

“I think he was more taken with Bette in the film than he was with me,” Dorothy later said. “But those two were years away from having an affair.”

Although he didn’t want to be seen in public with Lilian Bond, Howard invited Dorothy to go dancing with him at Cocoanut Grove. Perhaps Ginger Rogers was mad at the time, and he was no longer worried that she’d be jealous. “It started out like a real romantic evening,” she said. “Howard looked gorgeous, and I was at my best. But then Jeanette MacDonald entered the room with an entourage. Howard spent most of the evening sending love notes over to her table. Jeanette consistently ignored him, and I thought it served him right the way he was neglecting me.”

One morning after Dorothy had spent a night with Howard at Muirfield, he asked her to accompany him on his search for a new wardrobe. She was known for her taste in clothing, and she felt he wanted her to help him select fabrics for his tailor-made suits. During the Twenties, Howard had emulated his father by wearing the best suits from Brook Brothers or Savile Row in London. Howard and his new best friend, Pat DeCicco, were known as two of the smartest dressers in Hollywood.

“To my amazement, he took me to this men’s store that looked more like it sold hardware,” Dorothy recalled. “It was a place where plumbers and janitors went for their clothes. I remembered he purchased three pairs of khaki work pants. He then drove me to a shoe store where he bought three pairs of white canvas tennis shoes. One night when he took me to a big party Marion Davies was throwing in Santa Monica, he showed up in a well-tailored tuxedo but with one of those pairs of tennis shoes. That soon became his standard outfit for formal occasions. Our shopping spree continued. In the slummy side of Los Angeles, we went to this small department store that catered to low-class workers. He purchased a dozen shirts, mostly white, paying about \$1.50 each for them. He said he’d ignore the underwear because he didn’t believe in wearing any. Before the afternoon ended, he took me to this resale outlet where he purchased one black suit and one tobacco brown suit off the rack for fifteen odd dollars a piece. No more bespoke tailoring.”

Pat DeCicco later recalled his horror at seeing Howard for the first time in what gay men today call “blue collar drag.” “How can you dress like that?” he asked Howard.

“Don’t worry about it, Pat,” Howard said. “You’ll be the dude in the expensive clothes, and I’ll make the money.”

According to Dorothy, the wardrobe incident was only one in a series of irrational acts that Howard would commit in the years ahead. “I remember one night we drove all over Los Angeles looking for a vanilla ice cream that appealed to Howard. We must have gone to more than two dozen outlets before Howard found a vanilla cone that was right in texture and taste. It was a little store called Pat Kelly’s Ice Cream. Apparently, there was a Mrs. Kelly in the back room who made the ice cream herself. Howard loved it, ordering four scoops. He then went back and met the wife and ordered three large containers of vanilla ice cream, with the understanding that they’d be delivered to his Muirfield estate. He’d always order some scoops at dinner after he’d finished his steak and petite peas.”

Dorothy was too hip to fall for Howard’s promise of a big movie contract and starring roles, his usual line with women he was trying to seduce or seducing. “I went along for the party—and for no other reason. Actually, I was looking for a man to marry. My thing with Howard was a passing moment, but fun while it lasted.”

Cubby Broccoli had his own take on the Hughes/Jordan affair. “Howard was looking for an easy lay, and Jordon was very beautiful. Pat DeCicco called her a southern magnolia.”

Once, Howard flew Dorothy to New York, where columnist Walter Winchell spotted them together at the exclusive Stork Club. Back in Los Angeles, he took her three times for dinner at the swanky Perino’s. Dorothy remembered that each time he went back into the kitchen to instruct the chef how to prepare his steaks and give him instructions about serving only the smallest peas.

Dorothy’s romance with Howard quickly ended when she fell in love with director Merian C. Cooper. At the time, he was in the throes of his big success with *King Kong*, starring Howard’s future girlfriend, Fay Wray.

Howard is credited with offering Cooper some advice in cutting *King Kong*. Surprisingly, Howard had gone to a Hollywood theater by himself to see the film. In one clip, four sailors, after King Kong shook them off a log bridge, fall into a ravine where they are eaten alive by hideous giant spiders. The next day Howard called Cooper and told him that many women in the audience screamed and several patrons left the movie palace. “The scene is just too ghastly and takes away from the story.”

Cooper agreed with Howard, later saying, “The spider scene stopped the picture cold, so I cut it.”

As many Hollywood movie buffs know, Dorothy turned down the role of Honey Dale in *Flying Down to Rio* to go on her honeymoon with Cooper.

In her first role with Fred Astaire, Howard's girlfriend, Ginger Rogers, stepped in to replace Dorothy. The rest is movie history, or so they say.

Ginger called Howard and asked him to escort her to a party at the home of Una Merkel, the actress she'd met and befriended on the set of *42nd Street*. Una Merkel is remembered mainly for her no-holds-barred cat fight with Marlene Dietrich in *Destry Rides Again*, and for her ability to always deliver a wisecracking retort delivered deadpan. In 1932, Merkel had married an aviation designer, Ronald L. Burla, and both of them were hosting the party.

Ginger had gone to Muirfield around two o'clock that afternoon, bringing her evening clothes with her. Howard wanted to spend some quiet time alone with her, and she'd agreed to that. But as she was getting dressed for the party, a call came in for Howard from some distraught woman who had obtained his private number. Normally, he didn't accept such calls, but his housekeeper, Beatrice Dowler, said this one was urgent. "The woman's threatening to kill herself if she doesn't see you at once."

Howard took the call and, when he heard what she had to say, he told the woman to meet him in thirty minutes at the office of his attorney, Neil McCarthy. Howard then drove, with Ginger at his side, to the attorney's office, where he ordered Ginger to wait in the car until "this nasty business is concluded."

In the lawyer's office Howard confronted a blonde, shapely, and rather attractive would-be actress, Barbara Langford, who, as was later learned, had come to Hollywood two years earlier to make it as a film star. Finding no work, she'd taken a job as a waitress in a diner.

Neither McCarthy nor Howard ever commented on the nature of the threats Langford made that night in the office as an impatient Ginger waited for more than an hour in the car.

All that Howard told Ginger, as she later remembered, was that "I had Neil give the bitch five dollars to get rid of her."

"Is she going to kill herself?" Ginger asked.

"Frankly, as long as she doesn't do it on my property, I don't much care," Ginger remembered Hughes saying as they began their drive toward Una Merkel's party.

Earlier, Una Merkel had been cast opposite Ramon Novarro in the MGM collegiate drama, *Huddle*, and in the process, they had developed a strong friendship. Ramon had been very despondent, and Merkel wanted to cheer him up with a party. Ramon had lost almost all his money in the stock market crash of 1929, and had also discovered that his best friend and trusted business manager, Louis Samuel, had been embezzling from him. He had also recently lost his beloved brother, José, to cancer. Worried about his uncertain future in talking pictures, Ramon was depending to an increasing degree on liquor to get him through the night.

When Howard and Ginger arrived late at Merkel's party, Ramon was already deeply intoxicated. To the party, Merkel had invited cameraman Harold G. Rosson, and the woman he was soon to marry, Jean Harlow, in the wake of the death of her late husband, Paul Bern. Also at the party was William Bakewell, a juvenile actor of the 30s best known for appearing in *All Quiet on the Western Front* with Ginger's next husband, Lew Ayres.

Jean and Ramon had little to say to each other. Jean's late husband, Paul Bern, had produced *In Gay Madrid*, starring Ramon and Howard's latest flame, Dorothy Jordan. After Bern's murder, Ramon had told Hollywood gossips that, "I for one am glad to see the little prick go to prick heaven." Word of that had gotten back to Jean, and she didn't want to have anything to do with Ramon. Bern had further infuriated Ramon when he'd gone to Louis B. Mayer and urged the mogul not to renew Ramon's contract. Ramon never spoke to the producer again.

The night of the Merkel party, Howard and Jean had just had another of their big fights, although no one knows for sure just why. It might have been over "the other blonde in your life," Ginger Rogers. Inversely, Ginger was also jealous of Jean because of her success and because of her continuing romantic involvement with Howard.

Bringing together Ramon Novarro, Ginger Rogers, Jean Harlow, and Howard Hughes would have been the nightmare of most hostesses. During the party, Merkel seemed unaware that she had united four people in a potentially explosive situation. But the foursome, as well as Rosson, handled the evening with dignity. Only Ramon misbehaved by continuing to drink heavily.

At one point he disappeared into one of the upstairs bedrooms. A few minutes later, the party was alerted to screams coming from above.

When Merkel and her husband attempted to see what was the matter, Howard jumped up and said, "Let me handle this." Trailed by Ginger, he ascended the steps.

In the master bedroom, Howard was stunned to discover Ramon nude, wearing what looked like a *faux* tiara, jumping up and down on the bed, his cock and balls keeping time with the rhythm.

To everyone's dismay, he kept shouting, "I am Queen Victoria! I am Queen Victoria!"

And thus ended a typical evening in the life of Howard Hughes.

One day in 1932, acting on an impulse and unbeknownst to his staff and associates in Los Angeles, Howard rode the train from Los Angeles to Fort Worth, Texas. It would be one among many such disappearances, some of which lasted for weeks and in one instance for months at a time.

He arrived in Fort Worth wearing a newly purchased sky-blue suit from Sears & Roebuck and a pair of two-toned brown and white shoes. Joining other blue-collar workers, he stood in line at the personnel office of American Airlines. He had in his possession a driver's license issued in Texas and an authentic Social Security number. The name on both documents read "Charles Howard."

American Airlines' personnel clerk was impressed with Howard and hired him for a salary of \$115 per month as a baggage handler. He was assigned to the daily flight between Fort Worth and Cleveland. He had to report to American every morning at six o'clock to check and stow luggage in the plane, and for some reason, he had to physically accompany the luggage throughout both legs of the flights between the two cities.

On the flight to Cleveland, Howard sat up front with the pilot, observing his every navigational move and absorbing all the dials, switches, buttons, and levers.

He told the pilot, Bruce Dernhill, that he too wanted to become a pilot. Dernhill later recalled that he was impressed with this baggage handler's intricate knowledge of flying.

A district officer for American Airlines, Henry Madsen, just happened to be aboard the flight to Cleveland one morning. By coincidence, he'd met Howard when *Hell's Angels* had premiered in New York. He recognized him at once. "Mr. Hughes, what are you doing working for us?"

To explain his situation, Howard told *The New York Sun* on December 6, 1932, that he was working for American Airlines because he planned to make a film "about commercial aviation" and he wanted to learn the procedural, behind-the-scenes activities as a means of making his movie more authentic.

As for his job, the airline fired him as soon as his identity was exposed. It was against company policy to hire anyone under a false name. In the aftermath, Howard flew back to Hollywood where he hoped Ginger Rogers still waited for him. It was only then that he became aware, as he later told Noah Dietrich, that he hadn't bothered in advance to tell her about his leaving, and that he hadn't contacted her at any time during his unexplained absence.

After he returned to Muirfield, he made repeated calls to Ginger. She refused to come to the phone, even though he sent her daily flowers and had a diamond brooch delivered to her mother, Lela.

Thwarted and frustrated, Howard came up with an idea. He ordered Noah Dietrich to contact the Rogers household with some very bad news. "Tell her that I'm dying, and that I have to see her at once!"



Howard Hughes Jr. handling baggage

CHAPTER TEN

Los Angeles, 1933

Alarmed at the news about Howard's impending death, Ginger Rogers rushed to Muirfield for what she thought might be a final *adieu*. But when she learned that Howard was in fine health, and had only pretended to be ill, she stormed out of the house, tersely informing Noah Dietrich that her romance with Howard had officially ended.

Declaring himself as sick had worked well with Howard's mother, but Ginger was too smart to be fooled a second time. Nonetheless, after her departure, Howard continued to insist that a stroke was imminent. Alarmed, Dietrich rushed him to St. Vincent's Hospital in Los Angeles.

There, one of the nation's top cardiologists put Howard through a battery of tests, the examinations lasting all day. In an early form of a stress test, a monitoring device was attached to his bare chest, and he was instructed to run up and down three flights of steps for a full hour. He performed brilliantly. The cardiologist told Dietrich, "Your boy's as strong as a horse. There's nothing wrong with his heart. I wish mine were as good as his."

Even though Ginger had rejected him, Howard wasn't going to give her up that easily. He hired a pair of private detectives to report all of her activities to him. It was during the course of their sneaky invasion of her privacy that they discovered that she was having a torrid affair with Lew Ayres. Ever since she had seen his handsome, boyish face in the film, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Ginger had told some friends, "That's my dream man."

Howard already knew that Lew was a bisexual, having learned of the young actor's affair with Spencer Tracy. Howard told Dietrich that he was going to let Ginger go ahead with her plans to marry Lew. "She'll find out about him soon enough. Serves her right for walking out on me that way."



Hughes Jr. at play

Eventually, and in spite of her marriage to Lew Ayres the following year, Ginger would re-enter Howard's life. She would also have affairs with other lovers during the course of her marriage. Not surprisingly, none of this information appears in her sanitized autobiography, *Ginger*, although she warns readers at the beginning that her tome is not a "tell-all" book.



Ginger Rogers, Howard Hughes

Scotland, 1933

A week after the fiasco with Ginger, Howard returned East and sailed for Scotland. John Darrow was his bunk mate as he set out for Europe to purchase the *Rover*, the fifth largest yacht in the world. Designed and constructed by Stephens and Company in Glasgow, the *Rover* stretched 320 feet and was manned by a crew of nearly three dozen men under the command of Carl Flynn, whose nickname was “Jock.” Jock was a salty Irishman with a fondness for the whiskey of his country—“I can’t stand Scotch whisky. The Scots not only don’t know how to make whisky, they don’t know how to spell it, leaving out the e.”

The yacht’s asking price was a staggering \$850,000, the equivalent of more than 16 million dollars in today’s currency. The Scots would not come down on their price, wanting the full amount, forcing Howard to sell the *Hilda* on which he’d sailed with Billie Dove, whom he now referred to as “that tramp.”

Since Ella still had a freeze on his assets, he conceived a scheme with Dietrich where the cost of the yacht could be removed discreetly from Toolco royalties paid in London.

Changing its name to the *Southern Cross*, Howard lavished even more money on the vessel after purchasing it. He installed Murano chandeliers imported from Venice and also the largest known bed afloat for the master stateroom. From London, he ordered “the world’s largest ermine bedspread.”

On the first night, he auditioned the bed with John Darrow. “From the sound of things, it must have been one wild night,” Jock later said.

Since booze was still outlawed in America, Howard registered the ship in Panama. He personally supervised the installation of a ten thousand dollar wine cellar from a merchant based in London. That same dealer also secured two dozen bottles of rare 19th-century French brandy that one day would be praised by Sir Winston Churchill.

An entire rack of the most expensive perfumes in Paris was also ordered, along with valuable linens created by “nuns going blind somewhere in Flanders.” Howard ordered all his linen and towels monogrammed HH.

With John Darrow still at his side, Howard sailed across the Atlantic to Newport.

Jock later reported that Howard was particularly attracted to an extraordinarily handsome, blond-haired, blue-eyed sailor, Ralph Walker, who’d grown up in the slums of Glasgow. Howard first spotted him when Walker was exercising nude on deck. “With a body like he had,” Jock recalled, “I think he wanted to show it off. He could also have heard stories about Hughes and was deliberately baiting him.”

At any rate the moment the *Southern Cross* reached Newport, John was shipped back to Los Angeles, presumably to resume his film career. The next night, Ralph Walker was sleeping in the master bedroom under that ermine spread.

Howard then launched into what Dietrich would call the *debutante dujour* phase of his life.

East Coast, West Coast, 1933

On and off for at least a year, either with or without Pat DeCicco, Howard sailed aboard his “floating palace” into expensive seaports along America’s East Coast, especially Newport and Palm Beach.

Many of the young women sailing with him were introduced to him by Pat, who was well connected socially, and who would eventually marry the debutante of the year, Gloria Vanderbilt.

Rich and powerful East Coast families seemed only too willing to entrust their daughters to the two dashing lotharios of the sea. No doubt, the reputation of Howard as the richest man in America was part of the attraction. Pat, on the other hand, was often dismissed as “just a gigolo.”

Usually Howard spent no more than a weekend with one of these young beauties. The exception was seventeen-year-old Timmie Landsing, a stunning beauty and Manhattan debutante, who enjoyed a brief but intense romance with Howard.

Their inaugural meeting occurred in in Los Angeles. The romance itself was launched in a luxurious suite at the Ambassador Hotel, scene of many of Big Howard’s sexual conquests. Howard invited her to sail with him from California to Acapulco, where they spent a “glorious two weeks,” as he later told Pat. After that, he sailed with Timmie through the Panama Canal. On shore he would often leave her while he went off with Ralph Walker.

On the East Coast after the cruise, the romance continued. He invited her to come and stay with him at Muirfield where she occupied Ella’s old bedroom. During the day, she attended drama classes at Pasadena, as he was holding out the promise to her of a film career. In the afternoon, the Westmore brothers, two famous hairdressers of their day, restyled her image, making her more glamorous than she had been before.

Then Howard, as was typical of him, lost interest. Back at Muirfield, growing lonely and despondent, Timmie threatened suicide. Howard was unmoved. Over the years, many women would threaten suicide when he dumped them. Finally Timmie’s parents arrived from the East and removed her “from the clutches of that evil man.” The day that happened, Howard was flying over Southern California with William Randolph Hearst, Jr., the handsome, blue-eyed scion of the Hearst empire. He and Howard became almost instant friends and “cruising buddies.” Each of them actively pursued a series of lovely young women, few of whom turned down invitations from Howard Hughes Jr. and/or William Randolph Hearst Jr.

Privately, Louella Parsons referred to them as “airborne cocksmen.” The two frequently flew their hot dates—a string of starlets, beauty contest winners, and debutantes—to Palm Springs, to Mexico, and sometimes to San Simeon.

Hearst Jr. may have been unaware of Howard’s homosexual encounters, which he conducted privately and with an entirely different set of players.

One morning, Howard disappeared. Beatrice Dowler alerted Noah Dietrich but he waited for four days before attempting to find him. He was not on his yacht, and not at his suite at the Ambassador Hotel. He hadn’t flown away on one of his planes. Dietrich then called Neil McCarthy, who alerted the police, asking them to be discreet in their search for Howard.

Howard had a morbid fear of being kidnapped, and Dietrich thought that it was entirely possible that he had been abducted, although no ransom note had arrived at Muirfield.

Twice a day Dietrich checked with Leonard Daniel, a Los Angeles detective, but there was still no news of Howard, and still no ransom note. This led Dietrich to speculate that Howard might have been killed accidentally during an abduction, his body dumped somewhere. He ordered a search of the Los Angeles morgues.

Twenty days later, Howard miraculously returned. Beatrice Dowler placed a call to Dietrich. “Mr. Hughes is back, and he’s burning all his clothes and all the linens. There’s this big bonfire in the garden.”

Arriving at Muirfield, Noah Dietrich found Howard burning all his clothes and bed linen. It wasn't the clap this time. Somehow, he'd contacted syphilis. In a few months he would enter a phase of the disease called "tertiary syphilis." In this relatively dormant stage, the venereal disease caused damage in various tissues, including his bones, skin, heart, reproductive system, brain functions, and cardiovascular system.

In a pre-penicillin world, Howard had disappeared to begin a risky and rather radical treatment for the disease. The cure involved injecting low dosages of arsenic and mercury in a combination known as "the magic bullet" into the victim's bloodstream. Regrettably, this treatment did not entirely eradicate the disease in Howard's system. His autopsy report in 1976 revealed many signs of tertiary syphilis. The disease, however, did not render him sterile. Pregnancies and abortions lay in his future.

Except for his leather flight jacket, all of his clothes were burned that night at Muirfield. Somehow Ralph Walker had managed to take the jacket as a souvenir. The sailor didn't believe that you could get syphilis from a flight jacket. Of course, he never wore that jacket in Howard's presence.

In 1932, Howard had founded Hughes Aircraft Corporation in California for the manufacture of airplanes, and later, through Dietrich, he'd purchased 1,200 acres of land in Culver City for the company's future needs. In the beginning, his aircraft company would comprise a mechanics shop and a dusty office with a set of ledgers. But within the decade it would evolve into one of the country's biggest defense contractors, with demand for its planes fueled by the upcoming world war.

He'd purchased a six-passenger S-43 Sikorsky Amphibian. Accessorized with a red leather sofa positioned on one side of the cabin, it was delivered on January 4, 1933. It was the first of many planes that the newly organized aircraft corporation would purchase. Howard had already leased a hangar for it at the Grand Central Airport in Glendale. He knew "everything" about piloting planes but he admitted that he knew very little about "flying boats."

Immediately he wanted to make the aircraft better and faster. He hired Glenn Odekirk, a handsome and charming young pilot his same age, as a mechanic. Odekirk was relieved to find a job. The Depression had bankrupted his charter plane business that had previously flown high roller gamblers from Los Angeles to the race track at Aquascalientes, Mexico.

Glenn quickly learned what a perfectionist Howard was. At one point he spent three hours arguing with Glenn about the placement of three screws into a sheet of metal.

As part of his new job, Howard ordered Glenn to fly coast-to-coast with him. Dietrich voiced his suspicions about Howard having a secret crush on Glenn but then stated that he was probably too shy to make a pass at him. Glenn was straight and happily married, although those conditions did not always deter Howard.

When Glenn set out with Howard, he told his wife he'd be gone for three months. But as events unfolded, it soon became clear that he'd be away from home much longer than that.

Howard flew Glenn to Phoenix and on to Houston where he visited Toolco for the first time in years, even though it was the source of his fortune. Leaving Houston, the pilots headed for the Mississippi Delta, planning a stopover in New Orleans. As they approached the city, a violent storm erupted, and one of the airplane's twin engines spun to a halt. Not knowing when the storm would end, and with a disabled plane, Howard made a bold decision. Flying over windswept cottonwoods, he landed the amphibian on the Mississippi River, some thirty miles from New Orleans. There they drifted for hours in turbulent waters until they were rescued by the Coast Guard.

Dodging the press, and arriving in town in time for the annual Mardi Gras celebration, he and Glenn checked into a seedy hotel on Bourbon Street under assumed names. They cleared it with the landlady that each of them could bring "friends" back to their room at night. It is believed that Glenn discovered that Howard was a bisexual on this trip when he noted some very beautiful young women and some very handsome young men emerging from his hotel room. It is alleged that at one point Howard "auditioned" a brother and a sister who'd come down from Baton Rouge for the celebration.

Recovering from the party, Howard flew Glenn to Long Island. These two dashing airmen were seen at some of the more glamorous parties that summer season in Southampton. "Everyone wanted to have Howard Hughes as a guest that summer," said Elsa Longworth, a society matron. "The debutantes were crazy about him, and a lot of our dear homosexual young men were always seen fluttering around him. Of course, you must remember it was the Depression, and all of us had heard stories that his Texas oil wells were pumping black gold at the rate of one million dollars a month." Instead of oil wells, Mrs. Longworth meant his drill bit.

Another matron, Betsy Olden, felt that Howard didn't have to pursue anybody. "All he had to do was stand in the corner and nurse one drink all evening. The beauties, both male and female, came to him. Getting a date with Hughes became one of the social coups of that summer season. Hughes engaged in so much debauchery he would put a Roman emperor to shame."

Finally, Howard allowed Glenn to fly back to the west coast with him. Howard had purchased a new toy, a Boeing P-12, a single engine pursuit plane used by the U.S. Army Air Corps. The plane was intended for only military use, but Howard had managed to bribe someone in the Department of Commerce.

He installed the Boeing in one of the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation's hangars in Glendale, and immediately ordered Glenn to "turn this sweet ass prop into the fastest plane on earth."

Howard and Glenn took the revamped Boeing, which had been refitted with a 580 horsepower Wasp engine, on a test flight. The two skilled pilots roared away from Los Angeles and above the San Fernando Valley at 225 miles per hour, an amazing air speed at the time. In Los Angeles after the test flight, Howard informed Glenn that they'd be entering the plane as a contestant in the air show in Miami on the first of the new year.

The only thing that distracted Howard from his latest toy was a new romance. One afternoon while spending the weekend in Palm Springs with Ralph Walker, he spotted a beautiful girl walking with her mother into a restaurant.

It was "love at first sight," as Cubby Broccoli later recalled.

There was a problem. Although she dressed much older and was heavily made up, Ida Lupino was only fifteen years old.

A fifty dollar tip to the head waiter, and Howard found himself sitting at a table waiting to be introduced to Ida and her English mother, also an actress, Connie O'Shea Lupino. Eager for her daughter to meet producers and directors in Hollywood, Connie was delighted to have received a spontaneous invitation from such an important—and rich—Hollywood figure as Howard Hughes.

He was eager to curry their favor. Wisely, he devoted most of the luncheon to flattering Connie while casting shy glances at Ida, the true object of his affection.

As he would later reveal to Cubby Broccoli, he thought Ida was at least nineteen years old at the time. Since he didn't read the trade papers, he was not aware that the teenager had been brought over from London to test for the lead in *Alice in Wonderland*. At the time of their meeting, she had lost the part to the more wholesome-looking Charlotte Henry.

There was a mischievous glint in Ida's blue eyes that seemed to amuse Howard. Even at her age, she had a brusque quality in her voice that evoked the more mature Ida Lupino that would grace the silver screen in several *noir* films of the Forties. At the time she met Howard, she'd been playing vanilla *ingénue* roles. But, like a horse eager for the race to begin, she wanted to rush forward, in this case to play adult parts. To do so, she started dressing and trying to look far older than her years.

Howard was eager to learn anything he could about the background of his guests. He found out that Connie was married to the well-known British comedian, Stanley Lupino, and that "the theater runs in the blood of all our family."

"I made a real mistake," Connie told him, "by taking my daughter along to an audition. I was trying out for the lead in *Her First Affaire*. That's *affaire* with an e. Regrettably, I introduced Ida to the American director, Allan Dwan. He cast my daughter in the film instead."

Connie told Howard how thrilled she was to have seen *Hell's Angels*. She said that she screamed when she saw the Zeppelin attack London. "Ida here was born under a dining table during a Zeppelin raid on London, so that scene brought back a lot of painful memories for me."

When Connie excused herself to go to the powder room, Howard had the opportunity to do what he'd wanted to do, gaze deeply into Ida's eyes. He took her hand and held it tightly, predicting a dazzling career for her. Ironically, his prediction eventually came true.

At that point in her life, Ida had just a glimmer of the hard-boiled broad she was to play in her most memorable films, when she was sometimes identified as "the poor man's Bette Davis."

As she said in an interview granted decades later during her retirement, "I did get star billing over Bogart in *High Sierra*." She seemed rather proud of that accomplishment, but was disdainful of her comparisons to Bette Davis. (The character of the vengeful cockney strumpet she created in *The Light That Failed*, opposite Ronald Colman, did strongly evoke Davis's character of Mildred in *Of Human Bondage*) Ida was quick to point out that she was offered the roles that Bette turned down, but often refused to accept them, which led to endless battles with Warner Brothers.



Ida Lupino

When Connie returned to the table, Ida amused Howard by telling him how she first tested herself as an actress. "I rounded up tattered clothing, some of which had been left out on the stoop for the poor. I dressed myself in these rags, smudged a bit of coal on my face, and went from door to door in my neighborhood. I claimed that my father beat me severely if I didn't return home with something to eat. I also told them I was starving to death and hadn't eaten in two days. Apparently I was so convincing that every household gave me a little bit of food to carry away."

Howard's lunch with the Lupinos was a success, and it led to a lavish dinner the following night, again with Connie being invited as guest of honor. Beginning to suspect Howard's motives, Connie warned him that their surname of Lupino comes from the Latin *lupus*. "In Italian it means little wolf," she said. "I can be as ferocious as my name if anybody tries to harm my Ida."

In spite of that threat, Connie began to relax her guard around Howard, especially when he showered expensive presents on her. The full story is not known, but after a week and a half of wooing by Howard, Connie consented to let him go out alone with Ida.

Learning that she had a birthday approaching, he asked what she'd like for a present.

"A pair of the strongest binoculars on earth," she told him.

"Why?"

"To look up at the stars and dream that one day I'll be one of them."

"Why are you so dead-set on becoming an actress?" he asked.

"Because I'm the only woman in Hollywood who can be both fire and ice on the screen," was her enigmatic response.

In the weeks to come, Howard was seen in both Palm Springs and in Los Angeles with Connie and Ida, or else just with Ida. At one point, he flew mother and daughter for a lavish weekend in San Francisco. This would become a standard seduction technique of Howard's.

At her home and in her retirement, Ida refused to reveal any details of her seduction by Howard. In that same interview, Ida showed great interest in

both verbally attacking then-President Ronald Reagan, and in denying charges that her former friend, Errol Flynn, was either a Nazi sympathizer or a bisexual, as had been recently alleged in one of his biographies.

Only two sources have claimed knowledge of Howard's seduction of the underaged star. Beatrice Dowler said in later years that "I saw the romance unfold before my eyes." She remembered the night Howard summoned his doctor, Verne Mason, in the early hours of the morning. Beatrice said that she was present when Dr. Mason, after examining and treating Ida, told Howard in the foyer of Muirfield, "Don't get so carried away next time." Cubby Broccoli also claimed that Howard was regularly having sexual intercourse with what came to be known as "jail bait."

Ida spent her days at Paramount Studios. At night, she was eager to share her experiences with Howard. Since he wasn't much of a conversationalist, he was all ears. One of the studio's chiefs, Emmanuel Cohen, had ordered that Ida dye her hair platinum like Jean Harlow. Ida showed up at Muirfield looking like Jean's clone. This must have at least slightly perturbed the man who created the original Jean Harlow.

"I'd much rather be the new Jean Harlow," she told him, "instead of that stupid brat, *Alice in Wonderland*."

One night Howard invited Ida for dinner at the then popular Ship Café, a restaurant that was frequented by such Hollywood greats as Charlie Chaplin. Taking a small clothes bag, Ida disappeared into the women's room. She'd had two alcoholic drinks that night. In a few minutes, she reappeared in red silk pajamas she'd borrowed from Paramount. With the cooperation of the manager and the house band, she got up on a table. Much to the amazement of her fellow patrons, she danced a "snakehips," imitating a scene she'd played that afternoon on the sound stage during the filming of *Search for Beauty*. Howard was not amused.

He much preferred her attempts to entertain him at Muirfield in private. Sometimes she'd do a perfect imitation of one of Stanley Lupino's vaudeville acts. Howard's favorite was when she performed her father's novelty song for him, "I Lift Up My Finger and Say Tweet! Tweet!" He was much amused at this and confided to Dietrich, "This is the most enchanting creature I've ever discovered." Dietrich found that remark unusual, as the words seemed peculiar coming from Howard. It was not typical of his speech pattern.

As the days passed, Howard noticed Ida trying to assume a mask of sophistication she didn't actually possess. She took to wearing high heels and piling her hair higher. He suggested that she cut it shorter and pose for cheesecake to show off her beautiful figure and legs. "That way, the studio will cast you in more mature roles."

One night at Muirfield she asked that he take her to a restaurant patronized by gangsters. She told Howard that she'd seen his movie, *Scarface*, and a number of other films that starred James Cagney and Edward G. Robinson, including *Public Enemy* and *Little Caesar*.

Always willing to please her, he agreed. Since there was no place that really met her criterion, he placed an emergency call to George Raft, explaining his problem. "Could you round up some boys tonight? I'll cover the bill for everyone."

Raft understood his assignment at once. He was eager to curry favor with Howard, feeling that his role in Howard's *Scarface* had jump-started his career. He told Howard to bring Ida to The Blue Iguana in Santa Monica at nine o'clock that evening.

At the appointed time, Howard arrived at the restaurant with Ida to discover some twenty men with their "gun molls," occupying the various tables. Ida was thrilled. As she recalled years later, she whispered to Howard, "I bet they're all from Chicago."

Ida confessed that at the time she believed the men were real gangsters until George Raft told her several years later that it was all a set-up. "Actually, I still believe that Raft rounded up real gangsters," she said. "Those boys weren't just play acting. They were too real."

The following night, Ida returned home breathlessly to tell Howard, "I met Marlene Dietrich, Mae West, Carole Lombard, and Claudette Colbert at a luncheon today."

"I don't want to toot my own horn," he said, "but I've had intimate moments with Lombard and Dietrich."

"What about Colbert and Mae West?" she provocatively asked.

"I hear Colbert is a midget lesbian and that Mae West is really a man all dolled up like a woman," he said. "Not for me."

He wanted to keep Ida a prisoner at Muirfield. Many nights he left her alone to amuse herself, or else he delivered her to Connie's house for dinner while he went off into the night.

Refusing to be confined, Ida began to date other men. She had a fiery temper and a streak of independence, and she grew to hate Howard's attempt to control her life the way Stanley Lupino had done in England.

For a brief time, she fell in love with Buster Crabbe, the handsome Olympic swimmer turned actor. He was her co-star in *Search for Beauty*.

Selected for his physique, Crabbe had won the starring role in the 1933 *Tarzan the Fearless*. All the hottest women in Hollywood were after him. But when *Search for Beauty* opened for its premiere, Ida showed up in white furs and a white satin gown. He escort was neither Crabbe nor Howard but actor Jack La Rue.

Although both Howard and Ida dated other people during the several months of their courtship, their relationship came to an abrupt end in June of 1934. This was a summer of terror in the sweltering heat of Los Angeles. Some four hundred victims had already succumbed to the highly infectious and crippling disease of polio.

After a night on the town, much of it spent tap-dancing with actor Tom Brown, Ida returned to Connie's house in the early morning hours. She was no longer staying at Muirfield.

Two hours later, Connie remembered waking up in fright to see her daughter crawling across the floor trying to summon her to help her. "I found Ida bathed in sweat," Connie said. "She couldn't walk and could hardly talk. She was feverish and kept screaming about the pain in her arms and legs. Placing Ida in her own bed, she immediately called Dr. Percival Gerson to come to her home.

After a thorough examination, Dr. Gerson gave Connie the bad news. More tests would be needed, but it appeared that Ida had come down with polio.

Ida called Howard the next day and informed him of her tragedy, and he immediately promised to secure the best medical attention for her. Germ-obsessed and a hypochondriac himself, he refused to come see her, claiming that he had an emergency at Toolco and must fly to Houston at once. Connie later admitted that Ida seriously contemplated suicide that day.

He had lied, remaining at Muirfield. He feared contamination if he visited Ida. He also stopped going out in public, fearing that he too would contract the polio germ if he frequented restaurants, clubs, or theaters.

As it turned out, Dr. Gerson had delivered a false diagnosis. It is still not clear what overcame Ida but it wasn't polio. The strength gradually returned to her body, and slowly she regained the use of her arms and legs.

She called Howard but he'd left word that he would not be available to take her calls. His housekeeper informed Ida that "Mr. Hughes will be out of town indefinitely."

Having "stared death in the face," as Ida so dramatically put it, she sailed back to England. In a deep depression, she feared that her career as an

actress was over. “I failed in Hollywood,” she said.

That was not accurate, and soon she’d be back in Hollywood making lackluster B pictures.

At the time that he was seriously dating her, Howard had promised to marry her and “make you a bigger star than Harlow.” Upon her return to Hollywood, Ida had matured and realized that sex was all that Howard wanted from her.

Howard did not abandon her for forever. He would eventually return to her life, but as a producer, not a lover. After he bought RKO in 1948, Ida worked for him as a director. In 1951, he even came up with the title for one of her future films, *Hard, Fast, and Beautiful*. “He helped me a lot,” Ida said after her retirement from the screen. “He was willing to take a chance on me, a woman director, when at the time all other studio bosses were horrified at the idea of a woman directing pictures.”

But during the intense heat of his affair with Ida in 1933, Howard confided to Cubby Broccoli. “For me, there’s nothing finer in all the world than very young teenage pussy. I’ve become an addict.”

Los Angeles, 1933

If there was any woman in Hollywood who might have been ideally suited as the second Mrs. Howard Hughes, it was the actress, Corrine Griffith. From the moment he met her, Howard had pursued her, offering her money, a personal and very lucrative contract, and a chance to date Hollywood’s most eligible and sought-after bachelor. She had consistently refused. In Ida Lupino, Howard had developed a lifelong taste for teenagers. That made his pursuit of Corrine a bit off course for him. A fellow Texan from Texarkana, she was eleven years older than him.

When Frank Lloyd, who had directed Howard’s other love, Billie Dove, in *The Age of Love*, first invited Howard to a private party, he turned him down. But when he learned that Corrine would be the guest of honor, Howard accepted.

He’d heard rumors that her marriage to producer Walter Morosco was starting to unravel after only a few months of unhappiness. Allegedly, she’d told her friend Lloyd, “On my wedding night, I knew it was a mistake.” He’d responded, “Men are like cars. You should drive them around the block before making a purchase.”

During her heyday, several ladies of the silent screen had competed for the title of the most beautiful, with most film critics giving that honor to Howard’s discarded love, Billie Dove. But many writers for pulp magazines stated that Corrine Griffith was the most beautiful woman ever to grace the silver screen, even more stunning than Howard’s former girlfriend, Barbara LaMarr. Howard had made the bedroom rounds of all the leading contenders for the title—all except one, that is—Corrine Griffith herself who up until then had been immune to his charms.

Acclaimed as the face “the camera loves in close-up,” Corrine was universally disliked by all who worked with her. She was said to look only at her dogs and to ignore fellow actors and crew. When not emoting before the camera, she was speculating on real estate.

As her real-estate holdings grew, her film career declined. Her voice didn’t record well. *Time* Magazine claimed that she “talks through her nose,” and *The New York Times* call her voice “sad and tired.” With the coming of talkies, the career of the “Orchid Lady of the Screen” had come to an end.

Regrettably, what is arguably her best film, *The Divine Lady*, was released in 1929 just as talkies had arrived with a bang. In the role, Corrine appeared as Lady Emma Hamilton, mistress of Admiral Nelson. All the critics felt that Corrine was a suitable choice to play one of history’s most fabled beauties. But her acting was judged as wooden.

Although she was moving on in years, she photographed as lovely as ever. At Lloyd’s party, the beautifully gowned Corrine entertained the guests by singing “Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes,” accompanying herself on the harp, as she’d done on screen in *The Divine Lady*.

She spent the rest of the evening engaged in conversation with Howard. He later told Pat DeCicco, “I felt I was talking to myself in a woman’s body. That lady thinks just like I do. She’s a real cash register. She knows more about California real estate and what’s going to happen than anybody out here.”

From the night of the Lloyd party, Corrine and Howard became friends, but only casual lovers. Corrine later confided to Lloyd that their romance consisted of no more than three weekend romps together. “I think he just wanted to add me to his list of sexual conquests. There was no magic there.” Nonetheless, they continued to date occasionally, with no sex involved, until her marriage in 1936 to George Marshall, owner of the Boston Braves.

Howard considered Corrine an astute businesswoman and often called her for advice, especially if it had to do with California real estate. He even stood by like a rock to lean on when she did something stupid like attempt a comeback in 1957 by financing a film, *Stars in the Backyard* starring herself under the direction of Hugo Haas. Howard was rumored to have put up half the money, but Dietrich denied that. When Howard saw the final cut, he wisely advised her not to release it. “It’s your version of *Swell Hogan*,” he said, referring to his first film which also was so bad it couldn’t be released.

One night in 1965 Corrine frantically called Howard, claiming that she had made a dreadful mistake in marrying a young man in his 30s, Danny Scholl. When he asked if she’d ever slept with Scholl, she denied having done so. He advised that she seek a lawyer right away and file for annulment.

Instead of taking immediate action and seeking an annulment, Corrine waited six weeks, and then filed for divorce as part of a process that became the scandal of Hollywood. In court, she stated her age as fifty-one, not her actual age of seventy-one. Many actresses lie about their age, and that wasn’t unusual. What was, was that she claimed she was not actually Corrine Griffith.

On May 5, 1966, she testified that the actual Corrine Griffith had died in Mexico during the making of a film. She claimed she was the star’s stand-in and had just assumed her identity, which accounted for her being twenty years younger than the age that had been “officially” associated with Corrine. Two stars of the silent screen, Claire Windsor and Betty Blythe, both former friends of the star, were hauled into court. Each of them identified Corrine Griffith as being the friend they had known in the Twenties.

The story was the talk of Hollywood, and became such a popular legend that actor/novelist Tom Tryon used it as the basis for a novella, *Fedora*, which was turned into a movie in 1978 by Billy Wilder, starring William Holden and Marthe Keller.

In granting the divorce with no alimony for Scholl, the judge noted that the marriage was never consummated, according to the testimony, because neither Corrine nor Scholl were “conducive to amorous activities.”

As the Fifties deepened, Corrine and Howard met privately from time to time to talk money. Of all the stars of Hollywood, she was the most opposed to Federal income tax. So was Howard. All of her life, she was besieged by charities wanting contributions. She proudly said, “The only contribution I ever made was to send a check for ten thousand dollars in 1972 to George Wallace, governor of Alabama.”

Upon her death in Santa Monica of cardiac arrest on July 13, 1979, Corrine left an estate of \$150 million, making her one of the wealthiest women in the world at the time.

Of the fifty-eight feature films she made between 1916 and 1932, only ten are known to have survived. One of Howard’s Mormon servants later claimed that in his madness in 1974 he watched *The Divine Lady* twenty times in a row.

Miami, 1934

A pilot flew Howard’s remodeled Boeing pursuit plane to Miami for entry into an air show competition. In a separate and larger plane, Howard and Glenn Odekirk headed to Florida as well.

But first Howard stopped off in Houston for a visit to Toolco and an overdue meeting with his aunt, Annette Lummis, becoming acquainted with Annette’s two daughters and two sons. Some biographers claim that Howard had a final reunion with Dudley Sharp and his wife, Tina, during his short stay in Houston, even reporting details of that rendezvous. Dudley himself, however, later claimed that when he called Howard at the Lummis household and asked to speak to his boyhood friend, “He was too busy to come to the phone.”

Once in Miami, Howard checked every inch of his Boeing before competing in the All American Air Meet, which he’d entered in the category of “Sportsman Pilot Free-for-All.” Then he had Glenn inspect the plane as well. Before Howard had radically adapted the plane into what he defined as a Boeing model 100A, it had been a two-seater with an open cockpit, the civilian version of the Navy’s F4B or the Army’s P12B. Both the Navy and the Army considered it a sensational performer.

Under Glenn’s supervision, Howard’s mechanics had improved the plane considerably. It had been turned into a single-seater, and its wing and tail redesigned for greater speed. Purchasing the pursuit plane for \$45,000, he’d spent \$75,000 on improvements.

Lifting off, Howard achieved an average speed of 185.7 miles per hour for the duration of the twenty-mile contest. The crowd thrilled to his “loop-the-loops” and applauded his spectacular nosedives to within a few yards of the grandstand where the judges sat. All of these aerial tricks, including spins, slow rolls, or snap rolls, Howard had learned from his stunt pilots working on *Hell’s Angels*.

The choice of the judges was unanimous. Howard came in with a first prize for his daring feats. Before a crowd of 12,000 spectators, Howard walked to the platform to receive his trophy. Looking tall, handsome, and dashing, he was met with thunderous applause.

On a platform, he accepted a trophy from none other than General Rafael Trujillo, the dictator of the Dominican Republic, called *El Jefe* (the Chief) as a term of deference. (In some circles, and less flatteringly, he was nicknamed “the goat,” because of his sexual excesses.) Attired in his full military regalia, he awarded Howard the honor and extended an invitation for him to visit his island.

Obviously Trujillo wanted him to invest some of his vast fortune in his economically depressed nation. Perhaps the dictator was surprised when Howard immediately accepted the invitation, claiming that he’d fly down the following day. But he had one request. He wanted to meet Porfirio Rubirosa, the handsome, dashing playboy who was already on his way to winning his reputation as the “Playboy of the Western World.”

If the dictator felt that it was an odd request, he didn’t express it. He invited Howard to be his guest of honor at a private dinner in the Dominican Republic. “Rubirosa will definitely be at the dinner--I’ll see to that!” Trujillo promised.

Dominican Republic, 1934

By the time Howard met Rubirosa, the Dominican playboy was already known for sexual exploits which had earned him the nickname of *Toujours Prêt* (“Always Ready [for sex]”). In time he would marry two of the world’s richest and perhaps most temperamental women, Doris Duke and Barbara Hutton, and would seduce literally thousands of women, including Joan Crawford, Veronica Lake, Ava Gardner, Jayne Mansfield, Marilyn Monroe, and debutante Brenda Frazier. Eventually, many of those famous beauties would also be seduced by Howard himself, including Barbara Hutton before her marriage to his longtime lover, Cary Grant.

When Cubby Broccoli once asked Howard about his penchant for mimicking Rubi’s sexual exploits, he said, “That’s what happens when you fuck in international circles. Rubi got Joan Crawford, and I didn’t. But Rubirosa’s one coup, which I envied, was getting to screw Evita Peron. I’m sure I could have had her. I just didn’t get around to it.”

During the private dinner at Trujillo’s villa, Howard and Rubi became instant friends. The playboy was known for his ability to instantly bond with men. “He was the ultimate man’s man,” said Gerard Bonnet, a polo-playing banker friend from Paris. “All the men I know loved Rubi. The ones who didn’t were jealous of him. He was indeed the Don Juan or the Casanova of the 20th century.”

At Trujillo’s dinner, Rubi invited Howard to watch him play polo the following day. His team was competing against a group of visiting athletes from Nicaragua. Rubi introduced Howard to his wife, Flor de Oro (“Flower of Gold”), who just happened to be Trujillo’s daughter.

Howard showed no interest in Flor de Oro, although she made it rather clear that she’d be available for sex later in the evening. Both Flor and her husband, Rubi, were sexual carnivores, seducing everyone available. After divorcing Rubi, Flor de Oro would go on to acquire a stable of nine husbands. She was rumored to have “auditioned” most of the Dominican army.

In Rubirosa, Howard found a man who seemed to be everything he wasn’t: Articulate with a sensual voice; bright and witty; amusing at social functions; supremely self-confident; debonair; manipulative; well-educated. The list goes on.

After the polo match in which Howard attempted to play, he joined Rubi in the showers. There Howard could see for himself the reason for Rubi’s legendary fame as a seducer.

Among the fabled studs of the world, Rubi was endowed with a long, thick penis variously reported to be thirteen or fourteen inches long. By the late Thirties, his endowment became so well-known that male patrons in restaurants, requesting a peppermill, asked the waiter “to bring me a Rubirosa.” His *cojones*, as the Spanish say, were almost grapefruit sized, and he had to wear a special jock strap. Howard, particularly as he grew older, was overly concerned with the endowments of his male rivals in bed. Although his reaction is not known, he must have been overwhelmed by a close encounter with Rubi’s equipment.

When he met Howard, Rubi was still in training, learning how to be a pilot. For the weekend, Rubi invited Howard to fly over the island of Hispaniola, which the Dominican Republic shares with Haiti.

Rubi in particular wanted to show Howard “the fleshpots” of the city of Port-au-Prince, which was then the bordello of the West Indies.

The details of Howard’s secret trip to the Dominican Republic might never have come to light if it were not for Juan Martínez. He was a handsome young Dominican filmmaker, who never actually made a film but spent most of his life fretting over scripts. He once worked for Ruby as a kind of valet and secretary. He also wrote a sensational tell-all biography of his former employer, but it was never published. His lifelong dream was to make a film about the incredible life of Rubi.

Ironically, one of the century’s best-selling novelists, Harold Robbins, would use Howard as the basis of the hero of *The Carpetbaggers*, originally published in 1961, and Rubi himself as a role model for another of his novels, *The Adventurers*, published in 1966. During their trip across Hispaniola, Juan later claimed that Howard and Rubi seduced “any number of beautiful young women, most of them teenagers.” He also claimed that he heard Rubi sharing his lovemaking secret with Howard.

Rubi claimed his technique was called *Ismak*, said to be based on an ancient Egyptian principle. The man as the seducer is in complete charge and delays his own climax for hours if necessary, thereby subjecting his female partner to multiple orgasms before his own release. “I am the master of the situation in the boudoir,” Rubirosa is alleged to have said. “In complete control at all times.”

We can only assume that Howard, who suffered frequent bouts of impotence, must have been impressed.

At one point, and again according to Juan, Howard offered Rubi \$15,000 if he would agree to appear in a private stag film with an extraordinarily beautiful young Creole girl of sixteen. Always strapped for cash, Rubi agreed. Juan claimed to have shot the film himself, with Howard directing the action.

This is the first known pornographic movie Howard is believed to have directed. There would be other such films in the future, including one with a starlet who later became one of the biggest legends in film history.

Juan pleaded with Howard to let him keep a copy of the finished film, but Howard refused. He flew the film and its negative back to Florida, where supposedly he took it to Muirfield for his private viewing. It is not known if the film still exists today.

Before leaving the Dominican Republic, as Juan later recalled, Rubi also gave Howard one of his beauty secrets. “Cover your skin in honey at least once or twice a week,” Rubi confided, “and keep it on for two or three hours. When it’s done its job, invite three or four beautiful young maidens to lick every bit off your body. Make sure beforehand that you’ve generously coated all appendages and filled all cavities.”

According to Juan, on Howard’s final morning in Ciudad Trujillo, as his private plane was being readied, a messenger arrived with a single red rose and a note. He smelled the rose and read the note, already knowing who it was from before he opened it.

I still remember your dark brown eyes watching me, wanting me. But you did not touch me. Even so, I felt an incredible tension between us, a tension that was not released. Alas, if you had been born a beautiful woman—and not the handsome, charming man that you are—you would be in my arms right now and I would make love to you like no other man has ever done before. With me as your lover, there would never be another man who could satisfy you. But you are who you are, and I am who I am, a hopeless pursuer of the world’s most beautiful ladies.

Until we meet again.

Your devoted servant,

Don Porfirio Rubirosa.

Minister Plenipotentiary of the Dominican Republic. ”

Los Angeles, 1934

En route to California, Howard was seized with a grand ambition. “I want to fly faster and higher than any man has ever flown before,” he told his trusted friend and fellow aviation expert, Glenn Odekirk. The racer he conceived would soon be called Howard’s “mystery ship.”

He rented a corner of the Babb Hangar at Grand Central Airport in Glendale and began designing a racer, the H-1, which would eventually be nicknamed “The Silver Bullet.” Glenn was installed as supervisor of an eighteen man team of engineers. To assist, Howard hired Richard Palmer, a Cal Tech graduate who was known for his previous breakthroughs in radical aerodynamics.

Howard’s goal was to break the record set by the French pilot, Raymond Delmonte, who had flown a plane at 314 miles per hour. Howard wanted the Bullet to go 365 miles per hour.

After much bickering, Howard approved the final plan for the monoplane, a single-seater with an open cockpit. The craft would be extraordinarily small, measuring only 25 feet at its wingspan, just 27 feet from its nose to its tail.

The racer would become part of aviation history, as the team developed and tested the first retractable landing gear. After takeoff, the landing gear would fit into a cozy compartment under the wings.

A 580-horsepower Pratt & Whitney engine was installed. It was later beefed up to 1,000 horsepower. The fuel tank held 275 gallons. To make the plane lighter, Howard ordered that an alloy known as duraluminum be used. At the time, this was one of the lightest and strongest metals known. And for the aircraft’s structural elements, he used specially laminated plywood instead of the more conventional, and heavier, timbers in widespread use at the time.

Engineer Robert W. Rummel later said that Howard got a lot more credit for the plane than he deserved. “He wasn’t a brilliant engineer, but he was a relentless brain-picker. He stole one idea from this one, another idea from that one, and later claimed all these creative breakthroughs for himself.”

Colonel R.C. Kuldell, president and general manager of Toolco, had other concerns. “The fool will kill himself in some test flight. Without a proper will, the Feds will move in on us and absorb most of Toolco for taxes.” Kuldell wanted Howard to draw up a will that would leave the assets of Toolco to its trusted employees in the event of his untimely death. Howard sent word to Kuldell that he’d draw up such a will. But he never did.

Privately Howard told Dietrich that he held Kuldell in utter contempt. He dismissed him as “the brewer.” In the darkest days of the Depression, when Toolco was losing revenue, Kuldell opened The Gulf Brewing Company on its grounds. Shortly after Prohibition ended, Toolco launched “Grand Prize Beer,” which became the best-selling brew in Texas, although it never won a prize. This new source of revenue transferred Toolco from red ink to black

ink. When presented with the beer that saved his fortune, Howard refused to taste it.

Acting on orders from Howard, Dietrich managed to undermine Kuldell and forced him out of Toolco within two years.

Howard had little concern with Toolco politics, devoting himself to his love life, his experimental plane, and even to his automobiles.

It was at this stage of life that he began to drive dingy, battered, and aging jalopies destined for the junk heap. No more Rolls Royces and Duesenbergs. He had two reasons for driving around in dilapidated cars—one, he would park a car in some town or city and forget where he left it. “One time, he didn’t remember the state he left his vehicle in, much less the town,” Dietrich said.

His assistant also claimed that Howard once told him, “If I drive around in an old car, who would think of kidnapping me? No one would go looking for the world’s richest man wheezing about town in a jalopy.”

In the days leading up to the test flight of “The Silver Bullet,” Howard sometimes worked thirty-two hours without sleep, existing on quarts of milk and bacon sandwiches.

As “launch day” grew closer, he talked constantly and obsessively to Glenn and Palmer about piloting his prized toy. Both of them begged him to let some other trained pilot go up in the Bullet.

The suggestion angered Howard. “And deny me my moment in history? Not god damn likely!” He then revealed his ultimate dream in aviation: “One day I’ll be the first man to fly to the moon, where I’ll walk on its surface.”

The handsome but tight-lipped actor, Chester Morris, “with the patent leather hair,” was startled to receive a phone call from Howard Hughes. Even though he had awarded Chester with a long-ago role in his film, *Cock of the Air*, with Billie Dove, the two men hadn’t spoken since. During the shooting of the film, they had not bonded. Howard had also let it be known that he was terribly disappointed at the poor box-office returns of *Cock of the Air*, placing the blame for the picture’s failure on Chester and not on his lover at the time, Billie Dove herself. In fact, however, Howard’s picture was so bad that it practically marked the twilight of Billie’s film career.

Today, Chester Morris has been almost forgotten, even though he sometimes starred opposite some of Howard’s most memorable girlfriends, including Jean Harlow and Carole Lombard. For nostalgic movie buffs, he is remembered mainly as “Boston Blackie,” the retired safecracker and amateur detective in more than a dozen 1940s-era B movies. Earlier in his career, Chester had been directed in three separate films (*Alibi* and *Bat Whispers*, both in 1930, and *Corsair* in 1931) by the eccentric and autocratic director, Roland West

Since then, Chester and West had become best friends, often hanging out together at a club that Roland West had established with actress Thelma Todd, who’d had a brief but disappointing encounter with Howard during the casting of *Hell’s Angels*. The club, Thelma Todd’s Sidewalk Café, evolved into the most popular restaurant and nightclub in Hollywood, regularly attracting such patrons as Clark Gable and Charlie Chaplin.

Since their initial flirtation, Howard had seen Thelma on several occasions since she’d married his friend, Pat DeCicco, in 1932. Howard had never been to her club, however. Suddenly, he wanted to go there with Chester, suggesting that, “We’ll arrive stag and pick up some girls once we’re there.”

At the club both Thelma and West warmly welcomed Howard, although each of them appeared startled to see him show up with Chester. At that point, Pat was not appearing at the club very often, because his marriage to Thelma was on the skids.

After their third visit to the club, Chester figured out Howard’s real motives in inviting him. Very casually Howard suggested to Chester that he might like to include the strikingly handsome and rising young actor at MGM, Robert Taylor, at their table. Howard obviously knew that Chester was starring in a film that also featured Robert Taylor and Virginia Bruce.

Eight years before his death in 1970, Chester in an interview said that Robert turned down Howard’s first two invitations, claiming “From what I know of Hughes, I find him a bit creepy.”

“But Howard could be very persistent, and after badgering us both, Robert finally consented to go to the club,” Chester said. “Perhaps for his own protection, he insisted on inviting Virginia Bruce, with whom he was having an affair. Virginia was married to John Gilbert at the time. Her career was on the rise but John’s was fading. Sounds like the plot for *A Star is Born*.”

Chester revealed that unknown to Virginia, Robert Taylor was having an affair with her husband on the side. “It was hardly any secret in the Hollywood of the Thirties,” Chester said. “Both Robert Taylor and John Gilbert were the poster boys, as we call it today, of the bisexual world. Not me. I didn’t go that route, though I got a lot of offers back then. I don’t think Virginia knew that her husband was sleeping with her lover, Robert. It was very Hollywood. Triangles like that were going on a lot back in those days, and I guess they still are in the Hollywood of today. Except I’m out of the loop.”

“Howard knew that Robert was making only thirty-five dollars a week, and he played up to the actor’s ego,” Chester said. “He said he had big plans for both of our careers. Personally, I thought it was all bullshit. He was using the same lines on us that he used on chorines. Once I got Howard launched with Robert, I knew he’d never call me again. I was right. When my career began to slip, I phoned him several times, and the shit never returned one of my calls.”



Robert Taylor

“Robert and Howard had several private talks at Thelma’s club, and apparently established some sort of rapport,” Chester said. “I think that Robert was not sexually attracted to Howard, but went along for the ride to see what he could get. Call it a form of hustling if you like. I guess Robert figured that if Clark Gable could get his start this way, so could he. Besides, I always knew that money and power are great aphrodisiacs. How else could you explain all those German women throwing themselves at Adolf Hitler. Certainly not for his body!”

The next thing that Chester learned before he’d finished shooting *Society Doctor* was that Robert and Howard were taking weekend trips together. “I even heard they went hunting somewhere,” Chester claimed, “and someone told me that Howard hated hunting. I guess to get his man, he’d go to great lengths.”

Howard was not impressed with Virginia Bruce and accurately predicted that her star, unlike that of Robert Taylor, would not rise over Hollywood. If she’s remembered at all today, it is for her eighteen-month marriage to John Gilbert. Movie buffs taking a trivia quiz still recall that in the 1936 film, *Born to Dance*, she introduced the Cole Porter standard, “I’ve Got You Under My Skin.”

In later life, the Minnesota-born, pale-eyed blonde, who often played “the other woman,” had become dottily eccentric and tactlessly outspoken from her home at Woodland Hills, a retirement community in California favored by aging movie personnel. She truly detested Howard and didn’t mind admitting it. At first, she didn’t want to talk about either Robert or Howard, and certainly not about John Gilbert.

She was more interested in telling of her appearances in Turkish films, few of which had ever been seen in America. She’d married the Turkish producer, Ali Ipar, in 1946, divorcing him in 1952. She remarried him in 1952 shortly after the divorce papers were finalized, that bond lasting until 1964 when she divorced him again.

She still seemed proud that she was one of the 20 original Goldwyn Girls that included Betty Grable, Lucille Ball, and two of Howard’s former girlfriends, Paulette Goddard and Ann Dvorak.

“I knew Robert was bisexual,” she finally admitted when she consented to talk about her former lover. “I was madly in love with him and wanted to marry him as soon as my divorce (from John Gilbert) came through. At one point I had introduced Robert to my husband, John, who was drinking heavily at the time. I didn’t know until years later that John was sleeping with Robert on the side. It got very complicated. Robert told me that of all the movie stars in Hollywood, he wanted most to become the next John Gilbert. Maybe, and this is a bit far out, Robert felt that by sleeping with John he could assume his persona. How in hell do I know?”

She claimed that Robert would have married her if Howard hadn’t entered the picture. “Between John and Robert, my life was complicated enough. Enter Howard Hughes and that made an already explosive situation become a field of dynamite. As for John, he was still in love with Greta Garbo when he married me, with Marlene Dietrich waiting in the wings. How could I compete with those two?”

“In the years before he married the dyke-bitch, Barbara Stanwyck, Robert was very open with me about his bisexuality,” Virginia said. “We often talked about getting married one day. He said he would be true to me, the only woman in his life, but he wanted to be free to have relations with other men. Just so long as another woman wasn’t involved, I agreed to that. I was so desperately in love with him, I felt I didn’t have much choice.”

Suddenly, despite the fact that he was making almost no money at MGM, Robert appeared around Los Angeles in a new car and a new wardrobe. “We had several fights over Hughes,” Virginia claimed. “Robert admitted that he didn’t like having sex with Hughes. As men go, Hughes was not his type. But he wasn’t adverse to accepting gifts from Hughes. Robert had never had money before, and suddenly he was flying in private planes, sailing on one of the world’s greatest yachts, and drinking champagne and eating caviar, with a house filled with servants to iron his underwear. One time Hughes presented him with a dozen pair of the most beautiful handmade alligator shoes I’d ever seen in my life. He was also given a pair of diamond cufflinks on one occasion. And he was driving a new Duesenberg. I must say Hughes was very generous to him. He really turned Robert’s head. At one point, Robert was convinced that Hughes was going to offer Louis B. Mayer one-hundred thousand dollars to buy out Robert’s contract and put him on a salary of five-thousand a week.”

“Robert did not conceal his relationship with Hughes from me,” Virginia said. “How could he? It was so obvious.” Then she leaned back in her bed and hesitated before her next statement. “What really won Robert for Hughes was not the expensive gifts but a common bond they shared. Those two, from all I gathered, spent a lot of time talking about their mothers. Believe it or not, Hughes seduced Robert with all this mother talk!”

Because of the way their overly protective mothers had forced them to dress, both Howard and Robert had been taunted as sissies by their boyhood schoolmates. Sam Rudel, a schoolmate, claimed that Robert “looked more like a girl than a boy, especially because of the way his mother combed his curly hair. Actually, we knew him as Spangler Arlington Brugh back then.”

Spangler, the future Robert Taylor, was born on August 5, 1911, in Filley, Nebraska. His father, Spangler Andrew Brugh, was a doctor of Pennsylvania Dutch extraction. His mother, Ruth Stanhope Brugh, was descended from Scotch-Irish parents and was a virtual invalid because of a weak heart. Although her illness was real, she was also a hypochondriac like Allene Hughes.

In the prairie environment in which young Robert grew up, his mother dressed him in black velvet knickers and stiffly starched white lace shirts. Like Howard, he was mocked as Little Lord Fauntleroy. School bullies used to knock him down and splatter him with Nebraska mud so that he would go home dirty. When not attending school, the “pretty boy,” as his classmates called him, spent long hours practicing the cello. He suffered so much ridicule and taunts from his classmates that he developed a bad speech impediment by the age of eight. He was shy and insecure, just as Howard had been.

After his father’s early death in October of 1933, Ruth Brugh became totally dependent on her young son. She obsessed about his every action or movement, even after they moved to California and he started to mature. She selected not only his clothes, but his companions and warned him to stay away from girls “because the hussies can ruin a young man’s future.” She wanted Robert to spend his nights at home with her. She hand-washed his underwear, even ironing the undergarments. Unlike Allene, however, she did not check his stool daily.

“Ruth Brugh was the biggest mother hen protecting her pretty young chick in Hollywood,” said actress Lois Wilson. In 1934 Lois had been cast with Robert in Universal’s *There’s Always Tomorrow*.

Two years later, Joan Crawford appeared opposite Robert Taylor in *The Gorgeous Hussy*, prompting her to privately tell Billy Haines that “Robert

Taylor and Howard Hughes are just two mama’s boys.” Wags at the time speculated about which star was playing the title role of *The Gorgeous Hussy*: Joan Crawford or Robert Taylor.

Robert told Virginia Bruce that Howard was fascinated to hear stories of his childhood in Nebraska, but he provided few details about the actual romance between the two men.

At Muirfield, housekeeper Beatrice Dowler recalled waking up early one morning and going down to the kitchen to prepare breakfast. Entering the room, she discovered Howard in his underwear reading the morning news. Also in his underwear, Robert was at her stove making pancakes, which he told her was his favorite breakfast food. He claimed that he’d learned to make these pancakes from a former landlady, “Auntie Neuhauser,” whose house he had occupied when he was six years old in Nebraska.

Howard invited Beatrice to sit down and have a few pancakes. “They weren’t bad,” she later said. “Auntie must have had some secret.”

On some evenings, she could hear Robert in Howard’s library playing his cello. That was followed with Howard presenting a concert on his saxophone. “To my untrained ear,” Beatrice said, “both men were lousy musicians.”

She later reported a strange happening at Muirfield. As a youth, Robert had wanted to be a doctor like his father and had pursued a career in medicine for a while before switching to acting. “At one point, Mr. Hughes started calling Mr. Taylor, ‘Doc,’” Beatrice said. “Mr. Taylor tended to Mr. Hughes’s ailments, real or imagined. At one point, six doctor’s uniforms arrived for Mr. Taylor. The very next night, Mr. Taylor was seen wandering around Muirfield in one of these uniforms. I assumed he went to Mr. Hughes’s room to ‘examine’ his patient.”

Howard told Noah Dietrich that Robert’s personality was “prairie style.” Since Howard didn’t like overly sophisticated men—he hadn’t met Cary Grant yet—he found that quality in Robert endearing. When he signed to go to work for MGM, Robert found the film crews calling him a sissy, using the same kinds of taunts that he’d endured as a schoolboy back in Nebraska. The tough, macho crews that Louis B. Mayer employed liked he-men actors like Clark Gable. To most of these crews, Robert was nothing but a pretty boy, an appellation he’d spend years fighting off.

Robert became so disgusted on the set at one point that he ripped open his shirt and yelled, “See here, fellows. I’ve got hair on my chest! I’m a red-blooded man just like the rest of you.”

“Oh, princess,” one of the grips yelled at him. “C’mon over here and see the big surprise I’ve got for you.”

“After a tough day’s work,” Virginia Bruce recalled, “Robert would return to the protective arms of his mother. Later, he might rush over to my protective arms, and, later still, might end the night in Hughes’s protective arms. That was a lot of protection!”

Beatrice recalled that very slowly Robert began to move more and more of his clothing and personal goods into Muirfield. “One day he showed up with at least ten quilts. He told me that his mother, Ruth, had made each of them. Mr. Hughes preferred his expensive blankets but gave in to Mr. Taylor’s demand that each of them be replaced with his mother’s quilts.”

“I remember one night Mr. Taylor opened the door to find two of the best tailors in Hollywood,” Beatrice said. “Mr. Hughes had summoned them to make Mr. Taylor his first dinner jacket and tails. They also brought ten top hats for him to try on. Mr. Hughes never told me what the occasion was, but it was this big formal affair in San Francisco. I think William Randolph Hearst was throwing a party.”

“Mr. Taylor, as I heard later, actually arrived as Mr. Hughes’s date,” Beatrice said. “That must have started a lot of tongues wagging when the news traveled south to Hollywood.”

Although intense, the Taylor/Hughes infatuation eventually flickered and burned out, as was Howard’s tendency with both men and women. Getting his racer ready for competition left few nights to spend at Muirfield with Robert. And meanwhile, Robert’s romance with Virginia Bruce was unraveling. Complicating matters, the handsome young actor had developed a crush on a twenty-year old extra, whom he’d met on the set of *Society Doctor*, in which he was co-starring with Chester Morris. “He was blond, well built, and very good looking,” Chester claimed. “I think his name was Wayne Dedd—close enough. I can’t remember. Suddenly, Robert and Dedd were seen everywhere together. I figured that in spite of all his money, Hughes was being pushed aside. What I didn’t know until much later was that Hughes had met the true love of his life, a young actor who would eventually evolve into a far bigger star than Taylor himself. When it came to selecting lovers in those days, male or female, Hughes went after the big names. Of course, from what I was told, he still continued to pick up the occasional budding starlet with big knockers or a garage mechanic with a big something else.”

In spite of their eventual separation, Robert and Howard remained friends. Even though Howard was no longer sleeping with Robert, he was still interested in news about his love life. To keep him abreast of any new developments, Howard had Robert trailed.

At one point, even though she’d married Lew Ayres, Howard found out that Robert was dating Ginger Rogers secretly. Dietrich later said that Howard found this amusing and wasn’t angry at all, even though he was still seeing Ginger secretly himself, but in places far removed from Hollywood so that they would not be seen.

During the filming of *Small Town Girl* for MGM in 1936, the gossip columnists were busy writing about a romance between Robert and his co-star, Janet Gaynor. This was fictional, as Janet was far more interested in members of her own sex than she was in Robert.

Taylor then became momentarily taken with an attractive female extra, Pat Ryan, and started to date her. But for some reason, each of them decided to keep their romance secret.

Years later, as First Lady of the land, Mrs. Patricia Nixon encountered Robert on a visit to the White House. In front of witnesses, she said, “I had an awful crush on you, Bob Taylor, when I worked on *Small Town Girl*. I had my eye on you all day and dreamed about you at night.” Both Mrs. Richard Nixon and Robert Taylor had a public laugh over that.

Howard’s detectives had a very different scenario in the 1930s. They were reporting back to Howard that Pat was seen leaving Robert’s bungalow around three or four o’clock in the morning.

Later in life, Howard snidely remarked to Dietrich, “I wonder if Dick Nixon ever found out his wife wasn’t a virgin when he married her?”

It was early afternoon and all the flowers were in bloom at Muirfield as Howard wandered alone in his garden, dreaming dreams known only to himself. Suddenly, he looked up to see Beatrice Dowler leading his on-again, off-again sleeping partner, Randolph Scott, into the garden. He was locked arm in arm with a handsome, debonair looking man that Howard instantly recognized as the dashing Cary Grant. “Mr. Hughes,” Randolph said, being rather formal. “May I introduce you to my roommate, Mr. Cary Grant. He’s British.”

Normally he didn’t like to shake hands, but Howard eagerly extended his hand to Cary. “I know who this young man is, and I’ve been eager to meet

you. Call me a fan if you wish.”

“To know that Howard Hughes is a fan of mine would make up for a thousand screaming teenage girls,” Cary said.

Then Howard said something provocative and uncharacteristic of him. “The whole town’s discussing your affair with Mae West. Is it true that she’s a hermaphrodite? Or a mere rumor?”

“Mae West,” Cary said, flashing a winning smile. “She wishes she could get me. Tallulah tried and failed. In *Blonde Venus*, Marlene didn’t even try. She’s heard too many stories about me.” He turned and hugged Randolph closer to him.

At this point, the interaction between Howard and Cary is lost, because Beatrice was asked to go into the kitchen and prepare some tea for his guests.

Whatever happened on that day in 1934 was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. Beatrice remembered that they went to play a game of golf. Back at Muirfield, Howard told her he’d won the game.

“He seemed so elated,” she later recalled, “and it was more than just a game of golf. It was something else. There was a lightness in his step and a bubbly spirit. Very unlike Mr. Hughes.” He told her that he’d be having Cary Grant over for dinner that night and that she was to prepare something special.

“Will Mr. Scott be joining you?” she asked. A frown crossed his face. Without looking at her, he said, “No.” He turned and walked toward his library where he locked himself in until eight o’clock that night.

On the golf course that day, Jack Reeper, a fellow player, had been startled to see Cary Grant, Howard Hughes, and Randolph Scott. “Hughes and Scott were seriously interested in playing golf,” Reeper said. “Grant just seemed to tag along. At one point Grant performed a perfect double forward somersault. It was an amazing feat. Involved a roll of his body. His head almost hit the greens. It’s a wonder he didn’t break his neck.” Cary was much more skilled at this than Reeper realized that day, having performed acrobatics on the stage in London.

Mexico, 1934

The following weekend, Randolph was left behind in Los Angeles, as Howard took Cary, his new found toy boy (the term had not come into vogue then) for a sail on the *Southern Cross* to Ensenada.

For both the actor and the aviator, it was a voyage of discovery. “From the very beginning, Cary got closer to Howard than any other person he’d ever met,” Rupert, his uncle said in the late 30s. “And that included Billie Dove and Ella Rice.”

Howard’s Uncle Rupert had met Cary during Paramount’s 1933 filming of *Woman Accused*, starring Nancy Carroll, “The Candy Doll,” so recently tossed aside by Howard. The film had been based on a *Liberty Magazine* serial and promoted as a gimmick since ten celebrated authors had created the story, one of whom had been Rupert himself. “Howard’s uncle wasn’t needed on the set at all, but when he met Cary he was there all the time,” Nancy said. “He practically chased Cary around the set, with tongue panting like that of an overheated dog. Rupert was ugly and out of shape. There was no way that the little troll would have had a chance with Cary. I mean, Cary could have had any beautiful woman in Hollywood if he’d wanted that, and both Howard and Randolph Scott were considered very desirable catches.”

Rupert’s loss was Howard’s gain. What isn’t known is what Randolph felt about Howard sailing off with his boyfriend. He must have dealt with it, however, since he would remain friends with Howard until the late 1930s when Howard mysteriously vanished from his life. As a friend to Howard, Cary was alone for the duration of the ride, which would be a lifetime journey. And that ride began with just the two of them—no other invited guests—sailing aboard the *Southern Cross* with an all-male crew.

The only insight that ever surfaced about the secret cruise came from Christian Jacobsen, one of the crew members aboard the *Southern Cross*. Jacobsen had been booted out of the Danish Navy for reasons not known. Leaving Denmark for Los Angeles, he eventually earned his living working on luxury yachts—“but only for the very, very rich.” According to his reputation, he made himself available to the owners of these yachts, either male or female or sometimes as a man-and-wife combination for partners who wanted to make it a threesome. It is not clear if he had sex with Howard, but it was assumed that he did because he was known to have visited Howard’s stateroom at night.

South of Tijuana, the *Southern Cross* sailed into Bahia Todos Santos (All Saints Bay) at the port of Ensenada. It was a sleepy town in those days, mostly known as a fishing center and a port for the Mexican wine trade.

Jacobsen later claimed that Cary got Howard to abandon his typical steak plate for supper and sample deep-fried tacos cooked fresh by the vendors along the pier. “For Howard, that must have been love,” Jacobsen said. “The man was obsessed with germs. But at least for one night, Howard let his hair down and went native. He and Cary even ordered mango on a stick for dessert.”

“The next day they sailed over to the uninhabited Todo Santos Island,” Jacobsen said. “About five miles offshore. There they wandered around in the nude like Adam and Eve. So did I.”

Jacobsen said that Howard hardly touched liquor on the trip but Cary was “into some heavy drinking.” The sailor claimed he accompanied Howard and Cary to Hussong’s, which is still the most famous drinking establishment in Baja California. The cantina was established by Johan Hussong in 1892, and over the years, its patrons had included Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck. Cary and Howard were serenaded that night by Mariachi bands. Cary drank several margaritas, Howard preferring to sip brandy Fundador all night.

Tired of sleeping on the yacht, Howard checked into a suite with Cary at the Playa Ensenada Hotel. This hotel was opened in 1929 by “the champ,” Jack Dempsey, with money put up by Al Capone. A young singer, Bing Crosby, backed up by the Xavier Cugat orchestra, had headlined the opening night gala.

But by the time Howard and Cary arrived, the hotel had lost its edge. America was in the midst of a deep economic depression, and the repeal of Prohibition in the States had seriously reduced the hotel’s once-fabled popularity.

The following story may be apocryphal because the dates don’t quite match up, but Howard, for variety’s sake, was said to have picked up a teenage dancer and Baja native, Margarita Carmen Cansino, who at the time was performing at the club. Cary insisted that the story was true, or so he claimed to Raoul Walsh, his one-eyed director on the set of *Big Brown Eyes* in 1936. Whether it was true or not can’t be determined at this point. What is better-

known is that Howard would later become the dancer's lover in the 1940s after she changed her name to Rita Hayworth.

After their sojourn in Ensenada, Howard was due back in Los Angeles. But when it became apparent that Cary had time on his hands between film commitments, Howard called Dietrich, telling him that he would not be stopping off in Los Angeles, but planned instead to continue sailing with Cary all the way north to San Francisco.

"As we headed north," Jacobsen said, "it appeared that Howard and Cary were on their honeymoon. They dined together by candlelight, they strolled the decks together, talked for hours, and spent nights together in Howard's master stateroom."

He recalled coming upon them one sunny afternoon lying nude on the deck with their arms around each other. "They paid no attention to me," Jacobsen said. "It was like I wasn't even there. Neither of them seemed to care what the all-male crew thought. Perhaps I shouldn't say this, but I couldn't help but notice that Howard's endowment looked two and a half times bigger than that of Cary's."

Somewhere during the voyage, Howard discovered that Cary wore women's panties. He always insisted it was a practical matter, finding women's underwear lighter and easier to dry when he was on the road than the heavier men's underwear of the time.

By the time they'd reached San Francisco, both men had also discovered they had a fascination for attending clubs where transvestites performed. Cary may have even told Howard of his days as Archie Leach, and of his first full-blown sexual experience. Cary was sixteen at the time, and his partner was "Francis Renault," a muscular female impersonator in Manhattan.



Cary Grant

In San Francisco, Howard purchased beautifully tailored clothes for Cary, even buying very expensive jewelry for him, including a ruby ring. He also bought him a set of “the world’s most expensive luggage—all matched and monogrammed,” according to Dietrich.

The epitome of casual, Howard at the time was traveling around with a few shirts and a pair of baggy trousers stuffed into a cardboard box. Instead of a belt, he often used a discarded necktie to hold up his pants. If he ever had to dress up, he’d borrow clothing from Cary. Fortunately, the two men were about the same size.

At night these two high profile individuals prowled “the pansy clubs” of San Francisco. Word soon reached Hollywood.

Nancy Carroll said she was surprised upon hearing the news. She’d made *Hot Saturday*, which had co-starred both Randolph and Cary. “Those two were cohabitating, and I know this for a fact because I visited the lovers at the time. In private they carried on quite a bit and Cary—not Randolph—sometimes became very effeminate. Poor Virginia Cherrill. Cary put that woman through hell,” Nancy claimed.

She was referring to the actress who’d married Cary. Other than for that dubious accomplishment, Virginia Cherrill is remembered today as the female lead in *City Lights*, playing a blind flower girl opposite Charles Chaplin.

Ben Maddox, a writer for *Modern Screen*, had visited the Scott/Grant household and had written an article about them, leaving out his most obvious conclusions. He wrote that as a team, Grant was the “gay, impetuous one,” calling Scott more “serious, cautious.”

“I thought Howard Hughes just arrived on the scene and lured Grant away with his power and money,” Maddox claimed. “Then I saw Scott dating Grant at the Trocadero one night. It was only a week after his cruise with Hughes. I’ll tell you what I think, I think Grant, Hughes, and Scott had occasional three-ways. I understand this is a very common practice among homos. Those flighty boys have a lot of orgies.”

Director Lowell Sherman died in 1934 of pneumonia in Hollywood and was not privy to the Hughes/Grant romance. A once famous figure, he directed early films for Greta Garbo and Katharine Hepburn and had gone “along for the ride” in 1921 when Fatty Arbuckle took him to San Francisco. That weekend led to the death of starlet Virginia Rappé and charges of manslaughter brought against the popular comedian. Although not convicted, Arbuckle’s career was destroyed.

Sherman got to know Randolph—that is “as well as any man could get close to that cold fish” (his words)—when he directed Cary in *She Done Him Wrong*, starring Mae West. “Mae could spot a homo a mile away,” Sherman claimed. “And she definitely included Cary and Randy in that category. She was very tolerant of the boys but was not very advanced in her psychological points of view. She claimed that ‘all the boys really want to be me. Dress like me and look like me.’ Throughout her life she also claimed to have discovered Cary Grant.” She would also star opposite Cary in *I’m No Angel*.

She once told Tennessee Williams on a visit to her apartment that stories of her romance with Cary Grant were entirely created by the press. “Can you imagine Cary Grant taking me on?” she said to the astonished playwright. “It takes a real man for Mae. Gary Cooper—or so I’m told—could handle me. But he was too busy giving it away to Tallulah. When Cary met Hughes, they’d both already had affairs with Coop. Perhaps that formed some common bond between them. Who knows how these boys operate?”

The director, Sherman, felt that Randolph was deeply disappointed in his relationship with Howard. “He didn’t exactly expect Hughes to give him money. But I think he expected tips on the stock market, get-rich schemes. Things like that. He thought Hughes was his key to fortune. I think all that Hughes did was screw around with him and get him some bit parts which launched him into films.”

It is not known how the homophobic columnist for the *Hollywood Reporter*, Edyth Gwynne, found out about Howard’s mystery voyage to San Francisco with Cary. With her poison pen, she’d been on a campaign to “out” homosexuals, both male and female, in the movie colony long before anyone knew what that word meant. She had already outed Gary Cooper and -surprise of surprises -James Cagney. Her contacts fed her very inside information. She suggested that Greta Garbo’s next film might be called *The Son-Daughter*, and that Marlene Dietrich might star in *Male and Female*. Someone had gotten to her with the information that Cary preferred to play the passive role in sodomy. She suggested that his next movie might be titled *One Way Passage*. That 1932 movie, a drama/romance, had already been made starring William Powell and the lesbian actress, Kay Francis.

Cary never publicly talked in any detail about Howard after their return aboard the *Southern Cross* from San Francisco. But throughout his marriages and other lovers, he would become a fixture at Muirfield. He would also be the only movie star, male or female, who remained in touch with Howard until the very end of his life.

One of the few remarks Cary ever made about Howard was to claim, “We were so very different. Opposites attract, I guess. We became such good friends because we were so different.”

But were they that different? Many of their friends and associates have claimed that “they were birds of a feather,” as Nancy Carroll once put it.

Cary could be charming when he wanted to be, at least on the screen, and he was far more sociable than Howard. Both men were loners, however, and each of them seemed filled with a brooding sense of despair. It is not known if Howard ever attempted suicide like Cary once did. But both men throughout their tortured lives would occasionally collapse into nervous breakdowns.

In the only time Cary ever spoke about Howard to the gossip Louella Parsons, he said, “I think Howard and I are such great comrades because he doesn’t want anything from me, and I don’t want anything from him except his friendship and trust. I don’t expect him to give me money or push my career forward. He wants a male companion he can sail with, fly with, or just sit silently at dinner together. Sometimes we don’t say anything to each other for hours at a time. But it’s important to know we’re providing comfort and support for each other even if it’s not articulated.”

That comment was about as much insight as Cary ever provided about his closeted relationship with Howard. Neither man could tolerate too close a scrutiny from the press.

“Cary loved money,” Nancy Carroll said. “Not as much as Randolph. No one on God’s earth loved money like Randy boy. But it was Cary’s love of money that led to his marriage to Miss Moneybags, Barbara Hutton herself. I don’t mean he loved money in the sense that he tried to hustle loot from the rich like Randolph did by marrying Marion DuPont. In Cary’s case, he liked to be around people with money, namely Howard Hughes and Barbara Hutton. He asked many questions about my relationship with Joe Kennedy. He didn’t like Kennedy but admired him for his ability to accumulate millions. Cary had come from a background of poverty, and had broken into show business as a juggler and a song-and-dance man, touring England with an acrobatic troupe. I was told that he’d led a lean and hard life in New York—I should also add a very gay life—and he went to bed many times without even a bowl of Bubble & Squeak. Or should I say Faggots and Pease Pudding?”

After she’d had a drink or two, Nancy could develop a bitchy edge to her comments.

Although Cary became famous for his romantic roles on screen, he was not a romantic at heart and was rather cold and distant with most people. Howard was the same way. “Even in those early days, these two school girls weren’t wearing their hearts on their sleeve,” said Billy Haines decades later. “They were rather detached in their love affair. From the beginning, Howard and Cary never pledged fidelity to each other and were free to carry on with others. Cary continued to see Randy and also dated other women. Howard also continued to pursue any hot things in pants or a dress. Today we would call their relationship an open one. Yet they did have a commitment. I read somewhere that Queen Elizabeth demanded loyalty but not necessarily

fidelity from Prince Philip. The same could be said about Howard and Cary. Among male-male couples, the two buddies remained bonded at the hip almost from the day they met. That doesn't mean they didn't have their troubles, even a little violence on some occasions. But what couple doesn't have that?"

Although their friendship would eventually settle into a very peaceful relationship, Cary and Howard had many struggles when they were just getting to know each other. The exact nature of their arguments or fights will perhaps never be known.

Beatrice Dowler reported that one rainy night Cary showed up at Muirfield and virtually stormed into the room where Howard was working on some plans for his next breakthrough in aviation.

"Mr. Grant was drunk and unshaven," Beatrice later said. "Usually he was immaculate. He barged into the library and confronted Mr. Hughes. I've never heard such shouting in all my life. It sounded like Mr. Grant was throwing things and breaking objects."

"About an hour later, I was in the main hallway removing some wilted flowers when Mr. Grant raced out of the library, flinging the door open," Beatrice later claimed. "When he first saw me, he looked distraught and was in tears. 'The bastard doesn't love me,' he shouted, not necessarily to me but to the world in general. 'He loves only himself.'"

"At first I thought he was breaking toward the front door but he ran upstairs to the master bedroom," she said. "I didn't hear anything, and I began to get worried. Finally, I went and knocked on the library door. Mr. Hughes came to the door. I suggested to him that he'd better go upstairs and check on Mr. Grant. He seemed reluctant to do so. Finally, he walked up the steps, taking his own good time."

"I don't know what Mr. Hughes saw in that bedroom," she said. "But he came out in just a minute or two and shouted down the steps for me to call his doctor. I called Dr. Verne Mason, who was accustomed to making midnight house calls at Muirfield. When the doctor arrived, I showed him up the steps and then disappeared, because I felt Mr. Hughes didn't want me to know what was going on."

"I just assumed that Dr. Mason sedated Mr. Grant that night," she said. "When I served breakfast in bed the following morning around ten o'clock, Mr. Hughes and Mr. Grant seemed happy as two love-birds. Later that morning I went into the library. It looked like a bulldozer had been in there. Somebody had been throwing things at somebody."

"When Mr. Hughes walked in on me, he looked around and surveyed the damage but didn't say anything," she said. "Is Mr. Grant all right?" I asked him. "He gets a little carried away from time to time," Howard said. "Nothing that a very intense spanking can't cure." At that point the housekeeper said that Howard turned and headed down the hallway and out the front door, leaving Cary upstairs in the master bedroom.

She said that Cary got up later and demanded endless cups of coffee. "I knew that he was heavily lacing my coffee with bourbon," she said. "All that day he was 'sullen, morose, and quarrelsome,' just like Virginia Cherrill had testified in divorce court against him."

Beatrice claimed that she never liked Cary and always felt uncomfortable as long as he was in the house. "Mr. Hughes was exceedingly kind to him, but I never knew why he put up with what he did. He quickly dismissed most of his lovers who drank heavily. I think he had a double standard, though. He tolerated young men who drank. He couldn't stand women who drank heavily in his presence. Of course, years later he would allow a lush like Ava Gardner to do that, but I think she was an exception."

Cary was not the Mr. Nice Guy that he so often portrayed on screen, Beatrice claimed. As further evidence, she cited his former valet, Dudley Walker, who once said, "He could be a terrible bastard, that one!"

Throughout the early years of their relationship, Beatrice claimed that "frequent outbursts of temper" occurred between Howard and Cary. "Mr. Grant could be very charming at times, and then Mr. Hughes would do something that upset him and there would be shouting matches. Personally, I think Mr. Grant wanted a more serious commitment from Mr. Hughes than he was willing to give him. Mr. Grant could be very jealous and possessive. Yet, almost to contradict what I'm saying, they would sometimes have Mr. Scott over for the weekend. The three of them were very chummy together. I didn't even want to think what went on when all of them retired to the master bedroom upstairs."

Suddenly, without telling Noah Dietrich or Beatrice in advance, Howard and Cary just disappeared for ten days. They were later spotted at the Biltmore Hotel in Phoenix. Howard had flown Cary there in his private plane. A maid walked in on them and reported that she found them lying nude together in bed, locked in an embrace.

From there, they traveled to Tucson and were later seen in Juarez. "Otherwise, no other details of their holiday have ever emerged," Beatrice said. "All I know is that things at Muirfield were a little more peaceful for a few weeks after their return, but Mr. Grant went off the deep edge again, as he so often did in those days. I had a feeling that Mr. Hughes was the forever forgiving father, and Mr. Grant was the forever errant son. Even though it was no doubt a romantic relationship, there was also the element of the father-son in the way they dealt with each other."

Although not knowing the particulars, Beatrice once learned that Howard rescued Cary when he was caught performing fellatio on a handsome young employee in the men's room of a Beverly Hills department store. "I think Mr. Hughes paid a lot of money to hush that up," she claimed. "Following a pay-off to the police, Mr. Grant went free. No charges were ever filed, but the story was gossiped about all over Hollywood."

Paying off the police to avoid a homosexual scandal was but a prelude to equivalent circumstances that loomed in Howard's own future.

Cary had been cast opposite that fiercely independent New Englander, Katharine Hepburn, in George Cukor's homosexual romp, *Sylvia Scarlett*. It would turn out to be one of the most bizarre films ever made in the 1930s. Kate played the role *en travestie*. "I won't be a girl, weak and silly!" she says. "I'll be a boy, rough and hard!"

Sexual ambiguities abound throughout the film, and there are many risqué references to bisex-uality, most of which were Katharine Hepburn and Brian Aherne in *Sylvia Scarlett* pitched over the heads of the film's intended audience, just the way its homosexual director, George Cukor, wanted it.



Katharine Hepburn and Brian Aherne in *Sylvia Scarlett*

Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant, the two most closeted bisexuals of Hollywood's Golden Age, were ideally cast in their roles.

Starring opposite them was Brian Aherne, who would later marry Joan Fontaine, successfully taking her from Howard himself. Playing an artist in the film, the handsome Aherne says to Kate Hepburn, "I don't know what it is that gives me a queer feeling when I look at you." In the scene she is dressed as a boy.

At one point during the filming, Cary relaxed off-camera with Kate. Looking her over, he said, "I think I like you better as a boy than as a girl. As a girl, you're far too skinny, and I don't like skinny women."

"Do you like women at all?" she provocatively asked him. "Occasionally, but only on that very odd night," he candidly answered. "Randy and Howard have a lot more to play around with." He got up and wandered off as if distracted by something.

Unknown to most of Hollywood, Howard was about to intrude himself into yet another famous homosexual relationship. He was already the third party in the love affair of Randolph Scott and Cary Grant. Now he was about to become another "third wheel" in Kate Hepburn's ongoing affair with the lovely and sophisticated Laura Harding, one of the heiresses to the American Express fortune.

At the time of her first meeting with Howard, Kate had never given any indication that she'd even heard of Howard Hughes, much less cared about him.

But one morning during the shooting of *Sylvia Scarlett*, Kate looked up as a small single engine Boeing Scout was zeroing in on their set. Cukor had arranged part of his filming astride one of the most photogenic strips of beachfront along the Southern California coastline—the rolling dunes of Trancas Beach.

Cukor immediately called for his cinematographer, Joseph August, to stop filming. Hands on his hips in exasperation, Cukor also rubber-necked along with the rest of his crew. "Don't that beat all!" his sound recorder, George D. Ellis, said.

Kate later described the landing of Howard Hughes in a windswept meadow nearby, overlooking the roaring surf below. "His plane just seemed to emerge from the offshore fog. It was about noon. I can still picture the late morning sun glinting off the silver nose of his craft. It was as if Cukor were directing an aerial scene, not the action on the ground. The wings dipped, and the pilot came to a beautiful landing, the small craft gliding gracefully down. At that point, I decided I wanted to be an aviator myself. From the cockpit, the pilot emerged. He was one of the tallest and most boyishly handsome men I'd ever seen—a wondrous sight, really. He wore a brown leather flight jacket, with the sign of an eagle sewn on the left pocket. He also wore elephant-colored jodhpurs and jet-black Cordoban boots with some sort of silver ornamentation on them. The rangy figure came toward us."

In contrast to the dashing aviator, Kate appeared rather plain that day. Her red hair had been closely cropped, and she looked very much like a boy, wearing a nut-brown polo coat she'd borrowed from her makeup artist, Mel Burns. For some unknown reason, she'd splashed rubbing alcohol on her face, which had streaked and partially obliterated her screen mask.

On seeing "the fastest man alive," the fabulously wealthy Howard, coming toward her, she retreated to the safety of her dressing room before Cary could make an introduction.

There she remained for about thirty minutes before emerging again. This time she'd slashed a scarlet mouth on herself and had slipped into a pair of olive green gabardine slacks with a tailored man's white shirt she'd purchased at Brooks Brothers. "With her short hair, she looked like a sodomite's dream," Cukor later said. "Those slacks accentuated her slim hips." Under one arm, she carried a basket of freshly made scones baked by her maid, Johanna Madsen.



Ferocious rivals:
Ginger Rogers and Katharine Hepburn

As part of the picnic setup that Kate often hosted at lunchtime for her friends and invited colleagues on the set, Kate walked over to a blanket that Johanna had spread across a patch of scrub grass. Howard was sitting between Cukor and Cary. Howard rose to greet Kate. What he thought of her appearance is not known.

Other than shaking his hand, Kate didn't seem impressed with the man who had been dubbed by the press, like Rubirosa, as the Playboy of the Western World.

She seemed put off by the high-pitched sound of his voice. "Such a manly looking man should have a deeper, richer voice," she later confided to Cukor.

Ignoring him throughout her picnic lunch, she acted rather arrogantly in his presence. Obviously she didn't want him to think she was impressed with either his wealth or fame.

Howard had so little to say to her that she later told Cary that "he acted like a deaf mute" during the whole picnic, not even complimenting Johanna on her famous fried chicken. Howard was not overly fond of fried foods.

After he had left, flying dramatically away in his aircraft, Cary told her that his friend was really a fascinating fellow but was partially deaf and could not hear much of their conversation. Not only that, but Howard was working on one of his secret airplane projects at the time and found small talk boring.

When Kate later complained that she didn't like the way Howard had barged in, interrupting the filming of the picture, Cary confessed that he'd actually invited the aviator. Each day the stars of the picture, along with Cukor, had been asked to invite the most interesting person in their acquaintance to one of their picnic lunches. Cary had selected Howard.

Throughout the picnic, Kate never made eye contact with Howard. "I never looked at him—not even once after I shook his hand," she told film editor Jane Loring. "He had some nerve flying over us like that. The British would call it cheeky."

The following day, and in spite of Kate's wall of coldness to him, Howard remained intrigued by "that magnificent Yankee." He'd even come up with a nickname for Kate, calling her "Country Mouse." It was a nickname he would use for her during the course of their long relationship, despite its unflattering overtones.

Although he had been cold-shouldered by Kate when they were first introduced, Howard was interested enough to accept another invitation from Cary to fly in the next week for yet another picnic, this one prepared by Cukor's own personal chef. Kate and Brian Aherne were invited as the guests of honor.

It was only later that Kate was to learn that this complicated airborne charade was part of Cary's elaborate plan to bring Kate and the aviator together.

This is how Aherne remembered the second visit:

"Without warning, Hughes came back. A biplane roared up and set down on a makeshift landing strip above the dunes. Out stepped Howard Hughes looking like Charles Lindbergh. At the time, the crew thought that he was already having an affair with Kate. Later we found out that wasn't true. If he was in love with anyone, it was with Cary. Hughes was fascinated by Cary. As I recall, Cary was a bit of a prick-teaser at that picnic. Hughes came over and spoke to Kate and me. He had a high-pitched voice that struck me odd. Kate had told me that he was almost deaf. She seemed to mock his handicap during the picnic. She was playing up to Grant as if he were her lover. She'd lean over to Grant and whisper to him, 'Please, pass me another chicken leg.' It was all innocent enough, but the look on her face was making it seem that she was coming on to Grant. Hughes couldn't understand a word they were saying. He sat there getting angrier by the minute. When he could take Kate's cuddling of Grant no more, he got up and stormed away, heading to his plane. I've had enough of this shit!'he shouted back at Kate and Grant. The two doubled over in laughter. Grant promised to explain everything to Hughes later that night. Frankly, I thought it was rather sadistic of Kate to taunt Hughes like that."

Aherne said that after Hughes flew off, Cukor ordered everyone back to the set. The actor overheard Cary tell Kate, "You know what? Howard Hughes would make a perfect new beau for you."

"You must be kidding," she said. "Me and that rich playboy? Could you see me taking that womanizer and 'manizer' home to meet Kit and my father? They'd take a shotgun and run him off the grounds. A romance between Katharine Hepburn and Howard Hughes? Hell will freeze over before that day ever comes."

Unusual for him, Howard, accompanied by Noah Dietrich, called a press conference on August 10 to announce his intentions to break the world's airspeed record. At that point in his career, most reporters did not take his pursuit of aviation seriously. He was called various names in the press, including the "millionaire playboy flier."

On September 12, at Glendale, the time had come for him to take his mystery ship out of storage and reveal it to the world. During the previous week, he'd ordered his friend and fellow pilot, Glenn Odekirk, to paint it red and silver instead of just silver. He reasoned that the color of silver alone might make his plane invisible in the bright sunshine over southern California.

Since the monoplane was a single-seater, with room only for him, he told Glenn goodbye and agreed to meet him near Santa Ana. Stepping into his cockpit, he made a brisk takeoff. Once airborne, he aimed *The Silver Bullet* toward the Pacific, flying low over the rock-strewn Palos Verdes Peninsula. He was heading for the Eddie Martin Airfield in Orange County. Back then, it was nothing but a strip of tarmac near Santa Ana, at one end of which stood some ramshackle hangers. Today it's the site of the Orange County John Wayne Airport.

By the time Howard landed in his H-1 Racer, the judges were already inspecting their own planes, since all three of them would be airborne to judge Howard's attempt at breaking the world record.

One of those judges was Amelia Earhart, at the time, the country's most celebrated aviatrix. Howard admired Earhart's skill and daring in the air and congratulated her on her record-breaking solo flight from Mexico City to Newark. Advanced for his time, Howard treated women pilots with respect. Many of his fellow pilots felt that only men should be allowed to fly. But Howard had already provided flying lessons to a former girlfriend, Billie Dove, as he would a future girlfriend, Katharine Hepburn.

Earhart would be the sole pilot in the small craft she planned to use to judge Howard's performance. The other two judges would fly together in a shared airplane. Howard shook the hand of Paul Mantz, whom he'd hired as a stunt pilot during the filming of *Hell's Angels*. Mantz was currently employed as a technical advisor to Earhart. The third judge was Lawrence Therkelson of the National Aviation Association.

All three judges found Howard's dress code unusual for a pilot. In a dark blue suit that looked like he was attending a bankers' meeting in Houston, he wore a black tie and a soiled Oxford white shirt. He had donned a leather cap and pair of oversized goggles.

Howard faced a three-kilometer course, with a chronograph installed at each end to take pictures of *The Silver Bullet* as it entered the airspace at the end of the run. For Howard to break the world record, he would have to make a series of four "flypasts," going at a speed that exceeded the 314 miles per hour. The world speed record was held at the time by a French pilot in a plane that had cost the French government, in the mid-1930s, a million U.S. dollars.

As Howard got into the cockpit for his takeoff, one newsman later claimed that *The Silver Bullet* "looked like a spindly legged man-eating insect." Surprisingly, the sun was already beginning its long descent into the Pacific when Howard took off. Glenn wondered if he'd be able to complete all four flypasts before darkness fell over the Santa Ana countryside.

Because of high winds, Howard was able to achieve a speed of only 302 miles per hour even though he took the plane to ten-thousand feet. "Firewalling" the throttle, as pilots say, he made his first flypast at 346 miles per hour. Later, he was seriously pissed off when Lawrence Therkelson of the NAA informed him on his headset that the judges had disqualified his flypast. "When you came into the measured course, you were still pulling out of your dive. You have to be at level flight for cameras to record it."

Angered but more fiercely determined than ever, Howard took off into the skies again. This time he leveled out his plane before executing the flypast at 354 miles per hour. But by then it was too dark for the cameras to record it. Howard was invited back the next day.

"So that's it!" Howard said in disgust to Dietrich. "I've flown faster than any pilot's ever flown since the airplane was invented. And I'm being sent home to bed until tomorrow."

Friday the 13th of September loomed ominously for superstitious pilots, most of whom didn't like to fly on that day. Howard flew anyway, and the cameras caught the action as the sun was high in the cloudless skies. This time, he did many more flypasts than were required, posting speeds of 355, 339, 351, 340, 350, and 351 miles per hour.

Howard's real aim involved establishing the new world's record at 365 miles per hour. As such, he became impulsive, opting to make an additional run. Waving to Glenn and the ground crew, he took off for one final flypast, piloting *The Silver Bullet* over the brown hills of San Joaquin and making a circle over the turbulent breakers of Corona del Mar. Once *The Silver Bullet* reached its maximum speed, "Hughes just seemed to dive toward the earth," Mantz later said.

"He looked like a bolt of silver lightning coming down," Earhart later told the press. "In one horrifying moment, it dawned on me he was in distress."

Aviation writer Howie Davenport claimed, "To me, his plane looked no more than 1,200 feet above the earth, and he was hurtling to the ground at ferocious speed. Some claimed 100 miles per hour, others 180. It was clear to all of us that he was attempting frantically to pull *The Silver Bullet* up. We later learned that his engine had died when it ran out of fuel. He'd stayed in the air much too long making all those flypasts. He was desperately struggling with the controls. It was later revealed that he was trying to open his emergency gas tank to no avail. It was blocked. He must have known he was going to die."

"I know this sounds weird," Davenport said, "but when *The Silver Bullet* was falling, it gave off a ghostly shriek, almost like a person screaming when he jumps off a high building to a certain death. Earhart and all of us just knew it was curtains for Hughes. I know it wasn't the right thing to think at the time, but I thought that a fool and his money are soon parted."

Suddenly, all that the newsman saw was a dusty red cloud rising over a beetfield. Howard had made landfall. "The migrant workers must have had chopped beets for dinner that night," Davenport said. "I thought Hughes was killed on impact."

Spectators saw Glenn racing across the field, the first to arrive at the downed plane. Amazingly, Howard was emerging unscathed from the cockpit. "I'd never heard him curse like that before," Glenn later said. He rushed to help his boss. "It was son of a bitch this, mother fucker that."

Howard grinned like some fool. "I can fly a lot faster than that," were his first words after his emergency landing.

After finding out he was all right, Glenn asked, "Why didn't you bail out?"

"And throw away the \$125,000 I've invested in this beautiful thing?"

Mantz was the second person to reach the plane, telling Howard, "You're the luckiest son-of-a-bitch on the planet. You're the new Lucky Lindy." Howard only frowned at him, as he never liked comparisons to Charles Lindbergh.

He took out a stick of chewing gum and went around to inspect his propeller, finding it damaged. He was at the front of his plane when photographers arrived to snap his picture and flash it around the world. America had created another aviation hero.

Howard had hardly landed on his feet before he was directing Glenn to put the racer on the back of a flatbed truck to be hauled back to Glendale.

“From now on, this baby is going to be called *The Flying Bullet*,” Howard told the press.

The next day at a press conference, Howard modestly downplayed his own achievement. “The day will soon come when commercial airplanes will be flying over the continent of America at the rate of four hundred miles per hour.” He turned to some reporters on the side and in a low voice said “and one day man will fly faster than the speed of sound.”

That same day Howard turned to Glenn and commanded, “Let’s go to work.” He was determined to find out what had gone wrong, even if it meant dismantling *The Silver Bullet* piece by piece. Since arriving in Glendale, Howard had posted twenty-four hour security guards around the plane. On a Sunday, having worked day and night on the plane’s “autopsy” since Thursday, Howard located the problem.

Someone had blocked the pipeline leading from the spare gas tank to the plane’s engine with a bunched-up wad of steel wool. That’s why Howard had been unable to tap into the emergency fuel source when the plane was going down.

Glenn speculated that the steel wool might have been inserted by accident. “How would a mechanic know that you’d have to use the emergency tank? After all, you told no one that you were planning more than four flypasts.”

Glenn had a point, but Howard dismissed it when he discovered that the steel wool was held in place by a tiny lead wire. Howard said that he might idly have told his mechanics that he was going to make a total of eight passes and that his life might depend on accessing the fuel in the second tank. “I was working day and night and half out of my mind,” he said to Glenn, “and I just can’t remember.”

“Someone wanted me to die,” Howard said. Through Dietrich he ordered that all the mechanics who worked on the job be interrogated by the toughest police detectives he could find. “Hire only the best. One of them will crack under pressure.”

But none did after intensive questioning. And Howard seemed to have sincerely believed that none of the mechanics had harbored a personal grudge against him. Eventually, to an increasing degree, Howard’s suspicions became focused on the executives at Toolco.

Howard admitted to Dietrich that he’d made a terrible mistake. When Toolco executives were pressing him to draw up a new will in case he was killed on one of his dangerous missions, he had agreed to their demands. “I did more than that,” Howard said. “I actually told them that the will had been signed. They believed that in the event of my death, most of the Toolco assets would go to them. But I lied. I never drew up such a will.”

In the months that followed, Howard’s relationship with Toolco, the source of his wealth, grew more hostile.

The forced landing and near death at Santa Ana didn’t keep Howard out of the air for long. He had far bigger plans than breaking some aerial speed record. In the next few weeks, he would conduct a series of dangerous flights over the bleak Sierra Nevadas. Aviation experts at the time described his flights “like staring Death in the face,” or, in the words of one writer, “How to meet the Grim Reaper in one easy lesson.”

Through his experimental flights, Howard was proving to skeptics that high altitude flying increased air speed tremendously.

Keeping a careful log, Howard told Glenn, “I’m proving my point. I’m right about this. But I’m doing more than that. I’m becoming the god damn daddy of commercial aviation. The day will soon come when any fool with the price of a ticket can fly across America. Next thing I know, the railroad people will try to have me murdered.”

Early one morning, just a few minutes after Glenn reported to work, he called Howard at Muirfield to report a theft at the hangar. “Our papers and records for the *Bullet* have been stolen. Someone broke into our office and made off with them.”

Howard was furious at this breakdown in security. But it wouldn’t be until years later that he realized who the culprit might be. The first time he saw the dreaded Japanese Zero fighter during the early years of World War II, he knew what had happened. “The Japs have stolen the plans of *The Flying Bullet*,” he said. “God knows how many American lives will be lost because of me.”

Howard’s revolutionary mystery ship now hangs in an alcove at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Los Angeles, 1935

Having broken one speed record, Howard was determined to go for another. He wanted to break the speed record for a transcontinental flight between the East and the West Coasts. The existing record often hours, two minutes, and fifty-seven seconds had been established by Captain Roscoe Turner, who had been one of the stunt pilots during the filming of *Hell's Angels*.

Aware that he'd need an all-new airplane to meet the challenge, and unwilling to wait the full eighteen months that would have been needed to build it, he cast his covetous eye on a state-of-the-art Northrop Gamma owned at the time by Jackie Cochran, a beautiful, blonde, twenty-six year-old aviatrix. Without her knowing it, Howard had secretly spied on Jackie, as her crew put her Northrop Gamma through a battery of fuel-consumption tests at Mines Field.

Although her rival, Amelia Earhart, is a more famous aviatrix today because of her mysterious disappearance, Jacqueline Cochran is actually the greatest woman pilot in aviation history. By the time she'd died in 1980, she held more speed, distance, and altitude records than any other pilot (female or male) in the history of flight.

In stark contrast to Howard, Jackie had been born into poverty, growing up the hard way in a small Florida sawmill town. She was cared for by foster parents who sent her to work full time in the mill at the age of eight. At the age of eleven, she apprenticed herself to a hairdresser. She fled from home after selecting a new name for herself from the phone book. In New York, she became a successful beautician, but she would eventually discover that her true love was in the air.

In time Jackie would marry a multi-millionaire, Floyd Odlum, the founder and chief executive officer of the Atlas Corporation from its beginnings in 1923. But at the time Jackie met Howard, she was strapped for cash.

Their relationship began with a call that came into her hotel room one night at 11:30pm. Sleepy, she picked up the receiver and heard a high-pitched voice with a Texas accent inform her, "Jackie, this is Howard."

At first she didn't know who he was until he clarified it. "Howard Hughes," he said.

"That's nice," she said. "I'm the Queen of Sheba."

"No, it's really me," he insisted. "I want to buy the Northrop Gamma."

She immediately refused, telling him she wanted to fly the plane in the Bendix Trophy Race, covering the distance between Los Angeles and Cleveland. He told her that he wanted to use her plane to break the existing transcontinental flight record. She startled him by informing him that she wanted to do that as well. But Howard could be very persuasive, and she agreed to see him the next morning if he'd let her get some sleep.

At Mines Field, Howard was fifteen minutes early for their appointment. Usually he was at least an hour late, in some cases four or five hours late. Howard was with his co-pilot, Glenn Odekirk, when he first met Jackie. He would later confide to Glenn that "the dame is a stunner—maybe needs bigger breasts, but so do most women." Glenn found "fire in her eyes and a spine made of steel."

Even though very feminine, Jackie had chosen to enter the tough-talking, hard-driving macho world of the male pilot. Most aviators drank too much at night and took too many risks during the day. "To live without risk, for me, would be tantamount to death," Jackie was fond of saying. She uttered that same sentiment one morning in 1962 when she became the first woman to fly a jet airplane across the Atlantic.

Glenn later recalled that Howard seemed so mesmerized by the charm and beauty of Jackie that at first he forgot to transact business. "My God," he later told Glenn, "her eyes are browner than mine." In the morning sun without her helmet and goggles, her hair was a "shimmering gold" and her skin was "porcelain like," bringing out the poet in Howard. Perhaps Jackie's complexion evoked memories of Billie Dove for him.

He later told Dietrich, "Jackie manages to look like a real woman even when she's dressed up like a pilot. In the same flying togs, Amelia Earhart looks like a transvestite version of Charles Lindbergh."

After Jackie had left for the day, still undecided about what to do with her Northrop Gamma, Howard told Glenn, "I've found Howard Hughes alive and living in a woman's body." In a few short months, he would make the same remark about another "gal pal," Katharine Hepburn.

It took Howard a month to break down Jackie's resistance. Dietrich later claimed that Howard won over Jackie by seducing her. "I know that on two separate occasions he disappeared for a weekend with her in the air—God knows where." Two of his closest male friends, Cubby Broccoli and Pat DeCicco, said they frequently saw Howard during this time—and he never once mentioned Jackie Cochran. Perhaps their testimony could be discounted because he also didn't mention his plans to acquire her plane.

After Howard's seduction of her, Jackie "caved in" (her words), but since she couldn't bring herself to actually sell her plane, she finally agreed to lease it to him instead. He presented her with an offer of \$65,000 which "I could not refuse." That figure was more than the total cost of the plane's original construction. "I just couldn't afford to do otherwise," Jackie later said. "He had me." Her last remark, of course, could be taken two different ways.

After Jackie married Floyd Odlum, she no longer desperately needed her lease payments from Howard. But even though Floyd had many reservations about Howard, he became his friend, a relationship that lasted for many years. Howard became a frequent visitor to the couple's California ranch.

When Jackie introduced Howard to Floyd, he later told his friends. "Hughes looks like a suspicious recluse, the kind of guy who might steal something from your house. He even has to borrow a dime to make a phone call or thirty cents to fill up his gas tank. Never has any money on him."

After his seduction of Jackie and right at the time of her marriage, Howard told Billy Haines, "There are three people I want to fuck in this world. "The first, Jackie Cochran. Mission accomplished. The other is Amelia Earhart."

"Pray tell, who is the third?" Billy asked.

"Charles Lindbergh, that son of a bitch!"

One weekend Jackie recalled that Howard arrived at her ranch with a beautiful aspirant young actress. He introduced her to the Odlums as Terry Moore, only fifteen at the time. "He told me he was going to marry Terry," Jackie later said. "On another occasion, he showed up with Rita Hayworth." Jackie claimed that he was growing increasingly paranoid by that time. "He insisted on opening every closet at our ranch before he would talk to us," she said. "He was afraid that spies were hiding in the closets."

In 1960, the relationship soured when Floyd retired early from Atlas to run Toolco for Howard. At the last minute, Howard reneged on his promise without informing Floyd, who then sued him. The lawsuit was settled out of court for an undisclosed amount of money.

Dietrich always claimed that Howard was able to force Floyd into a settlement because Howard's detectives had discovered a startling bit of

information about Jackie. It seemed that at some point in her life, she'd had an affair with her friend, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Aldine Carter, manager of the Odlum ranch, later recalled a midnight call from Howard. "Jackie was asleep when I called Floyd to the phone to take a call from Hughes," Aldine claimed. "Howard was trying to buy a mattress he said he'd slept on at Floyd's ranch. He said the mattress had a hole in it, and he wanted to sleep on it again because he'd come down with a bad case of hemorrhoids."

Floyd denied ever having such a mattress. "If we have a mattress with a hole in it—and we don't—we certainly wouldn't give it to such an honored guest as yourself to sleep on."

Later, when Floyd had hung up, Aldine asked, "Hughes has got all the money in the world. Why doesn't he buy a new mattress and have a hole cut in it?"

"Howard, I fear, has gone into space," Floyd said. "I saw it coming. His mind is now somewhere else—not of this world!"

Cary Grant was still eager for his boyfriend to attach himself to Katharine Hepburn. He told Randolph Scott, director George Cukor, and others that Kate would be the perfect girlfriend for Howard. "The press will go wild about promoting the romance. She'll be the perfect cover. She'll make no sexual demands, and Howard can do pretty much what he likes. And so can Kate." He continued pressing this point of view so frequently he became almost like a stuck record.

Instead of taking Cary's advice, Howard did almost the opposite and, temporarily at least, began to see more and more of Pat DeCicco. Paying him a salary with funds out of who-knows-what cache, Howard chose Pat as his nocturnal associate. If the job description of this hustler/gigolo could be defined at all, it was "an arranger of liaisons."

Pat had begun to date June Knight, a grade B, twenty-two-year-old actress born in Los Angeles. She was not exceptionally pretty but attractive. Pat tantalized Howard with stories of his nighttime activities with her, claiming "we have great sex."

"Better than with Thelma?" Howard asked.

"Much hotter!" Pat said.

Wilson Heller, the pioneer Hollywood publicist, once said, "Two of his [Howard's] girlfriends told me he wasn't worth a damn as a lover. He was just no good in the sack. They said all he wanted to do was to look and fondle."

That was basically true at the time because Howard was experiencing a prolonged period of impotence with women. From all reports, he performed satisfactorily with men in bed, especially Cary, but could not complete intercourse with women.



Nightclubbers: Pat DeCicco, June Knight, and Howard Hughes

Nonetheless, he was more drawn to women than to men and continued to seduce them. "At least he could perform orally," Billy Haines said at the time, "even if he couldn't get it up for the ladies."

As Pat kept boasting about his great sex with June Knight to both Howard and his cousin, Cubby Broccoli, Howard began to invite himself out on late-night dates at nightclubs with the two lovers. As his paid lackey, Pat was not in a position to refuse.

The inevitable finally happened. Howard was becoming more and more the voyeur, and he was growing tired of hearing about the "great sex" his friend was having with June. He wanted to see a demonstration first hand. Pat, from all reports, was very reluctant to grant such a request. But the hustler in him did not want to turn down Howard, as he feared the consequences.

What happened next was reported by Pat DeCicco himself, who relayed it to Cubby Broccoli, who relayed it to, among others, Howard Hawks. More or less simultaneously, the details of the story were independently reconfirmed by June Knight, who relayed the stories to, among others, Una Merkel and Robert Taylor, with whom June was making *Broadway Melody of 1936* at MGM. And somehow, Jack Benny (who was starring in that same film) heard the story too, and relayed it to contacts of his own. As 1935 came to a close, it had blossomed into one of the most oft-repeated raunchy stories in Hollywood.

According to Cubby Broccoli, Pat DeCicco came to him complaining bitterly of "having a sore ass." He felt humiliated and was furious at Howard. Howard had maintained that his impotence would be cured if Pat would let him fuck him while he was fucking June. Although Pat admitted to Cubby that he'd occasionally been on the receiving end of blow-jobs from Hollywood homosexuals, he'd never been "used like a woman before...it's very painful."

Howard may indeed have been correct about the means whereby he could cure himself of his impotence. The bedtime romps with June and Pat seemed to do the trick. In the next few weeks, Howard pronounced himself cured of his sexual underperformance with women. He is said to have made that announcement on the morning after he finally penetrated June directly, supposedly having no further need of using Pat as a surrogate.

Commenting on the situation years later, Una Merkel said, "June had her fifteen minutes of fame in Hollywood underground lore.

The Hughes/DeCicco/Knight affair made a great story. And what else was there to talk about? Shirley Temple's triumphs at the box office?"

Another latter-day commentary on the three-way affair was offered many years later by actress Lilian Bond, who maintained that she had heard about it directly from June Knight as well. "June was just one of the two thousand handsome young men and beautiful young women who got dumped by

Howard Hughes. Pat DeCicco had promised June that he'd be her agent and make her a bigger star than Ginger Rogers, and Howard had promised to star her in some of his upcoming films."

One dark day, with the gossip probably echoing in her head, June realized that the dreams of 1935 were only to be dreamed. She appeared in four more films, each of them minor, delivering her final performance in 1940 in *The House Across the Bay*, in which she played a supporting role to George Raft and Joan Bennett.

It is entirely possible that Howard wouldn't have even recognized the name of June Knight by 1940. A washed-up and forgotten figure, she died on June 16, 1987 in her native Los Angeles.

No longer impotent, at least for the moment, Howard launched the pursuit of one of the most famous blonde bombshells of her era, the beautiful, busty, and provocative Thelma Todd. Sometimes known as “Hot Toddy,” she was recently divorced from Pat DeCicco. Thelma might be best known to modern-day readers for her portrayal by the talented actress Loni Anderson in a made-for-TV-movie in 2001.

Howard had already bedded Thelma at least once before. Usually as part of a group of acquaintances, he had been seeing her two or three times a week at Thelma Todd’s Sidewalk Café. “Perhaps he likes my sloppy seconds,” Pat told Cubby Broccoli. Pat could have been rather ungallantly referring to either June Knight or Thelma Todd. Pat’s divorce from Thelma had come through only the year before. Howard had developed a fondness for pursuing divorced actresses, whom he cynically referred to as “wet decks.”

As he launched his seduction plans of Thelma Todd, he could not have known that, from the sidelines, he was about to witness the backroom intrigues of one of Hollywood’s more sensational murders, a killing that easily matched, and perhaps even surpassed, the speculation surrounding the still-unsolved murder of director William Desmond Taylor in 1922.

When he wasn’t out with Pat, June, or whomever, Howard was spending time in an airplane hangar with Glenn Odekirk, virtually rebuilding the high-powered Northrop Gamma he’d leased from Jackie Cochran.

Jackie was unaware of what was happening to her plane, which was under heavy security guard. Technically, she still owned the plane, but she wasn’t allowed visitation rights. Howard figured he had three months to get the Gamma ready. He planned to fly across the North American continent some time in January of 1936, as soon as he was notified that weather conditions were ideal.

He replaced the plane’s original engine, which was less than two years old, with the latest Wright Cyclone R-1820G 850 horsepower engine, a semi-experimental device that wasn’t usually available to civilians. To get it, he and his staff weaved their way through a series of intensely private, behind-the-scenes manipulations of the U.S. Army Air Corps. Pilots referred to the installation as “the cyclone engine,” because it generated awe-inspiring blasts of power at takeoff. In addition, he installed a Hamilton Standard variable pitch propeller. To prepare himself for the transcontinental run, Howard made eleven flights as a Douglas DC-2 co-pilot on TWA runs between Los Angeles and New York. Through it all, he still found time for romance.

By the time Howard got around to seriously pursuing Thelma Todd, she was a diet pill addict, popping “my little darlings” so fast and so recklessly that she evoked a future Marilyn Monroe. Unknown to him, she’d also become hooked on hard drugs, as supplied to her by her gangster lover, Charles (Lucky) Luciano.

When Billy Haines learned that Howard was dating Thelma, so recently divorced from Pat DeCicco, the actor asked him if he had any guilt about that. “Hell, no!” Howard said. “I’ve fucked both of them.”

He had begun showing up frequently at Thelma Todd’s Sidewalk Café, where the actress was in partnership with Roland West, whose career as a director had wound down in 1931. He is known today mainly for his 1926 silent film, *The Bat*, which became the prototype for many of the “scary movie” thrillers that followed.

Thelma had a motive for dating Howard: She wanted him to buy out Roland West, whom she claimed was trying to take control of her life. Complicating matters was the fact that much of the original investment for their restaurant had come not directly from West, but from West’s wife, Jewel Carmen, a former beauty queen.

Thelma had been looking puffy-faced and was taking far too many drugs, and consuming too much alcohol until Howard expressed a romantic interest in her. Her new flame seemed to drive her out of her months-long depression. Taking better care of herself, she purchased a new wardrobe and was visited by a hairdresser every day. There was some fantasy spinning through her head that Howard might actually marry her.

Over pillow talk, Thelma told Howard more than he wanted to know about his best friend Pat. She also related this same story to her costar Patsy Kelly, as well as spicy details of her romance with Howard. Pat was known for his violent temper, and in their marriage, he repeatedly beat Thelma and heaped verbal abuse on her. She was as equally hot tempered as her gigolo husband, and their fights, often staged at the café in front of clients, became the gossip of Hollywood.

Much of Howard’s affair with Thelma was conducted upstairs over her beachside café. The upstairs had been converted into two apartments, one for West, one for her. West had also been her lover. The building also contained an additional space on the third floor which was usually used for gambling and other illicit encounters. It was this third floor space that became the focus of a battle among Pat DeCicco, Lucky Luciano, and Thelma.

Lucky was eyeing the third floor as a possible site for his own illegal gambling activities in Los Angeles, where he planned to pay off the police. Many of Hollywood’s top stars, including Clark Gable, patronized the joint, and Lucky was anxious to separate them from their fat studio paychecks. He also wanted to make Thelma’s the hub of his own drug racket.

In addition to being on Howard’s payroll, Pat was also a paid frontman for Lucky, who needed someone debonair and charming to represent him. Even though Thelma was divorced, and even though he was having an affair with her himself, Lucky rightly figured that she probably still carried a torch

for Pat. He wanted Pat to intercede and get Thelma to grant his request for the clandestine and illegal use of her club. She not only refused Pat, but turned down Lucky to his face, even spitting at him. Pat expressed his concern to Howard. “No dame does that to Lucky Luciano and lives.”

At first, as Dietrich later reported, Howard seemed unconcerned with the turmoil and drama spinning around Thelma and her club. He viewed her as a “good time gal”—and nothing more. On three different occasions, he took her on his yacht for sails to Catalina Island.

One night at Thelma’s Club, and in front of witnesses, Howard said to Pat, “With Thelma, I’ve had some of the wildest sex in my life. She’ll do anything, and I mean anything.” One can only imagine what her former husband thought upon hearing that. In the presence of Howard, however, Pat never expressed anger, probably because he wanted to stay on the payroll.

Pat had shared his wife before with other men, and had, in fact, introduced her to Lucky while he was still married to her. In front of both Pat and her partner, Roland West, Lucky’s first words to her were, “I love blondes, especially beautiful blondes that get a rise from me. Glad to meet you, babe. My big friend and I would like to get to know you better.” It was obvious what he meant by his big friend.

West later claimed that if Pat were jealous, “his face gave not a clue. Pat was a big ball clanker most of the time. But around Howard or Lucky, he became the court eunuch.”

Like many movie personalities of his era, Howard seemed enthralled by the idea of Pat introducing him to Lucky Luciano. In time, Howard would become a friend of an even more notorious gangster, Bugsy Siegel. Howard dined with Pat and Lucky on several occasions at Thelma’s Club.

“Stars in Hollywood back then, although not necessarily criminals themselves—except in their bedrooms—liked to socialize with cold-blooded killers,” Cubby Broccoli once said. “It was a vicarious tingle for them. These guys would show up at A-list parties in those days in their dark suits and their fedoras. Machine gun toting gangsters were fleeing New York and Chicago for the rich pickings in Los Angeles. It was an exciting time. Cousin Pat and Howard were right in the thick of it all.”

With both Lucky and Howard taking turns bedding Thelma, Pat launched an affair with the beautiful Iowa-born actress, Margaret Lindsay. No longer the tomboy she was when growing up in Dubuque, she was on the dawn of a career that frequently included roles as “the other woman.” She’d had a small but showy part in the Oscar-winning *Cavalcade* in 1933 as a member of the supposedly all-British cast. She’d played a bride honeymooning on the *Titanic*. Today she is known for having appeared opposite Bette Davis in films that included *Bordertown*, *Dangerous*, and *Jezebel*. In *Jezebel*, she played Henry Fonda’s bride from the north and the rival of Bette.

Margaret was to die in Los Angeles in 1981 of emphysema, but in the mid-1970s she spoke about her romance with Pat DeCicco and the weeks leading up to the murder of Thelma Todd.

“Pat, wearing incredibly expensive clothes,” Margaret recalled, “took me to all the best places back then. Montmartre. Musso and Frank’s. At the Brown Derby, we chatted with Darryl F. Zanuck and waved at Gloria Swanson’s table. Sometimes Hughes would show up, but always alone, never with Thelma Todd, although Pat told me they were having a torrid affair at the time.”

“Pat was the ultimate hand-kissing hustler and he was fantastic in bed,” Margaret said. ‘It was obvious why the gals went for him. Frankly, if you ask me, I think he was also putting out for Hughes. He never admitted that, however. There were rumors. Lots of rumors. One night when I casually mentioned them, Pat slapped my face. He was very touchy. He didn’t deny the rumors, though.”

Both Margaret Lindsay, Pat’s girlfriend, and Ida Lupino, Howard’s former “jailbait” love, were among the few witnesses to the events that led up to the murder of Thelma Todd, aged thirty, on December 16, 1935.

Ida and Margaret, although not privy to the details of the actual murder, may have been the only ones who ever told the truth. All the others intimately involved with Thelma at the time, including both Pat and Howard, lied repeatedly over the years. Howard, in fact, claimed that he was not even in town the night Thelma was murdered. Pat dismissed any suspicion of murder, claiming that Thelma accidentally died of carbon monoxide poisoning when she was found in her car parked in a closed garage behind her restaurant.

Despite a “delirious” deathbed confession by Roland West that he murdered Thelma, the truth may never be known. In lieu of that, rumors—some of them quite well-informed—and speculation remain about exactly what happened to Howard’s “Hot Toddy.”

Margaret Lindsay recalled the final night of Thelma’s life, at least from her long-distance perspective. “The details of that night are absolutely baroque, with everybody playing dangerous games. Perhaps my role was that of the pawn who made Thelma jealous.”

The night began with a party at the Trocadero that the Lupino family was throwing in Thelma’s honor. Ida’s father, Stanley, remembered Thelma fondly for her role in some comedy, *You Made Me Love You*, three years previously, and for the kindness she’d extended frequently to his daughter.

This was Stanley’s first trip to California since then. To his party, he’d invited some important guests, including Sid Grauman, the owner of Grauman’s Chinese Theater.

“Stanley Lupino’s wife, Constance, was also there,” Margaret claimed. “Unknown to me, Pat DeCicco had also been invited to the Lupino party. I learned about that later. Earlier, he had called Ida and told her that he had a cold and couldn’t make it to the party. It all seemed so dumb. Having made such an excuse, how did he dare walk into the same club where the Lupino party was being held? He had to know he’d be spotted by both Ida and Thelma. Something else had to be going on. Perhaps he was ordered to the club on some last-minute mission. After all, he was on Lucky Luciano’s payroll at the time. I’ll never know the full truth.”

“Years later, I learned that Ida herself was having an affair with Pat on the side,” Margaret said. “She was only a baby at the time. Pat had met her when she was Hughes’s underaged girlfriend. To make matters even more complicated, it seemed that Pat had called Thelma that night, claiming he was back from New York and wanted to get back with her—that he was still in love with her. Of course, I suspect what he really wanted was to take over her sidewalk café and turn it into a nest for that gangster, Lucky. I don’t think he ever loved Thelma.”

“At the time he started dating me, his divorce from Thelma had only recently come through,” Margaret said. “I learned many of the details of that fatal night only later. The plan was, so I gathered, that Pat would break our date early and meet secretly with Thelma to work out a possible reconciliation. I truly don’t know how he planned to do that when Thelma was sleeping with each of his bosses: Howard Hughes and Lucky Luciano. But Pat was one

crazy, mixed up guy. Always scheming.”

Before appearing at the party, Thelma spent a long time in her dressing room, according to the later testimony of her maid. With her heavy use of drugs and alcohol, it was taking her longer and longer to turn herself into the ravishing “Ice Cream Blonde,” as the fan magazines called her. “Warpainting” her face in heavy makeup, she put on a shimmering blue gown trimmed in lace and sequins, and “fairy slippers.” Around her shoulders she tossed a fabulous brown mink coat to ward off a chilly California night. She also put on nearly \$25,000 worth of jewelry—mostly diamonds and gold—including a sardonyx ring Pat had presented to her during their brief engagement.

Years later, Ida herself recalled her last encounter with Thelma. “She was receiving death threats, although I didn’t know about it at the time. But when we went together to the ladies room, she was all giggly and girly. She told me she was ‘having the greatest romance of her life.’ I knew she meant Howard Hughes. But, knowing about our past involvement, she told me that the man in question was a very rich businessman. Instead of saying he was from Houston—too obvious—she lied to me and told me he was from San Francisco. I knew better, of course. I pretended to be happy for her, but I was as jealous as hell.”

“She also told me that Pat DeCicco wanted to come back into her life,” Ida claimed. “That startled me because I was also seeing Pat on the side. To make both Thelma and me jealous, Pat had arrived at the café with Margaret Lindsay, but they refused to join our table. Frankly, I didn’t know how the evening was going to play out. All I know is that Thelma was going to meet Pat at midnight after he sent Margaret home in a taxi. Not only that, but she also had a date with her so-called ‘San Francisco businessman’ at two o’clock that morning. Such a late hour was not unusual for Howard. He often had his most intense dates at two or three o’clock in the morning in those days. He told me that there weren’t too many spies around at that time. I reminded him that the night has a thousand eyes.”

“Thelma had a lot on her plate,” Ida recalled. “I happen to know that she was also having an affair with one of the guests at father’s party, Harvey Priester. I don’t know how she juggled all those men and Lucky Luciano, too.”

While dancing around the floor with Sid Grauman, Thelma spotted Pat DeCicco and Margaret Lindsay at a table. Breaking from Sid, she walked over to confront her former husband. “On the surface, she was very polite, but the tension in the air could be cut with a fork,” Margaret said. “Thelma was very nice to me. With complete insincerity, she suggested we might make a film together one day. She seemed to send some sort of facial signal to Pat. Later I found out that he planned to dump me around midnight and run off with her. To complicate matters, Thelma was officially stationed at the Lupino family table with a guy named Harvey Priester. I guess she planned to dump that lover too. As Thelma left our table, Pat said, ‘I’ll see you real soon.’ He *really* meant that!”

“After Thelma left,” Margaret said, “I had lost Pat as my date for the evening. All he did was sit and stare at Ida or Thelma, especially when either of them was dancing with some guy. Thelma got real drunk on champagne and was making a play for every handsome man at the Trocadero. The jealous eyes of Roland West were following her every move. He looked like he could kill her.”

“Pat, as I mentioned, was going to cut short our date at midnight and send me home in a taxi,” Margaret recalled. “But at 12:15 we were still at table. I remember the time because I looked at my watch when he abruptly got up and said he had to make some urgent phone call. He was gone for about ten minutes. When he returned to table, he was very edgy and short-tempered. He demanded that we leave the club at once. He said he had an urgent business meeting and would call me tomorrow. All my life I’ve speculated that Pat’s mystery call was placed to Lucky Luciano. For all I know, they ironed out the details of how Thelma was going to be murdered later in the night by some hit man.”

Margaret left the club shortly before one o’clock, taking a taxi. After seeing her off, Pat called for his own car. Sid Grauman, who’d been dancing with Thelma that evening, said he escorted her to the front of the club where she told him that a car was waiting. “I kissed Thelma good night, and she raced toward a car parked slightly beyond the entrance, near a palm tree,” Grauman claimed. “The car was in a night shadow, but it looked like a man behind the wheel. Thelma got in and they drove off to God knows where. That was the last time I saw her alive.”

Grauman recalled that he asked the valet who’d retrieved the car, “Who’s the mystery man taking Thelma off at this hour?”

“That’s Pat DeCicco,” the young valet said, holding up a five-dollar bill. “Best tipper at the Troc.”

The plot thickens.

Except for the sighting by Sid Grauman, Thelma was never seen with Pat again. However, after Thelma’s murder, three witnesses came forward to claim that she was seen being driven around Los Angeles in the early hours of Sunday morning with none other than Howard Hughes.

It can be presumed that Pat and Thelma engaged in mutual recriminations about their divorce. Following what was probably a bitter argument, considering their hot tempers, it is also presumed that he drove her to Muirfield for a carefully arranged rendezvous with Howard. A round of sex might have been involved. An autopsy on Thelma’s body revealed that she had indeed engaged in sex that night “with an unknown party or parties.” That crucial piece of evidence was later suppressed by the crooked district attorney, Buron Fitts.

The first witness was a florist who’d emigrated to Los Angeles from Calabria in Italy ten years before. He said that Hughes and Thelma Todd, both of whom he’d recognized from photographs he’d seen of them previously, came into his all-night shop and bought an orchid corsage for her. Her previous corsage had wilted.

A “soda jerk” at an all-night drugstore reported that Thelma and Howard entered the shop and took stools at the counter where each of them ordered a banana split. Finally, a gasoline attendant reported having spotted them when Howard stopped to refill his tank. The estimated time was around four o’clock that Sunday morning. “The man was definitely Howard Hughes,” the young attendant said. “And I know it was Thelma Todd. I was one of her biggest fans.”

Noah Dietrich, late in his life, stated that Howard told him that he’d been driving Thelma around Los Angeles on the night of her murder. Why he was driving her around has never been determined. Apparently, she’d told him that she was expected at yet another pre-dawn meeting that night, this one with Lucky Luciano, and one didn’t stand up that gangster when he requested a face-to-face.

To get back at Lucky, and fearing for her own life, she’d recklessly gone to the FBI to report everything she knew about Luciano’s operations on the West Coast, including gambling, drugs, and prostitution. Apparently, she gave agents a rundown on the gangster’s infiltration of several Hollywood nightclubs, and his attempt to take over her own café. She also told what she knew about drug peddling within the Hollywood studios, including MGM, where Luciano’s boys were supplying drugs to some of the top stars in Hollywood. She also confessed that Luciano had gotten her “hooked on drugs” and that she’d become an addict.

Howard later told Dietrich that he warned Thelma, “You know what Lucky Luciano does with singing canaries?”

Unknown to Thelma and unknown to most of the FBI, Luciano had planted a “mole” within the FBI’s Los Angeles headquarters, who kept him abreast of any informant who came forward.

To make a mysterious night even more mysterious, other witnesses in the wake of Thelma’s death came forward to report that she was seen in yet another car with a different man that early Sunday morning in Los Angeles.

This “other man” was described as “foreign looking” with a dark complexion. Various witnesses estimated his age as in his early to mid-forties. Luciano at the time was forty-two years old. He was said to be wearing a dark overcoat and a fedora.

From all reports, Luciano had demanded that Thelma meet with him for “a final showdown.” He was reputed to have driven her to Santa Barbara, a two-hour drive back then, and to have ordered his chauffeur to park along the beach. He’d brought several bottles of champagne with him.

Eventually he drove her back to Los Angeles but bypassed her apartment and headed for downtown Los Angeles instead. WF. Persson, the owner of a local cigar store, reported seeing them around 9 o’clock that Sunday morning. He recognized Thelma but didn’t even look to see who she was with. He claimed that she was hysterical and looked like she’d been crying when she entered his store to make an urgent phone call.

“She used the phone,” Persson said. “I couldn’t hear what she said but I gather that she feared being kidnapped.”

Dietrich claimed that phone call was to Howard. Robert Fisher, a customer in the store, also remembered Thelma entering. “She wasn’t dressed for church but for a Saturday night on the town. She looked like she was coming from some all-night party.”

Apparently, she got no satisfaction from the party she so frantically dialed.

Fisher later claimed that the burly male chauffeur of the car waiting on the curb came into the cigar store and virtually dragged Thelma into the car. Fisher walked out for a final look to see who was in the back seat. “I thought it might be some bigtime movie star like Clark Gable or Gary Cooper. It was some dark man in a black suit,” Fisher recalled. “His hand reached out and just seemed to pull her into the back seat with him. It must have been ten minutes after nine when the car pulled away.”

The next day A.F. Wagner, the medical examiner for the county of Los Angeles, would report that Thelma had died at two o’clock that Sunday morning. Witnesses knew otherwise.

From this point on, the fate of Thelma becomes pure speculation. Presumably Luciano ordered his driver to take Thelma back to her apartment, upstairs from her famous café. Luciano must have told her goodnight, never to see her again.

All the murder buffs and amateur detectives, who have spent years studying the mysterious death of Thelma Todd, have more or less come to the same conclusion. Luciano brought in a hit man from Chicago to murder Thelma for her defiance of him and her going to the FBI.

The attack came as she was staggering toward her apartment. The hit man came out of the shadows and grabbed her, mauling her, choking her, and knocking her out. When her body was discovered, her nose was broken as were two ribs.

Her unconscious body was placed behind the steering wheel of her chocolate-brown 1934 Lincoln Phaeton convertible. She was still alive, or so it is believed, when the gangster left the garage, after starting her ignition, which would fill the garage and the car with poisonous fumes. He closed the door behind him.

It was there at 10:30am on Monday morning that her maid, Mae Whitehead, discovered the body, the corpse bloody and battered.

Pat DeCicco is believed to have called Howard with news of Thelma’s death. Howard was later to confide to Dietrich that he suspected that his friend—Thelma’s former husband—was “somehow involved” in her murder. But that day Howard had other more urgent business. “There was no way in hell that Howard wanted to connect himself with Thelma in the hours leading up to her murder,” Dietrich said.

Howard immediately swung into action. Dietrich denied any involvement on his part, later claiming “I was not part of any cover-up.” Somehow those witnesses who’d seen Howard and Thelma together suddenly didn’t remember or weren’t sure. All three of them denied accepting a bribe for their silence. But when called in by the police, each of them recanted their former testimony.

According to widely circulated gossip and speculation that month, Howard paid fifty thousand dollars to Buron Fitts, the most notorious and crooked district attorney in the history of Los Angeles County. His name would be linked to various film colony “suicides” or else out-and-out murders, each of which would go unsolved. Neither Howard nor Pat was ever called to testify before the Grand Jury, which was completely in Fitts’s pocket anyway. The Thelma Todd cover-up would haunt Fitts for the rest of his life, right up until March 29, 1973, when he killed himself with a .38 caliber pistol at the age of 78.

All the evidence presented to the Grand Jury was either contradictory or perjured. Their final verdict was “Death due to carbon monoxide poisoning.”

In her will, Thelma left Pat one dollar. Three pieces of jewelry, in diamonds and gold, given to her by Howard, disappeared shortly after her death. No one knows how they were stolen. No link to Howard was ever proven.

Pat DeCicco continued as Howard’s “best pal.” When he wasn’t with Howard, he began to move into the “fast lane,” spending his nights carousing and drinking heavily with Errol Flynn and the always inebriated John Barrymore.

Pat kept urging Howard to join him for one of his all-night orgies with Errol, who kept expressing a desire “to meet this tall Texan, this Mr. Hughes.” Howard kept turning down those invitations from Pat.

Howard’s sometimes lover, Cary Grant, kept urging him into “the perfect relationship” with Katharine Hepburn. Howard claimed, “I don’t think Miss Hepburn is very interested in me. Too many girlfriends.”

What Howard didn’t tell Pat or his cousin, Cubby Broccoli, or even Dietrich himself, was that he’d become mesmerized by a very handsome young actor.

Richard Cromwell.

His youthful looks fading, John Darrow was no longer the blond-haired Adonis he was in *Hell’s Angels*. In 1935 he played a minor role in *Annapolis Farewell*, directed by Alexander Hall. During the filming, he’d met and had an affair with one of the other actors, a young, good-looking stud named Richard Cromwell. Knowing of John’s link to Howard, Richard urged John for an introduction.

When John mentioned it to Howard, he found that the billionaire was eager to meet Richard. As he would continue to do throughout the rest of his life, Howard screened all the major films, and many minor ones, usually during the dawn hours. He was already familiar with the image and reputation

of the boyishly handsome Richard Cromwell.

Howard had been impressed with Richard's appearance when he'd won the coveted role of the kid brother who brings the mail in on time in *Tol'able David* in 1930. After that, Richard was cast in other "sensitive" teenager roles, including the 1933 *This Day and Age*, directed by Cecil B. DeMille himself.

Richard was at the peak of his fame in the mid-1930s when he was brought to Muirfield by John Darrow to meet Howard. Born Roy Radebaugh in Los Angeles in 1910, he was five years younger than Howard.

Richard was obviously impressed with Howard's money and power, although John later claimed that "there was also a powerful sexual attraction between the two of them."

In later years, after his career as an actor had faded, John became a Hollywood agent of the notorious casting couch variety when it came to auditioning handsome young actors. When he was sure that he was speaking off the record, John revealed a genuinely bitchy streak when commenting on his fellow agents or some of the closeted stars of Hollywood's Golden Age. He would even publicly denounce his long time companion, the director Charles Walters, as a "God damn faggot idiot," or "a second rate Vincente Minnelli."

In later years, John recalled that Richard suffered throughout his life from having been a charity case when he was growing up. "He carried that scar with him. For the few brief months that he was the lover of Howard Hughes, he felt empowered. For the first time, he could order anything he wanted in a restaurant. Charge expensive clothing in a fancy men's store in Beverly Hills. Be taken out for ocean voyages on one of the greatest yachts in the world where he'd sleep in the master bedroom of 'the richest man on the planet'—and a good looking one at that. Be flown in a private plane to San Francisco where he'd stay in a lavish suite and accept presents of jewelry. Howard courted Richard as if he were a girl—that's the only way Howard knew how to do it. In Richard's case, Howard's seduction technique worked beautifully."

In Richard, Howard found a man who was "eternally young," but also witty and charming. In some ways, he evoked a young Michael J. Fox. Importantly, Richard had a sense of humor, and he could make Howard laugh.

The first night Howard dated Richard, and looked into his beautiful green eyes, the young actor confided to him that instead of working in films, he'd originally dreamed of becoming an artist and decorator. He also wanted to make ceramics. In fact, he'd started out in Hollywood by creating mask likenesses of celebrities. He knew all the bigtime stars, especially the fading ones such as Gloria Swanson and Norma Talmadge.

He proudly told Howard that both Marie Dressler and Joan Crawford had purchased paintings from him. "At least you've cornered the lesbian market," Howard said. He was still smarting from Crawford's rejection of him.

Midway through a dinner at the Brown Derby, Howard became uncomfortable when Richard, for no apparent reason, burst into tears. As it turned out, Richard was very upset over what the fan magazines had been saying about him.

From the very beginning of his career, the magazines had seemed to question his masculinity. In fact, *Photoplay* had virtually "outed" him (to use a modern-day term) in 1931. The interviewer had written about the "blushes" in Richard's "pink cheeks" and how tears flooded his eyes even when he gazed upon some pretty flowers. "He cried when he thought he'd done something clumsy," the writer said. "He cried when the studio people were kind to him. He cried during the big emotional scene in *Tol'able David*. And lo, and behold, he is a great 'emotional actor.'"

Silver Screen writer Virginia Downs had pointedly asked Richard in an interview, "Are you a shy guy with a too-tender heart and a bawling tendency?"



Richard Cromwell

In 1932 Richard had posed for a picture in *The Los Angeles Times* with his latest mural in oil. The work depicted a very muscular and erotically posed male nude, his genitals discreetly hidden. Whenever he could manage it, Richard got some of the handsomest young actors in Hollywood to pose nude for him.

During the course of his romance with Richard, the bisexual Howard continued to date Ginger Rogers in private, even though she was married to the very handsome Lew Ayres at the time. Their relationship was strictly on her own terms, as he completely failed to dominate her in any way.

"With Richard, and unlike Ginger, it was a completely different story," John later claimed. "Richard was always there for Howard, even at a moment's notice. He was always willing to do Howard's bidding, even if it humiliated him. If Howard wanted his feet massaged or his big toe licked clean, Richard would be at the bottom of the bed servicing his master."

"Howard told me that Richard would do anything in bed," John said. "Some of Howard's future one-night stands, usually low-rent boys, confided to me that Howard was a sadist. I think that was true. That streak of sadism became more evident as Howard aged. I'm only guessing that he didn't pull that crap with women. Only with young men, and only when he was paying for it. Many of the guys I arranged for Howard to seduce told me that they didn't ever want to see him again."

"Although Howard preferred oral seduction—and, baby, I should know—he was also a top," John claimed. "When he learned that Richard found anal

intercourse painful, guess what? Howard insisted on penetrating poor Richard nightly and Howard was overly endowed. Richard confided to me that he was left bleeding on many a night.”

As happened to all of Howard’s partners, both male and female, Richard learned one night that Howard was kicking him out. Since Richard didn’t have a lot of money, Howard gave him ten thousand dollars in cash.

Richard was heartbroken. Only that afternoon, he had told his friend and confidante, the minor Idaho-born actress Clare DuBrey, “I’m going to become the next Mrs. Howard Hughes.”

“He nearly committed suicide the night Howard dumped him,” John later said. “I may have saved that girl’s life. She could carry on so—how she could bawl. The price one paid for getting mixed up with Howard Hughes!”

John said that he managed to stay in Howard’s life for a few more years by arranging “tasty morsels” like Richard for him to seduce. “First, Howard dumped me as his lover when I lost my youthful glow. Then I became his pimp. Know what? Eventually the bastard even dumped me as a pimp when he met a guy who could do it better. The creep who replaced me obviously had a better stable of boys. It was Henry Willson, the most vicious queen who ever set foot in Hollywood.”

During Richard’s cinematic heyday, movie magazines frequently compared him to Errol Flynn. One fan magazine wrote that, “Errol Flynn is the real thing, Richard Cromwell merely the mock.” Of course, the comparison was farfetched. There was no way that Richard Cromwell resembled Errol Flynn in any way except male beauty. Otherwise, they were completely different types.

“Perhaps Howard got tired of mock turtle soup and wanted the real thing,” John said rather sarcastically. “If you’re Howard Hughes and you desire only the very best—in this case, Flynn himself—you can go and get the real prize.”

The agent noted that by the early 1940s, women started turning down Howard. “But in his heyday in the mid-Thirties, he was rich and soon to become a national hero,” John said. “All the young, aspirant actors he desired accepted his offers to come to his bed. Of course, his rent boys were always eager for one of his hundred-dollar bills. Most of them were giving it away at the time for ten bucks. The gals paraded in and out of Howard’s bedroom as well—except one. Miss Crawford herself. I always found that puzzling, since she fucked everybody else in Hollywood, including both Clark Gable and Barbara Stanwyck. Only Marlene Dietrich had more conquests.”

In 1945, Richard Cromwell married the nineteen-year-old actress Angela Lansbury, a relationship that lasted for only nine troubled months. It appears that Angela was unaware that Richard was marrying her in an attempt to go straight. There is no evidence that she knew of his previous entanglement with Howard.

According to Hollywood gossip, Angela came home and found her husband in the arms of another man. (It wasn’t Howard.) Angela’s only comment, and that came years later, was, “I didn’t know until we were separated that he was gay.”

It took nearly half a century for the world to learn the secret of Angela’s first marriage. A supermarket tabloid on its frontpage blared the news: ANGELA LANSBURY’S GAY HUSBAND REVEALED: TRAGIC SECRET OF *MURDER, SHE WROTE* STAR’S FIRST MARRIAGE.

After an encounter between John Darrow and Howard in 1945, John claimed that Howard spoke briefly of Richard’s marriage to Angela Lansbury. Howard was familiar with the actress, having seen her in a film, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, based on the Oscar Wilde tale.

“She’s welcome to him,” Howard told John. “But I don’t know what use he’ll be to her.”

Also in 1945, with his career on the skids, Richard called Howard and wrote him repeated letters, asking for his help to get his career jump-started. He also asked Howard if he’d agree to put up the money for an art gallery he wanted to open in Beverly Hills.

When Noah Dietrich asked Howard what he wanted him to do with the letters, Howard said, “Burn them!”

Burbank, California, and Newark, New Jersey, 1936

The morning of January 13 dawned bright and clear over Southern California, as Howard sat at his lunch talking business with Noah Dietrich. Wearing sneakers, and dressed in a Palm Beach suit, Howard was halfway through a grilled cheese sandwich when a phone call came in from Glenn Odekirk. Howard was informed that weather conditions across the North American continent were ideal for him to attempt to break the transcontinental record.

On the road, and driving dangerously, with Dietrich pleading for his life, Howard raced across Laurel Canyon Boulevard and headed into the San Fernando Valley, where a slight chill still lingered at noonday.

Arriving at the Union Air Terminal at Burbank, Howard shook the hands of each of his mechanics—something he rarely did as he was germ-obsessed—and embraced Glenn. His number one man told him that Jackie Cochran’s much modified Northrop Gamma was loaded with an astonishing 700 gallons of gasoline. Up until then, pilots flying transcontinental had to stop in the Middle West for refueling.

In his haste to get into the cockpit, Howard didn’t bother to change his dress clothes. He put on a brown leather flight jacket Glenn held out to him and donned his time-worn goggles and a leather helmet. Once in the cockpit, he put on an oxygen mask and checked his controls for an immediate takeoff. As his ground crew waved him on a *bon voyage*, Howard looked at the time. It was 12:05 in the afternoon as his fuel-laden plane became airborne over the skies of Los Angeles.

He was ascending to the heavens. No more than three minutes into the flight he realized he’d lost radio contact. His antenna must have snapped off during an otherwise smooth takeoff. At this point in the flight, it would have been easy to turn back, land at Burbank, have his antenna repaired, and then take off again.

Instead, he made a reckless decision. He would fly the Gamma across the continent without radio contact. Boldly, even foolishly, he disappeared into the clouds with an entire continent to cross.

He rose to a cruising altitude of 15,000 feet, which gave him an idea for one of his later achievements in aviation in the months ahead. He’d design and perfect an oxygen feeder system to enhance aviator safety on very high altitude flights.

For more than two hours, he couldn’t see the ground as he encountered thick clouds “like rotting buttermilk.” He was flying in the direction of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

In a very rough way he was able to estimate his location until he encountered gusty winds north of Wichita, Kansas. There the wind blasts somehow caused the needle of his compass to go off register.

Once again and in a feat of recklessness, he made a decision not to seek a local airport and come in for an emergency landing. He took out a map and placed it across his knees, as he continued eastward on his history-making flight.

He was forced to rely on the moon and the stars for celestial navigation, for which he’d trained himself in case of such an emergency. He spotted what he believed was Columbus, Ohio, and later determined accurately that he was flying over the city of Pittsburgh which appeared below him off his port wing.

As the dark airport at Newark came into view, he realized he’d have to land the Gamma without contact with the tower. His only hope was that there were no other planes in the air at this time of the early morning.

Unlike the mobs waiting to greet Charles Lindbergh in Paris, there was no one on the ground to greet him but a timekeeper, who recorded the details of his epic landing.

He landed his plane at 12:42am, only nine hours, twenty-seven minutes, and ten seconds after becoming airborne over Burbank. Without radio contact or properly functioning navigational equipment, he’d set a new transcontinental record, shaving thirty-six minutes off Colonel Roscoe Turner’s time, by flying an average speed of 259.1 miles per hour. But the stunt pilot had stopped on the way to refuel.

Instead of celebrating his heroic achievement, Howard emerged from his cockpit cursing, the timekeeper later told reporters. “God damn it! God damn it! I’m mad as hell!” Those were Howard’s angry words as remembered the next morning by the timekeeper.

By dawn reporters for the New York papers had heard of Howard’s flight and wanted interviews. In front of newsmen during the days that followed, Howard played down his achievement, telling a reporter for the Associated Press, “I wanted to go to New York anyway, so I tried to see how fast I could get there.” He modestly reported, “I just sat in the cockpit. The plane did all the work.”

He predicted to newsmen that in the near future, regular airlines would be flying transcontinental in just ten hours from New York to Los Angeles. He even predicted that aircraft would soon be flying at an altitude of thirty-thousand feet.

“Do you think you’ll see God if you fly that high?” one reporter asked.

Howard frowned, at first thinking the reporter was suggesting that 30,000 feet would be a suicide mission. “I’m sure of it!” he finally answered.

Exhausted from his transcontinental ordeal, Howard checked into Manhattan’s Drake Hotel just before three o’clock in the morning after his landing at Newark. The desk clerk startled him by informing him, “Mrs. Hughes is here.”

Howard’s reaction is not known. He might have suspected that the clerk was making some insulting homophobic remark, because Howard had already sent Richard Cromwell across the United States by train. The handsome and boyish actor was waiting for him upstairs in his suite.

“Exactly what do you mean?” Howard demanded to know.

“Your wife, sir,” the clerk said. “Mrs. Ella Rice Hughes. She’s in suite eleven. Do you want me to have your luggage sent there?”

“No,” he finally said. “I don’t want to wake her. I’ve booked a separate suite.” Requesting a notepad, he hastily scribbled a note for her to meet him at eight o’clock that morning in the hotel dining room for breakfast.

The story about the clerk and what later happened at the Drake Hotel was related by Richard Cromwell to both John Darrow and Claire DuBrey.

When Howard came into his suite, Richard rushed into his arms. According to Richard’s later reports, Howard resisted his advances. “I’ve got to take a bath,” Howard told his lover. “I must smell like a skunk.”

“I like it when you smell like that,” Richard said. “The sex is better that way, more exciting. It’s like being raped by a beast.”

New York City, 1936

The next morning, Dietrich called Howard’s suite at the Drake Hotel. The woman whose plane he’d flown, Jackie Cochran, had told the press, “I’m happy for Howard but my heart is broken. I wanted to fly my own plane and break that record myself. It’s a man’s world. Howard had the money and I had the plane. As I’ve said, I’m happy for him.” In an uncharacteristic moment, this brave woman then broke into sobs.

“And you woke me up to tell me this,” an angry Howard told Dietrich before slamming down the phone. He turned over in bed and bit into Richard’s neck so hard he drew blood. The masochistic actor had known in advance what was coming. As he related to Claire DuBrey upon his return to Los Angeles, “I think Howard learned his seduction techniques by watching roosters in the barnyard.”

Howard had to get up anyway to meet his divorced wife Ella, who had agreed to the 8am breakfast meeting. According to an eyewitness reporter, Parley Cooper, who once worked for a newspaper, *The Brooklyn Eagle*, “She appeared in the dining room looking gorgeous. If I had been Hughes, I would never have divorced her in the first place. I was at the hotel that morning wanting some quotes from Hughes about his flight. I’d approached him earlier. He told me that if I would not mention his being with his former wife at breakfast, he’d give me a quote or two after they’d had breakfast. I agreed to that. I only wish I could have eavesdropped on their conversation.”

Later, Howard was very vague on the details of that early morning meeting. Back in Los Angeles, he spoke to Dietrich about it and apparently to no one else, unless it was Cary Grant to whom he was confiding almost everything, including details about his indiscretions with other men. Billy Haines, who saw Howard upon his return, said he didn’t recall his friend mentioning such an unusual encounter. “Something like that I wouldn’t have forgotten,” Billy claimed.

At the Drake, Howard encountered a more mature and sophisticated Ella Rice. She had lost none of her original beauty in the wake of her sterile marriage to him.

She later confided to friends, including her paramour, James Overton Winston, that she fully expected the breakfast to be a business meeting about alimony payments. She feared that Howard would be asking for additional extensions in his payments. He didn’t. Instead, he impulsively proposed that they get remarried.

She later told her sister, Libby Rice Farish, “He held out every promise in the world to me. He even, if you can believe this, promised to be the ideal husband, forsaking all others for me. He said it’d all be different if I gave him another chance. Of course, I turned him down. But ever so gently.” To Libby this was a triumph for Ella and a humiliation for Howard. Violating her sister’s confidence, Libby told the story to all of Houston society.

The elegant socialite seated across from Howard at the Drake Hotel had virtually reinvented herself after her disastrous marriage. She'd become a world traveler and a leader in Houston society. What she didn't tell Howard that morning was that her true love, James Overton Winston, was waiting for her in her suite upstairs.

Nearly sixty years after that fateful breakfast, Winston himself spoke publicly for the first time about his ordeal. "Ella was gone for no more than an hour from our suite. It was the longest hour of my life. I'd begged her to turn down Howard's invitation, but she said it was only fair that she hear what he had to say. She thought the talk would be about money. I suspected something was up. When Ella returned to our suite, she confirmed that Hughes had asked her to remarry him and that she'd turned down his proposal. I ran to her and took her in my arms. Although it wasn't a very manly thing to do, I burst into sobs. Ella said she wanted me for a husband—not Hughes. She also told me that I was the only man she'd ever loved. Hughes was a total asshole to let a woman as grand as Ella go."

After a few days shackled up in New York with Richard, Howard grew bored and sent him packing on a train back to Los Angeles. Howard felt tired and wanted a winter vacation, hoping to go swimming and to soak up some sun. "I'm looking too pale in January," he said. "He also ordered Glenn Odekirk to fly the high-powered Northrop Gamma to Miami. After his rest, Howard planned to break another aviation speed record by flying the craft from Miami back to New York.

Before leaving for Miami, Howard sent a bizarre message to Dietrich. At that time the Hughes Aircraft Company had some fifty-five employees. More than a dozen of them were aviation engineers. Howard told Dietrich that in the future all his male employees would have to submit to being photographed in the nude. Howard cited some vague "security reasons" for making this request. Dietrich at once suspected his motives, having noted that Howard's male workers were getting more and more handsome—"some of them movie star material."

"When he wasn't dating Cary Grant or Richard Cromwell, Howard was growing fonder and fonder of mechanics," Billy Haines claimed. "Especially if they had grease under their fingernails. I guess he didn't want to waste time by auditioning men he wasn't attracted to when the guys took off their pants."

Finding the order repulsive and awkward to manifest, Dietrich nonetheless did his master's bidding. "With very few exceptions, the men agreed to it. I turned the naked photographs over to Howard for him to study in his library at Muirfield."

Dietrich wasn't the only man Howard called in Los Angeles. Another surprising call came in to the home of Howard Hawks. "At first," Hawks later revealed, "I thought Howard was going back into the movie business. I knew he was impressed with my work on *Scarface*. Actually, as it turned out, Howard had a most unusual request. During my long career in Hollywood, I've been asked to do almost everything. But pimp for Howard Hughes! I later learned that Bogie himself had done a little bit of that. I know that Billy Haines had. I went along with his request and conveyed to Tyrone Power an invitation: Howard wanted to fly him down to Miami for an all-expense-paid vacation between pictures."

Miami, 1936

When Tyrone Power accepted Howard's unexpected invitation to come to Miami, he was just on the "dawn's early light" of a glorious career that would make him one of the great swashbuckling stars of the mid-20th Century. The Ohio-born actor, a closeted bisexual, was also involved in a torrid affair with Loretta Young at the time. She would become his frequent co-star when she wasn't sleeping with either Spencer Tracy or Clark Gable.

Arriving in Miami, Tyrone appeared like a sun-bronzed god to Howard. Howard later told Billy Haines that "Tyrone is just too good looking to be true." Or, as a fan magazine put it, "Tyrone Power is actually as good looking as Robert Taylor is supposed to be."

As Howard was soon to learn, Tyrone was the fourth in a famous acting dynasty stretching back to the 18th century. Although not personally charming himself, Howard was quick to recognize the trait in other men. As he was driving Tyrone to their suite on Miami Beach, he commented on the actor's bright smile, flashing white teeth, good looks, and overall charm. "I don't know about my looks and all that, but the secret of charm is bullshit," Tyrone said. "Howard thought that over and said, 'My God, I think you're right. You and I are going to hit it off.'"

The early relationship and interchange between Howard and Tyrone would have been lost to Hollywood history were it not for a character actor, Monty Woolley, who was also breaking into films that same year.



Tyrone Power, Loretta Young, Howard Hawks

A notorious homosexual, Monty was also the best friend of Cole Porter. He'd met and "fallen in love with the dear boy" when Tyrone and he had appeared together, along with Loretta Young, in *Ladies in Love* for Twentieth Century Fox. Monty quickly became a confidant of Tyrone's, and seemed to pump indiscreet information from the young actor. "The juicier the details, the better for me," Monty said. "I need stories to dine out on."

On the trip to Miami Beach, Howard—or at least Howard "according to Monty" - asked Tyrone how his love life with Loretta Young was going. Apparently, Tyrone did not answer directly. "Marlene Dietrich, or so I'm told, said that every time Loretta sins, she builds a church. That's why there

are so many Catholic churches in Hollywood.” Howard found that amusing, as Loretta was definitely not his type.



Errol Flynn

Having seduced Robert Taylor frequently, Howard was anxious to add Tyrone to his belt, at least according to Howard Hawks, who arranged the off-the-record rendezvous.

Even while he was still a bit player at Twentieth Century Fox, Tyrone had been the subject of several stories in fan magazines, the pulp writers predicting that this beautiful young man was in a neck-to-neck race with another male beauty, Robert Taylor, the “heartthrob” over at MGM. Occasionally, one or another of the magazines gave Errol Flynn the edge. Howard, as he privately confessed to Billy Haines, was anxious to audition all three of these young blades before forming his own judgment.

Howard and Tyrone individually would enjoy affairs with both Robert Taylor and Errol Flynn. Tyrone’s explanation? “I wanted to see close-up how my competition stacks up.”

“The dirty deed,” as Tyrone later reported to Monty, occurred on the night of his arrival on Miami Beach, just prior to his departure with Howard aboard the *Southern Cross* for Nassau.

From all reports, Howard was sometimes a bit shy in his first attempts at seduction of handsome young men, unless he’d paid them. He had no embarrassment about commanding hustlers to do his bidding. But he treated Tyrone with far greater courtesy and sensitivity. It began with a candlelight dinner of champagne and caviar for Tyrone, although Howard preferred a simple steak. Tyrone remembered that Howard did consume two glasses of champagne, however.

As a lover, Howard didn’t know what to expect from Tyrone. He had a strong masculine appeal, and perhaps Howard anticipated an aggressive, lusty lover. What he got that night was what gay men today refer to as a “dominant bottom.”

Before midnight, Howard learned more about Tyrone, who wanted to be deeply penetrated. Again and again. It must have been a very tired Howard who assumed command of the *Southern Cross* the following morning.

“The boy is oversexed,” Howard told Billy Haines back in Los Angeles. Upon Tyrone’s return to California, he was “de-briefed” by Monty, who wanted to learn “each and every sordid detail” about his friend’s lovemaking with Howard.

“I think Ty made Hughes feel more like a man than any woman ever had,” Monty claimed. “Many of Ty’s male lovers have told me the same story. He whispers incredible flattery into the ear of his top. That gorgeous hunk is an incredible aphrodisiac to a gay male, particularly an insecure one. The poor boy told me that Hughes ‘ate me alive.’”

As proof of Howard’s attraction to Tyrone, he began to shower the actor with gifts upon his return to Hollywood. “I know for a fact that Hughes paid a lot of Tyrone’s bills in the early Thirties,” Monty claimed. “He even bought him a car and a new wardrobe.”

In the following year, Tyrone became a big star, and Darryl F. Zanuck’s favorite boy at Fox, but Howard continued to purchase luxuries for Tyrone, who wasn’t getting rich as a contract player. “Both of those living dolls, Ty and Robert Taylor, depended on Hughes’s largesse for quite a while,” Monty said. “Mr. Moneybags of Texas could afford it.”



Tyrone Power

Unlike Robert Taylor, who desperately wanted to appear macho at all times to compensate for his pretty boy reputation, Tyrone was more connected to his feminine side. In protected company, he could even cry freely and express his humiliations and disappointments. “Although there wasn’t that great a difference in their ages,” Monty said, “Ty looked upon Hughes as a powerful father figure.”

Howard never delivered on any of his promises about making Tyrone a great movie star. Zanuck and Tyrone himself would take care of that. At the beginning of his affair with Howard, Tyrone was earning only one hundred dollars a week. In contrast, the studio’s big money earner, Shirley Temple, was pulling in an annual salary of \$300,000. Despite his physical beauty, life was not easy for Tyrone. When he was cast as a newspaperman in the film, *Sing, Baby, Sing*. Sidney Lanfield, the director, denounced him on the first day of the shoot in front of cast and crew. “You’re too much of a pretty boy—too soft like a woman. Your gestures are those of a gal, not a hardbitten reporter. The trouble with you, Power, is you have no balls to clank!”



Robert Taylor

Monty, who was seeing a lot of Tyrone at the time, claimed that his young friend was so devastated by Lanfield’s denunciation that he seriously contemplated suicide. Alice Faye, the reigning queen of the lot, heard of the director’s cruel treatment of the aspirant young actor. She invited him to the Tropics Restaurant in Beverly Hills where all the stars went to dine and get photographed with their dates or escorts for the evening. She assured Tyrone that he had the looks and talent to make it as a big star. “I have faith in you,” Alice told him. She was right. He became the biggest male star on the lot, often appearing at Fox with Alice herself, especially in two hits, *In Old Chicago* and *Alexander’s Ragtime Band*, both films released in 1938. Did they have an affair as was rumored? Years later, Alice denied they had, although admitting that when he kissed her on camera, “I immediately ascended to the heavens, upper balcony seats only. But Loretta got him. I didn’t. First, he never asked me, and second, he liked boys too much.” In later years, after Howard had broken off his sexual relationship with Tyrone, but not his friendship, his spies kept him informed of Tyrone’s bisexual string of seductions. Howard was especially interested in big names the actor had seduced. “He succeeded in bedding Crawford,” Howard told Dietrich, “and I didn’t. Of course, we both shared Marlene. Who hasn’t? Ty did all right for himself with women: Sonja Henie. Judy Garland. Betty Grable. My God, Evita Peron! At least we got to share two girlfriends, Rita Hayworth and Lana Turner. Lana had it bad for him.” As for Tyrone’s ultimate sexual preference, his longtime “trick,” hustler Smitty Hanson, summed it up this way: “Ty was basically gay but liked a girl from time to time, occasionally marrying one.”

Miami and New York, 1936

Late April had come to the Miami airport, a day so hot and muggy it felt like summer. Howard breathed deeply, taking in the faint breezes, blowing across the field before once again climbing into the cockpit of Jackie’s much modified Northrop Gamma. He was out to break another record, this time for a flight from Miami to New York. His departure from Miami went smoothly, and soon he was airborne, anticipating a flight of 1,196 miles. Even before he’d left Florida airspace, Howard began to encounter difficult crosswinds. Once again and rather disturbingly, he lost radio contact, but instead of attempting a landing at some airfield in the Deep South, he opted to continue his flight. At least this time his compass was working. Looking down and guided by a map, he determined accurately—as it turned out—that he was flying over Raleigh, North Carolina. After taking an

airborne piss in a Mason glass jar, he headed toward the air space over Virginia where he planned to enter a “corridor” that would take him into the Northern states.

He later admitted that he thought about landing in Washington, D.C., to demand an audience with President Franklin D. Roosevelt but then he opted against the idea, dismissing it as impractical.

He began to breathe more rapidly as he saw Coney Island in the distance. He was almost there. The weather was chilly, and the amusement park was still in a lingering slumber from winter.

With no mechanical problems but without radio contact, he landed with a thud at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn.

According to his own calculations, later confirmed, he’d set a record Miami/New York flying time of four hours, twenty-one minutes, and thirty-two seconds.

Only a few airport personnel were on hand to greet him. But four hours later at the Drake Hotel, after radio broadcasts had announced his feat, at least a hundred worshipping fans had gathered outside to cheer his accomplishment.

This was hardly the crowd who’d greeted Lindbergh, but it was a signal to the world that in the not-so-distant-future thousands of New Yorkers would be flying in record time to vacation in Miami Beach. America was giving birth to another genuine aviator hero.

While fans massed outside, Howard was taking a much-needed bubble bath, enjoying a good soak for tired bones. As he was later to tell Pat DeCicco, “I have a taste for debutantes, the younger the better, and I want you to arrange something special.” After hanging up on his friend and pimp, Howard called Cary Grant, asking him to come and join him in New York. The actor readily agreed.

While waiting for Cary, Howard was seen about town escorting the beautiful Ruth Moffett, daughter of James Moffett, vice president of Standard Oil of California. That budding debutante was only fifteen years old. Today an older man dating “jail bait” that young might be considered shocking, or even the defendant in a court case involving a child molestation charge. But the mid-Thirties were a different time, even though statutory rape laws were on the books, as Errol Flynn in the years ahead painfully realized.

There were even rumors in the press that “little Miss Moffett” was scheming to marry Howard. After one sail to Long Island aboard the *Southern Cross*, she announced to the press that she was going to redecorate it.

Hoping to escape more press attention, and rather amazingly, Howard appeared at New York restaurants and hot spots in disguise. Having grown a beard, he claimed to be Señor Carlos Gomez, a rich oilman and resident of Mexico City. Columnist Walter Winchell, as well as various headwaiters at exclusive restaurants and nightclubs, quickly saw through the disguise. As one headwaiter quipped, “As long as Hughes paid the bill and tipped me well, I’d pretend he’s Greta Garbo if he wants that.”

When Cary Grant arrived in New York, Howard resumed what would be his on-again, off-again romance with the actor. Cary arrived with a surprise invitation from Randolph Scott, and he and Howard made plans to join the actor in Virginia.

In the meantime, they sought amusements in New York where Cary, as a former resident, knew places Howard had never been. The actor tantalized his lover with a series of nocturnal adventures. It was reported—but never confirmed—that Howard and Cary appeared one night at a notorious male bordello in Harlem which was flourishing at the time and known for its “exhibitions.”

Word of their night in Harlem spread quickly through the grapevine. It was even mentioned in the press, but in the veiled news language of the day. “Cary Grant has been seen in New York with his closest pal, Howard Hughes. The actor and the aviator seemed to have developed an insatiable taste for chocolate, sampling some of New York’s biggest éclairs on a visit to Harlem.”

Virginia, 1936

Having abandoned the foolish notion that Howard would lavish millions on him, and having more or less given up on the idea of a lifetime commitment to Cary Grant, Randolph Scott in a secret ceremony had wed Marion DuPont in Charlotte, North Carolina, on March 23, 1936.

She was not only the heiress to a vast industrial fortune, but a nationally known horsewoman. She lived at Montpelier, an estate in Orange County, Virginia, former home of President James Madison and his wife, Dolly. Cary and Howard had been invited to the Southern estate, where they would spend ten days.



Newlyweds: Randolph Scott and Marion DuPont

It is believed that Howard got to know Cary better during those ten days at Montpelier than at any other period of his life. Up to then, Cary had been an enigma to him in spite of their long hours spent together. Cary was also an enigma to all his friends or lovers, even to Randolph and perhaps even to himself.

The author, Nigel Cawthorne, once wrote: “Nothing about Cary Grant was quite what it seemed. He was not the Ivy League New Englander he appeared to be on-screen, but a working-class boy from Bristol. His name, of course, was not Cary Grant, but Archibald Alexander Leach. He was not a sophisticated, eligible bachelor, as the woman who succumbed to his charms discovered; he would beat, abuse and sometimes injure them; nor was he a heterosexual.”

“And here we are,” Howard said, pulling his car up at the Montpelier estate. In the distance, both men could see Randolph striding forward to greet them.

Neither Howard nor Cary was impressed with Randolph’s new wife, the imperious daughter of William DuPont, the industrialist. The tweedy Miss DuPont walked with a manlike stride, with square shoulders, close cropped black hair, and a face that some acquaintances compared to that of a witch. She was rumored to be a lesbian. Actually the opposite was true. She was a heterosexual nymphomaniac.

When the press learned about the Scott/DuPont marriage, the couple were dubbed “The Beauty and the Beast.” “Horse-faced Scott marries Miss Horsey herself,” quipped Louella Parsons.

At one point, Howard asked Randolph why he’d married Miss DuPont if they weren’t sleeping together. Of course, by this time she’d retired for the evening. “She wanted a beautiful trophy husband,” the actor told Howard, “And she got me. I’m just to be brought out like a show hoss. The marriage has not been consummated. Nor will it ever be!”

After the DuPont heiress had retired for the night, Cary continued to urge Howard to take up with Kate Hepburn. “If you think Randolph here has the perfect setup with Marion, you can have the same with Kate,” Cary said. “It’ll be hailed as the romance of the century, but you can sleep in separate beds.”

“I’ll think it over,” Howard promised. “Speaking of beds, mine is empty tonight. Who’s going to be the lucky guy?”

He smiled invitingly at both Randolph and Cary.

Chicago andBurbank, California, 1936

With Cary Grant safely on the train back to Los Angeles, Howard flew solo to Chicago in Jackie Cochran’s radically altered Northrop Gamma. While ordering his lunch at the airport in Chicago, he encountered a heckler, Robert Jamison, who bet him he couldn’t fly to Los Angeles in time for dinner.

Jamison claimed he’d pay for Howard’s dinner if he’d take the bet. Even though the flight would cost thousands, Howard took the bet, and prepared to leave at once. Facing a distance of some 1,885 miles, he felt time was wasting.

As unbelievable as it sounds, Howard claimed he couldn’t find suitable maps in Chicago. He decided to depart on his hazardous gamble without them. The details of his harrowing flight were later told to Noah Dietrich and Glenn Odekirk.

Three hours and fifteen minutes into the flight, Howard said “the shit hit the fan.” East of Kansas City, he encountered heavy turbulence. Later, to clear the Rockies, he had to climb to 15,000 feet, then 16,000 feet. Still he felt in danger. He then decided to climb to the then-astounding altitude of 20,000 feet. He’d never flown this high before.

At that point, his oxygen equipment broke down, and he feared he’d come down with anoxia. He chose to remain aloft instead of attempting to return closer to earth and seek a spot for an emergency landing. Suddenly, he encountered a fierce thunderstorm. Fighting against sleep, he grew dizzy. He claimed that he kept screaming to stay awake. The plane grew deadly cold. For the dangerous five subsequent hours, he flew bravely as ice formed on his wings.

Amazingly, he made it to California airspace. Only one hundred miles east of Burbank, his oil pump collapsed, and he was forced to operate it

manually for his final descent into his familiar airport. Just fifty miles from the field, his airspeed indicator stopped functioning.

The lights of the city of Los Angeles, a welcome relief, sparkled in the distance. It was at exactly 7:16pm that his Northrop Gamma landed at the Grand Central Air Terminal eight hours, ten minutes, and twenty-five seconds after he became airborne over Chicago. He'd set another world's record, this one from Chicago to Los Angeles.

He'd faced fierce head winds roaring in from the Pacific. "The only god damn thing still working was the engine," he told Glenn once he'd landed. Almost as an afterthought, he added, "As the ace pilot I am, I break flight records like I pierce hymens."

He told reporters, "I've learned more in the past eight hours than I have in a whole decade." During the flight to Burbank he'd proven a theory of his. Flight instruments calibrated at sea level don't work accurately if the pilot flies at high altitudes.

Privately he told Glenn, "I'm through with Jackie's plane. Sell it back to her. I was an idiot not to have put that junkheap down in Kansas City."

He told Glenn that work would begin early tomorrow morning on his *Flying Bullet*. "I'm going to break my own record."

That night, to honor his bet, he had dinner in Los Angeles, ordering a small steak and very small peas, finishing off with a scoop of vanilla ice cream. The total bill came to seventy-eight cents. When he'd finished dinner, he told an astonished waiter, "Send the bill to Robert Jamison in Chicago. I'll give you his address."

Santa Barbara and Los Angeles, 1936

Accompanied by three other pilots, including Daniel Montgomery, Hughes flew to Santa Barbara where Howard and Daniel checked into the same suite at a resort. Howard paid for the rooms of the other two pilots, but they were each assigned much smaller single accommodations on the top floor. He liked the area so much that he ordered that the crew of his yacht, *Southern Cross*, head north to Santa Barbara, where he'd meet them for a few days of sailing.

Daniel was an exceedingly handsome, blond, blue-eyed young man who'd won some sort of swimming championship back in his home state of Indiana. Howard would take up with good-looking men like Daniel, especially if they were pilots or mechanics, and he'd be seen with them for a few days only to grow quickly bored. From all evidence he treated most of his toy boys with far more generosity than he did many of his women companions. Sometimes Howard would bestow as much as ten thousand dollars on one of the men or he'd buy a new car for them. One mechanic claimed that Howard, after spending two weeks with him in Nevada, helped him financially to the point that he was able to open his own service station.

By this time Howard had developed the trait of scanning newspapers and magazines, looking for pictures of beautiful young women. As he and Daniel rested by the pool, a picture of a beautiful local debutante, Nancy Bell Bayly, caught his attention. The twenty-year-old brunette bore a striking resemblance to Ella Rice at the peak of her beauty in Houston.

The following Sunday night at the Montecito Country Club, as Nancy was dancing with her good-looking beau, Ronald Channell, who was still in college, Howard cut in.

Somehow in the days that followed, Howard began a series of dates with Nancy, most of them conducted aboard the *Southern Cross*. Ronald was given an all-expenses-paid trip to Mexico. Nancy later told the press that "Howard was the perfect gentleman. He never even kissed me goodnight, not even a peck on the cheek. We went to the movies twice, and he didn't even hold my hand. In spite of all his money and power, he reminded me of a little lost boy. Women found that quality of vulnerability very appealing."

For Nancy's twenty-first birthday on July 11, 1936, Howard sailed with her to Los Angeles, promising her a lavish evening on the town. Both of them checked into separate suites at the Ambassador Hotel. The night was cloudy with heavy fog rolling off the Pacific. Driving was difficult.

The faux Polynesian restaurant, Trader Vic's, was all the rage at the time, and Howard invited her there to celebrate her birthday. No restaurant décor in Los Angeles was more exotic at the time, with an artificial rain forest inhabited by fake "birds of paradise," along with real orchids and an artificial waterfall. The bartender's specialty, called a "Volcano," was an ice-blue drink heavily laced with rum and six tropical juices, including guava and pomegranate. "We got real tipsy," Nancy later recalled, "after ordering three of them." He purchased her a gardenia lei, which he placed around her neck.

After dinner, he drove her to Muirfield, even though he'd booked hotel suites. She thought that he'd invite her to sleep over. While she waited in the living room, Beatrice Dowler made gin martinis for them. She didn't remember if Howard drank his or not but she poured her martini into a potted plant when Beatrice left the room.

Upstairs in his bedroom, Howard changed his clothes. When he came down, he invited her to go dancing at the Cocoanut Grove, with its *papier-maché* palm trees. Once there, Howard encountered Pat DeCicco, who invited them to join his table. His date for the night was the blonde-haired actress, Joan Blondell, who later admitted that she flirted shamelessly with Howard "but it didn't do me any good."

Growing bored with the Cocoanut Grove, Howard invited Nancy to drive west with him to a popular amusement park at the Santa Monica pier. "I want to ride the roller coaster," he announced. Joan was willing to go but Pat turned down the invitation, preferring the more sophisticated pleasures of the nightclub instead.

It was about 10:47pm when Howard's 1929 Duesenberg approached Third Street and Lorraine. The streetlight had burned out, and the night had grown increasingly foggy. "Suddenly, the lights of a streetcar just seemed to emerge out of nowhere," Nancy later recalled. "Howard swerved quickly to avoid a collision with an oncoming big black car. All I remember was this loud thump like someone had thrown a sack of potatoes onto our hood. I screamed when I realized what must have happened. Howard jumped out of the car. To his horror, he discovered that he'd run over and killed a man. In the newspapers the next morning, I read that his name was Gabe Meyer, and that he was fifty-nine years old and a clerk at May Company Department Store."

At that point Nancy had gotten out of the car too. She helped Howard pull the man's body to the curb. By that time a crowd of nearly fifteen rubberneck-ers had gathered. Most of them were streetcar passengers who'd gotten off at the busy corner of Wilshire and Third. Others were motorists who'd stopped to witness the accident.

"Almost subconsciously I picked up the man's straw hat," Nancy later remembered.

On an impulse, as Nancy later testified, "Howard grabbed me, ripped off my beautiful gardenia lei from Trader Vic's and virtually pushed me onto the next streetcar. 'Get out of here!' he instructed me. 'Go back to the Ambassador. I'll send someone to drive you to Santa Barbara in the morning.' It

was only when I boarded the street trolley and had been sitting there for three minutes in shock did I realize that I still held the straw hat of the dead man in my lap.”

The details of what happened next are completely obscured. Howard placed an emergency call to his attorney, Neil McCarthy, who immediately took over the case. All eyewitness reports were contradictory. One man claimed that Meyer was “falling down drunk” and “staggered into traffic.” another claimed that Howard was speeding. Yet another witness, a housewife, Florence Smuckler, said she knew for a fact he was going at the rate of fifteen miles per hour.

Someone, not Howard, called the police. C.P. Wallace, a Los Angeles policeman, was first at the scene. Howard said he was a businessman from Houston and gave his address as 3921 Yoakum Boulevard.

When a squad car arrived, Howard was taken to the Hollywood Receiving Hospital where, amazingly, he passed a sobriety test. John Yarkin, who admitted Howard, later told the press that, “Hughes was obviously drunk. I wasn’t with him when he was given the sobriety test. There was no way a man in that condition could have passed the test.” But by that time, McCarthy had arrived on the scene, and he, not the police, was conducting the show. At Central Jail in Los Angeles, Howard was booked on a charge of “negligent homicide.”

Through McCarthy, Howard released a statement to the press. “This is my first accident. I’ve been driving since I was twelve years old and I’ve never hit a cat or dog. My father owned the first automobile in the state of Texas and taught me to drive eighteen years ago. I’ve had a perfect record. I’ve never even scratched the paint on my Duesenberg in nearly seven years.” Released from jail on a writ of Habeas Corpus the following morning, Howard still refused to give the name of his fellow passenger. One Los Angeles newspaper ran this headline: MISSING BEAUTY HOLDS KEY TO DEATH.

Surprisingly, Howard still refused to name his passenger. It was only when a reporter tracked down Pat DeCicco later that day that he identified the woman as Nancy Bell Bayly of Santa Barbara. It is not known if his revealing the identity of Howard’s date caused a strain in his relationship with his boss.

Damaging testimony was provided by Walter Scott, a driver for United Parcel Service. He claimed that Gabe Meyer had been standing in the trolley car safety zone. He testified that he saw Howard’s car speeding toward the zone, and that he noted at the time that “the driver was real erratic—I thought it was some drunk at the wheel.”

At the July 15, 1936 coroner’s inquest, Nancy made a stunning appearance. She made eye contact with Howard, who only smiled. No words were exchanged between them. For the occasion, she was chicly dressed in a new black Chanel suit, with a string of white freshwater pearls. She carried a black lizard-skin bag and matching black lizard-skin shoes.

Throughout the inquest, she nervously toyed with a diamond-studded wrist-watch that Howard had presented to her in Santa Barbara. She completely backed up his testimony.

Howard’s biggest break came from Scott, the United Parcel driver. He recanted his previous testimony claiming that “I was mistaken.” In his new version, Meyer was “staggering across the street—obviously drunk when he stepped right in front of the Duesenberg which was traveling at a safe speed.” At the end of the inquest, Howard was found not guilty. He later announced to the press that, “I’ve never been drunk in my life.”

There was speculation that Neil McCarthy had bribed the notorious district attorney of Los Angeles, Buron Fitts, who was always willing to take a payoff whenever a celebrity, usually a movie star, ran into trouble.

Howard learned from Dietrich that the members of Gabe Meyer’s family were “outraged” at the verdict. The victim left behind one brother, Mendel Meyer, along with married sisters Viola Davis, Stella Carlisle, Rose Schiff, and Laura Loewenthal. Howard ordered Dietrich to “send each of the bereaved a check for five thousand in this their time of need.” He never heard from any of the Meyer clan again.

Back in Santa Barbara, Nancy recalled that, “I waited and waited for Howard to call me after the case was settled. He never did. Finally, I made a call to my former beau, Ronald Channell, and he took me back into his good graces. As far as Howard Hughes was concerned, it was CASE CLOSED. I never saw him ever again.”

Los Angeles, 1936

Under threatening skies, Katharine Hepburn was playing a game of golf at the Bel Air Country Club. “Hughes landed a Scout on a very narrow expanse of greens,” she later told Laura Harding, her longtime companion. “He had to maneuver between two towering pine trees. He had only three feet on either side for his wings to clear. The manager of the club ran out and started to denounce the pilot until he saw it was Howard Hughes. He didn’t want to anger Hughes too much, fearing he might buy the golf course and fire the manager.”

Kate said that after Howard emerged from the Scout, he played nine holes with her and then she drove him to the Beverly Hills Hotel. Since the plane couldn’t take off on the greens, the Scout had to be disassembled and towed back to the hangar in Burbank, all at a cost often thousand dollars.

Kate remembered letting Howard off in front of the hotel. Before getting out, he turned to her and said, “Miss Hepburn, I plan to make you my next wife.” “I’ll have a lot to say about that!” she said, before shooing him out of her car and driving off into a fading afternoon.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Los Angeles, 1936

Kate Hepburn finally accepted an invitation for a date with Howard, thus launching one of the most publicized romances of the 20th century. Only the best-connected members of the Hollywood community knew how unconventional the relationship would become. After all, Howard and Kate were each among the oddest of the Hollywood oddballs.

When director Howard Hawks first heard about the romance, he quite accurately summed up the attraction. “Howard, in spite of his pursuit of the most glamorous women in Hollywood, was actually looking for a mother. Kate, on the other hand, wanted a golf partner and someone to teach her to fly.” Kate revealed the details of her first “date” with Howard to her favorite director, George Cukor, who was a bit gossipy.

Howard instinctively knew that Kate was far too independent a New Englander to be added to his stable of conquests. Throughout the course of their relationship, she’d have a life of her own and never be dependent on him for money, although he would occasionally contribute cash to help her career.

He also sensed that none of the labels placed on him by the press would impress her—moviemaker, matinee idol, handsome playboy, genius inventor, or even billionaire. She would be impressed not by his money or power, but by his daring feats in the air. “He also played a great game of golf,” Kate told Cukor, “although not in my league.”

When she agreed to get into Howard’s car outside Cukor’s house after one of the director’s Sunday afternoon parties, he immediately delivered the following line. “You’d be ideal as my mate. In you, I could find the perfect woman,” he told her. “You’re the only woman I’ve ever met who has the beauty and sensuality of my mother.” Those may not be Howard’s exact words, but they were later repeated by Kate to Cukor, who then paraphrased them to others.

As Cary Grant had accurately predicted, Kate went for “the mother bait.” As Howard drove her to Santa Monica, she wanted to ask many questions about his mother. But first, she complimented him on his choice of vehicle. As everyone knew, Howard could have bought a fleet of the world’s most expensive vehicles, including the company that built them. A girlfriend who loomed in Howard’s future, Ava Gardner, would sometimes refuse to get inside one of his junky vehicles. In vivid contrast, Kate referred to his jalopy as a “hoot.” He explained to her that he’d borrowed the broken-down car from his cook.

It was not only battered, but filthy. The cook apparently didn’t like to eat his own food but preferred hamburgers to go, along with bottles of orange juice, all the empty containers thrown haphazardly into the back seat. She was particularly amused that there was no hood to conceal the ferocious-looking, rusty engine, which looked as if it were going to expire before ever reaching the sands of Santa Monica.

“A jalopy without a hood—perfect for me,” she exclaimed, or so she later said. “I don’t know about you, personally, but I believe that no car should be retired until it gives off its last gasp.”

She leaned back and let the breezes blow through her red hair. Here she was, riding with the richest man in the world in a God-awful car. She couldn’t have been happier, as she was later to report, and she began to like this unconventional man in spite of his fickle reputation. Sometimes if there was a noise on the road, as from a passing truck, he couldn’t hear her exact words, but he always nodded and smiled in agreement regardless of what she said.

When she learned that his plan for the evening involved taking her to a public restaurant, she absolutely refused, claiming she never dined out. “I can’t stand to have people watch me eat,” she claimed. “It literally makes me faint.”

When he pulled the car to a stop at The Rusty Pelican, he turned and faced her squarely. He looked thin and bronzed, with dark, searching eyes that seemed to take in every detail of her own slim frame. “Don’t you think I know that already?” he asked. “Cary has told me everything. The restaurant is reserved for just the two of us tonight. I don’t like people either. We’ll be alone.”

Persuaded to go in, she was happily surprised to see that The Rusty Pelican lived up to its promise. An all-male band had been hired for the night, and the eight-man waitstaff existed only for the two of them.

In the restaurant, she appraised his clothes more carefully. He was a towering beanpole in a pair of khaki trousers she knew all too well, as she herself had bought an equivalent pair at a local department store for one dollar and ninety-eight cents. What made his pants intriguing was that they came within six inches of reaching his ankles, and his “time-capsule” old jacket had sleeves that also came within six inches of reaching his wrists. His two-toned shoes in brown and white were scuffed up. What particularly amused her was that instead of a belt, he held up his pants with an old tie with a ragged edge.

If the extensive kitchen staff thought it was going to be an evening of lobster, caviar, and champagne, they were disappointed. Howard, as she was to learn, always ate the same meal every night: a ten-ounce and very lean steak, a small helping of canned—never fresh—peas, and a dessert of one scoop of vanilla ice cream with a caramel topping.

She was appropriately modest in her demands, ordering only a grilled chicken breast and three side dishes followed by instructions not to overcook the vegetables. Unlike Howard’s canned peas, she insisted that all her food be fresh.

He figured that since he was paying for the band, he might as well avail himself of its music. He asked her to dance. At RKO she’d never even tried to compete with Ginger Rogers for dancing roles with Fred Astaire. If called upon, Kate could dance a little. Howard also offered Astaire no competition. On the dance floor, he held her so tightly that her feet were hardly touching the floor. She called him “the Bear-Hugger,” and was greatly relieved when they could return to table.

Instead of champagne, both of them ordered plain tap water, although a wine steward was standing impatiently by with nothing to do. The bartender hired for the night waited in vain for drink orders that never came. She had had enough to drink that afternoon at Cukor’s party.

Before the night was over, Howard won her sympathy by telling her the full story of his relationship with Allene, even describing the masturbation in the pink porcelain bowl. Partly because she had grown up as the daughter of a liberal New England doctor, she was not as shocked as most women would have been. Her family had confronted such matters head-on—birth control, venereal disease. Dr. Thomas Hepburn even told his family at the dinner table, though his children were quite young, about evidence of incest he’d encountered among the cases brought before him.

Cukor later claimed that “Howard won her heart that night. Kate wasn’t seeking a stud who’d knock her over the head with a club and drag her back to his cave. She liked people with problems, male or female. Of course, she was a bit cocky—then and now—and always felt she could solve any problem. Her father had wanted her to be a doctor like himself. I always felt she’d have done better as a dictatorial psychiatrist. To me, she seemed to feel that Howard had entrusted her with very secret information.”

“None of Howard’s close associates, and very few of Kate’s friends and confidants really expected the relationship to be very sexual,” Cukor claimed. “Kate obviously was n’t Howard’s type. If he had a type at the time, it was Ginger Rogers. This gets a little complex here. But I feel that, in Kate, Howard found a playmate. In one person, he’d met the perfect tomboy he’d always wanted to be with. He also had found the one woman in Hollywood who could mother him, which is what he wanted from Kate all along. I think he was actually looking forward to coming down with his first cold so that Kate could attend to his needs and cook him her own version of chicken soup.”



“For sex during his long relationship with Kate, Howard had so many others to turn to,” Cukor said. “Ginger Rogers. Fay Wray. Robert Taylor. Tyrone Power. So many others, so very many others, including several New York debutantes. He even went after my two favorite sisters, the very beautiful and talented Joan Fontaine and the equally beautiful and even more talented Olivia de Havilland. My God, I left out Cary Grant. How could I have done that? The big question about Howard’s relationship with Kate was when did he find time to see her? Naturally, she wasn’t sitting at home knitting by the fireplace, waiting for her man. During their so-called romance, she also had a number of affairs on the side with both men and women, everybody from Leland Hayward to John Ford, from Laura Harding to Claudette Colbert. If any couple in Hollywood pioneered what is called today an open relationship, it was Howard Hughes and Katharine Hepburn. In some ways, Cary Grant was right: they were perfect for each other.”

The next morning, in the wake of her bizarre date with Howard, Kate called her closest confidants to report on the evening: George Cukor, as noted above, Kenneth MacKenna, and Anderson Lawler. “Howard is like a little boy, so different from his playboy image,” she said. “He doesn’t need a woman in the sense that a conventional man needs a female mate. Since I’ll never have a son, I might as well adopt him.”

When Howard in his private plane flew over Kate’s house the morning of the next day, he dipped his wings as if to acknowledge that they had embarked on what might be called a love affair.

It was to become the strangest relationship of Kate’s life.

Howard had flown into her life without warning. After their bizarre dinner together, he had flown out just as mysteriously. She had no idea where he’d gone or when—or if—he’d be back.

Hartford, 1936

Katharine Hepburn’s most recent film, *Quality Street*, had played to practically empty theaters. Dr. Thomas Hepburn, her father, told her to quit making “silly period pictures” and to accept the role of *Jane Eyre*, as a means of reinforcing her reputation as a serious dramatic actress. Apparently he was ignoring the fact that *Jane Eyre* itself was a period piece.

Upon her arrival in Hartford, Kate found one hundred roses—“the most perfect ever grown”—waiting for her along with a diamond bracelet from Howard. She kept the flowers, but returned the diamonds with a note. “Dear Howard,” she wrote, “I’ve been accused of many things. But a prostitute I’m not. Your bracelet is beautiful, but not my style. Of men, I’ve never demanded—no ice, no dice. Love, Your Country Mouse.”

For some reason known only to himself, Howard had dubbed her “Country Mouse.” Whatever she was, Katharine Hepburn was no mouse, country or otherwise.

Jane Eyre opened on December 26, 1936 in New Haven. One thousand long-stemmed roses arrived backstage for Kate. She read the note: “Dear Country Mouse. Become the mouse that roared. Love, Howard.”

That night when Kate went on, she felt that the audience didn’t respond to her appearance in *Jane Eyre*. With her film career in shambles, she acutely feared failure on the stage. Filled with dread and anxiety, and regretting her decision to go on the road with *Jane Eyre*, she headed for a shaky run in Boston.

Boston, 1937

Feeling rather lonely, Kate checked into The Ritz Hotel in Boston. Her only companion was a stout-hearted, no-nonsense Yorkshire woman, Emily

Perkins, her secretary. Rather mannish and speaking in a brogue, she had met Kate when she'd served as her wardrobe mistress on the John Ford film, *Mary of Scotland*. Kate had nicknamed her "Em."

As Em slept in an adjoining small maid's room, Kate had gone to bed in the master bedroom at around nine-thirty. At midnight, she heard a door opening. Jumping up, she reached for her gown to investigate who the intruder was.

When she flipped on the lights, she saw Howard standing in the living room of her suite. He'd booked the suite next door and had bribed a hotel clerk to open the locked door to her connecting quarters.

"He looked so helpless and lovesick, I couldn't object," she later told her friends. "I likened him to John the Baptist about to lose his head."

He stayed up talking to her until three o'clock that morning. He even ordered champagne sent up. She joined him for two glasses but that was her limit, although he managed to down three bottles. This was an amazing test for him. He rarely consumed alcohol. But he was filled with a particular excitement on this night and wanted to share a secret with her.

He appeared nervous and apprehensive and used the champagne to steady his nerves. She feared that he might be driving himself toward a nervous breakdown, as he would so often in his future.

As she later told her confidants, including George Cukor, she thought that after all the roses and the diamond bracelet that he was going to declare his undying love for her.

His secret turned out to be quite different, although infinitely more exciting in terms of the world. He revealed that in a few days, when strong winds would be coming in from the Pacific Ocean, blowing behind any airplane headed eastward, he was going to attempt to break his own transcontinental speed record.

Impulsively, she asked if she could fly with him.

He looked amazed at her suggestion. "There's room for only one person—the pilot." Sensing her disappointment, he offered to teach her how to fly.

As she was to tell her pal, Anderson Lawler, upon her return to Hollywood, "Howard didn't even kiss me—not even on the cheek. I'm beginning to think he's more homosexual than bisexual. He shared his great dream with me, but the telling of it seemed to sap all his energy. He fell asleep on my sofa. I got a blanket for him. Don't believe all those stories from maids who were given a hundred dollars to report that they caught us together, going at it like animals in heat. We became great friends on the night he 'broke' into my suite like a rapist. Poor Howard. I doubt if he really knows how to rape a woman. In his heart, he remains mommie's little boy."

Chicago, 1937

After their unexpected encounter in Boston, Howard disappeared to "wherever he disappeared to," in Kate's words. Some of his disappearances have been explained; others have not. Billy Haines, who knew about some of them, claimed that Howard would sometimes meet a handsome stranger—male—and lure him away from his job. "None of those hot studs lost financially by going away with Howard," Noah Dietrich claimed. "He could be pursuing a woman on the A-list, such as the Hepburn dame, although I never saw what the attraction was. She was definitely not his type. Then he'd abandon her for an affair of the moment."

Wherever he'd gone, Howard suddenly flew in for Kate's appearance at the opening night of *Jane Eyre* in Chicago. Later, when he was spotted in the theater, the Chicago press went on red alert. "We dealt with the story with the same excitement we'd handle any other, even, say, the assassination of President Roosevelt," claimed Johanton Elder, a reporter at the time. "In other words, 'Second Coming' headlines."

On the second night of *Jane Eyre*, crowds formed around the theater—not just playgoers but thousands of local fans wanting to catch a glimpse of the famous couple. Howard and Kate seemed to enjoy the various ruses they used to escape their fans and the rubberneckers. Once, Kate arrived at the theater in a garbage truck, entering through the back alley.

Almost overnight, Howard Hughes and Katharine Hepburn became the most famous couple in America. There was endless speculation about their possible marriage. Actually, Howard had already proposed to her in the interconnecting suites they shared on the ninth floor of the Ritz Hotel.

Their relationship still hadn't been consummated. "He hadn't even kissed me yet," Kate later told Cukor. However, Howard did present her the largest diamond ring she'd ever seen as an engagement ring, perhaps forgetting that she'd rejected his "ice" before. Not only a ring, he also gave her the same diamond bracelet she'd returned to him previously, plus a new diamond tiara.

In essence, Howard had given her a fortune in diamonds during some of the darkest days of the worldwide Depression. Perhaps to show her disdain, she did not wear the ring, which she left, along with the bracelet and tiara, unguarded in her dressing room. When she returned to her dressing room after her third night's performance, she found that the jewelry had been stolen.

Fearing headlines, she never reported the loss to the police, nor did she tell Howard what had happened.

Just as mysteriously as he'd appeared in Chicago, he disappeared again. This time Kate knew where he was heading. Flying to Los Angeles, he arrived at the Hughes Aircraft hanger to prepare for his historic flight across America, hoping to break his own record. He called her every night to keep her abreast of what was happening.

Back in Hollywood, Cary Grant seemed pleased that Howard had taken his advice about pursuing Kate. He told friends, "They've turned into a mutual admiration society, and they have more in common than bad dressing, of which each is the worst in his or her category." In a phone call to Cary and later to Cukor, Kate claimed that she admired Howard's "verve and stamina," although the latter had never been demonstrated in her bed. "He's at the top of the available men in the world, and I of the women," she rather immodestly claimed. "And both of us have a wild desire to be famous."

She had already succeeded in making the world aware of her presence. In a few days, Howard was to become even more celebrated than she was. Howard told Cary and his associates that Kate was a "brilliant woman—totally without pretense, without sham of any kind. She is, in fact, the most totally magnetic woman on the planet."

Actually, it was Howard who was keeping Kate in the headlines. She was on the verge of joining the long list of actors whose careers had soared brilliantly in the Thirties, but which had descended into a kind of twilight on the eve of World War II as new stars, among them Lana Turner and Betty Grable, rose to take their places.

As she faced the possible end of her career, Kate was twenty-eight years old. But Howard, at the age of thirty, was just on the dawn of his greatest acclaim. As a man, he was viewed as the single most desirable catch in the world.

Burbank/Newark, 1937

Although the Empire of Japan was plotting to devour China, and Hitler was involved with “the final solution to the Jewish problem,” and poised to conquer all of Europe, much of America focused on the exploits of Howard Hughes as he prepared to break his own transcontinental record. Of almost equal interest was the possibility of his marriage to Katharine Hepburn.

It was windy and foggy at 2:14am on January 19, 1937, when Howard in his radically reconfigured *Winged Bullet*, which had cost him \$125,000, taxied down the tarmac of the Union Air Terminal in Burbank. For the first time he’d be using his “continuous feed” oxygen mask. Banking his aircraft over the Sierra Nevada mountains, Howard flew into an uncertain voyage in total darkness. Nothing at the time, perhaps, seemed as distant as the East Coast of the United States.

Just before takeoff, Howard had second thoughts about flying across the country, since much of America, especially the Middle West, lay under a heavy cloud cover. The winds were behind him, though, and he carried a potentially dangerous 280 gallons of aviation fuel.

Even at 15,000 feet and above the cloud level, the weather was still rough, the winds choppy. He chose to go even higher, rising at least another 3,000 feet. At this level, he didn’t trust his instruments for accurate measurements.

As he entered airspace over Arizona, trouble set in.

“I couldn’t breathe,” he later related. “I was gasping for air, but my oxygen mask wasn’t working properly. I moved my fingers but couldn’t feel my right hand on the throttle. I felt my brain swelling like it was going to bust. I was hurtling through space. It was a pit of darkness out there. At the time I was going three-hundred and fifty miles an hour. I desperately pulled on my oxygen mask. No luck! My oxygen had been trapped by an air bubble. I didn’t think I could drop altitude in time to save myself. Don’t tell anyone, but I was sobbing hysterically. Finally, in a fit of desperation, I actually bit through the rubber hose feeding into the mask. My left arm was numb, and I sucked the air into my lungs just at the moment I felt I was going to pass out. As I sucked in the air, my paralysis receded. As I flew across the country, the throbbing pain in my head was unbearable. All I could do for relief was to scream for periods of about five minutes at a time. Only then could I focus on the dials.”

Another astonishing fact emerged. Before take-off, he’d been awake in Los Angeles for a total of thirty hours. Knowing the long and arduous air voyage that lay ahead of him, it is not known why he’d made such a reckless decision and had failed to get the much-needed sleep he’d need before embarking on such a flight.

It was while Howard was flying over Arizona that America, including Kate in Chicago, learned that the aviator had lost radio contact. Announcers speculated that his plane had crashed.

Much of the country was listening to radio sets as an official bulletin from the National Aeronautical Association came over the airwaves. The world was informed that no word had been received from the “millionaire playboy hero of the air”—those were the official words of the NAA—for five hours. It was presumed that the *Winged Bullet* was lost. Search parties were rapidly formed in the Southwest to seek out the wreckage and whatever remained of the pilot’s body.

The event was frontpage news around the world. *The Chicago Daily Tribune’s* banner headline proclaimed AVIATION HERO LOST!

In reality, Howard was flying over America’s vast Middle West, where he’d picked up a tail wind he later described as “lusty.” In the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, the heavy cloud cover began to give way. He could see land, realizing he was flying over the rolling farmlands of Pennsylvania. Suddenly, unknown to Howard, a bulletin came across the Associated Press wires. A pilot coming in for a landing at Army Field in Middleton, Pennsylvania, had spotted *The Bullet*. HOWARD HUGHES ALIVE! screamed a banner newspaper headline in Chicago.

He had begun what was later termed as his “long glide” into Newark, New Jersey. At long last the airport came into view. Without radio contact, he feared he might collide with another plane.

To his horror, he spotted a United Airlines airplane that had been cleared for take-off. Employing what pilots call a *chandelle* maneuver, something he’d learned from Roscoe Turner during the making of *Hell’s Angels*, he circled the airport for nearly twenty minutes waiting for the commercial airliner to become airborne.

Once the United flight had cleared his airspace, his silver racer “just seemed to shoot out of the clouds,” in the words of one radio announcer. Going at the astonishing rate of three-hundred and eighty miles an hour, it plunged toward the earth in less than a minute, a distance of 12,000 feet. Observers thought the plane was in a tailspin and heading for a crash.

Safely on the ground, Howard emerged from the cockpit looking weary to the point of collapse. Reporters noticed that he was wearing the same double-breasted suit he’d worn on his first record-breaking flight across the continent.

Finally, the news that America had been waiting for came over the air. “Howard Hughes, millionaire aviator and playboy, has landed in Newark at 12:45pm Eastern Standard Time. He left Burbank, California, seven and a half hours ago and has slashed his own speed record for flying across the continent by one hundred and seventeen minutes. Feared lost for five hours, he has emerged as an aviation hero, his fame and achievement topped only by Charles Lindbergh.” Even before Howard was on the ground, commercial aviation experts were predicting coast-to-coast flights for everybody at the record-breaking speeds.

The actual record he set was seven hours, twenty-eight minutes, and twenty-five seconds.

Hundreds of people began to descend on Newark Airport, hoping for a glimpse of Howard. After disembarking from the plane, he told the press, “I heard somebody else was going to try and break my record, so I decided to beat him to it.” He was referring to aviator Frank Hawks, owner of a racer, *Time Flies*. After hearing about Howard’s record-breaking flight, Hawks abandoned his own plan.

From the office of the airport’s manager, Howard sent a telegram to Kate: “Am down and safe at Newark, Love, Howard.”

No doubt about it. Howard Hughes was the undisputed pilot of the year. “Although known to millions before that flight, his name truly became a household word the moment he stepped onto the tarmac at Newark,” Dietrich said in Los Angeles.



Hughes Jr., with Noah Dietrich

When word reached Chicago, where Kate was still appearing in *Jane Eyre*, thousands of fans were waiting, fully anticipating that the wedding of the famous aviator and the fabled actress would take place in the Windy City.

Chicago, 1937

With Howard safely on the ground, speculation renewed again over the possibility of an imminent marriage to Kate. Theresa Helburn, a leading spokesperson for the Theater Guild, the outfit that was staging the Chicago production of *Jane Eyre*, was delighted at the box office receipts generated by the alleged Hughes/Hepburn affair. “In America at least, interest was greater than in King Edward VIII’s giving up his throne to marry ‘the woman I love,’” Helburn claimed.

Howard flew to Chicago, where he booked an adjoining suite to Kate’s at her hotel. There he would resume his “hot but chaste romance” (her words).

She was so overjoyed at his safe return and his incredible accomplishment that after her performance in *Jane Eyre* that night, “I got smashed, along with Howard,” she revealed to actress Patricia Peardon. “We toasted and toasted, then toasted some more. I told Howard, ‘for two people addicted to fame, we have gone beyond our wildest fantasies.’”

He pressed her for an answer to his marriage proposal but she still put him off. That night newspapers broke a story from the Cook County clerk’s office. The clerk, Michael J. Flynn, claimed that a “man said to be an agent for Mr. Hughes” had called to inquire about what requirements were necessary to obtain a marriage license in Cook County. The clerk also reported that the manager of Chicago’s Ambassador Hotel, where Kate and Howard were staying, had also placed a similar call earlier that day.

The next morning, Kate and Howard awoke in separate beds to read the latest headline proclamations: HUGHES AND HEPBURN TO MARRY TODAY.

An enormous mob of people descended on the theater. Kate wondered if she’d be able to reach the stage door in safety. She later told her beloved “Em”: “I feel like a fox cornered by a pack of snarling hounds.”

She couldn’t be seen anywhere in public without having to face the question, “When’s the wedding?” or “How’s Howie?”

The following afternoon, a crowd of screaming teenage girls, whose numbers were estimated at three thousand, ignored the recent snowfall and virtually staged a riot as Kate arrived at the theater to rehearse some script changes for *Jane Eyre*.

By the time the curtain went up that night, radio announcers were claiming that some ten thousand spectators—“and not just teenagers”—would be descending on the theater where *Jane Eyre* was playing.

By four o’clock that afternoon, Mr. Flynn, the Cook County clerk, held a press conference. He claimed that he would hold his office open late that night for the arrival of “America’s most celebrated lovebirds.” Reporters noted that Flynn was wearing a new navy blue pin-striped suit with a maroon-colored carnation with a matching tie.

His gesture was in vain. At 5:15pm that same afternoon, the concierge at the Ambassador Hotel released a message to the press. “Miss Hepburn wishes to announce that she and Mr. Howard Hughes will not marry today.”

Enigmatically, headlines in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* the next morning proclaimed: LA HEPBURN’S WEDDING DAY IS REALLY SOMETHING!

Howard told Kate that he had to have an answer to his marriage proposal before curtain time that night. Even as late as fifteen minutes before she was called to the stage, she still hadn’t decided what to do.

Because of the thousands of people waiting outside his hotel, Howard dared not risk coming to the actual theater, but remained in his suite.

She delayed her answer until just five minutes before curtain time, as he waited patiently on the phone.

Just as she was heading out of her dressing room, she picked up the receiver, “It’s your Country Mouse,” she said to him in the presence of “Em.” “Yes, God damn it, let’s stop all this fuss once and for all. I’m going to become the second Mrs. Howard Hughes, and a hell of a lot better wife to you than Ella Rice.”

Before flying out of Chicago, he telegraphed his staff “to get ready for the arrival of one Miss Katharine Hepburn, about to undergo a name change. Muirfield is going to have a new mistress.”

The Caribbean, 1937

Both Kate and her producer, Theresa Helburn, along with other Theater Guild backers, agreed that *Jane Eyre* was not ready to face the harsh critics

of New York. To save face, Helburn announced that the play's Broadway opening had been postponed because of film commitments by Kate. That was a lie. No producer in Hollywood, and Howard was very aware of this, was offering her any role.

The play, however, still had bookings outside of New York, and Kate slogged through previews in cities that included St. Louis, Toledo, Columbus, and Pittsburgh. Her relief from the tedium of these provincial shows revolved around Howard's unexpected arrivals. He would fly in and out of a city where she was appearing. In fact, he was in the theater in Washington, D.C., when this tedious play "mercifully" folded after a road-show run of only fourteen weeks.

She accepted an invitation from her groom-to-be to sail the Caribbean aboard his spectacular yacht, the *Southern Cross*.

On the first day of their sail, Kate was "burning alive with my ambition to fly instead of sail." She told him that the only thing she had waiting for her in Hollywood was the series of flying lessons he'd promised her.

Eager to install her at Muirfield, Howard agreed to take time out from his many business affairs and aviation interests to personally give her the lessons that any trained pilot could have taught instead.

With her acting career advancing sluggishly, at least temporarily, Kate pursued her dreams of carving out a career in aviation. She wrote John Ford, "Soon the world will forget that Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart ever existed. When aviation history is written in the future, it will have chapters devoted to the exploits of Katharine Hepburn and Howard Hughes."

Aboard the *Southern Cross*, sailing first to Nassau, then on to Jamaica, Howard confided to her his most ambitious plan to date. He wanted to fly around the world, breaking all previous records. She was enthralled.

As she would later say, "Right then and there, I knew that I didn't want John Ford, but this great man of vision and dreams, Howard Hughes. John and I were merely making entertainment for the masses—in my case, not even doing that. Howard was writing history with all the daring of a Columbus. I found him absolutely fascinating. In spite of my earlier indecision, I more and more wanted to be less Miss Katharine Hepburn and more Mrs. Howard Hughes, a name I would wear with pride, unlike what I did with my first husband. Of course, even with Howard, a lady is entitled to change her mind."

Los Angeles, 1937-1938

Back in Los Angeles, Kate moved into the Muirfield mansion, chasing away the ghosts of Howard's former wife, Ella Rice, and of that great beauty, Billie Dove. It was a beautiful spring day. Only that morning, Kate had read in a Hollywood column that she and Howard had been named "the world's most romantic couple."

She didn't arrive at Muirfield alone. Kate brought some baggage that included, naturally, her personal maid, Johanna Madsen. Although she used to drive herself around Hollywood, Kate had acquired a personal chauffeur, Louis Prying. Johanna no longer did all the cooking, that assignment going to Ranghild Prying, Louis's wife. None of this new staff of permanent guests set well with Richard Dreher, Howard's personal valet and *major-domo*. He also wasn't impressed when "Button," Kate's French poodle, immediately bit his ankle. She also brought along two cocker spaniels—one gray, Mica, another black, who answered to the name of Pete.

The *major-domo* assigned Kate "to the bedroom of the first wife," as he put it. He proudly proclaimed it "the master bedroom."

"Where is Mr. Hughes going to sleep?" Kate asked.

She was told that he preferred to sleep in a makeshift bed in his private study, directly above her master bedroom.

"I guess that way I can hear him walking around during his sleepless nights," she said.

Howard's staff also had to make way for a collection of Kate's New England antiques that arrived in a truck the next day, along with her wardrobe—mostly slacks—and a virtual library of books and plays.

To her astonishment, Kate found that many of the rooms at Muirfield were locked. Even some of the rooms that were open were darkened by black velvet draperies. She set out immediately to order some spring cleaning, demanding that the curtains be pulled back and the windows opened to let in the fresh California air. She was truly establishing herself as the *châtelaine* of Muirfield—and not just in name only.

Cary Grant later said that Howard's time with Kate was the most peaceful and stabilizing of his life, even though they were definitely the odd couple. He constantly urged them toward matrimony, although she couldn't help but notice that while she slept alone, it was Cary Grant himself who arrived at least two nights a week to share Howard's bed.

Even so, for a few weeks she genuinely liked her life with Howard. Their two shared passions were not for each other, but for playing golf and flying. Day after day, regardless of how busy he was, he taught her to become an aviator. She seemed to like flying a hell of a lot more than appearing before a movie camera.

Later during her tenure at Muirfield, he placed his most beloved possession on the mantelpiece in his parlor. It was the Harmon International Trophy. (Established in 1926, and administered since 1950 by the Smithsonian Institution, it acknowledges excellence in aviation—particularly flying.) In 1938, the trophy was awarded to Hughes by President Franklin D. Roosevelt himself. Somehow, the president's blessings seemed to be the final endorsement Howard needed to qualify him as a genuine aviation hero.

Nonetheless, Howard assured Kate every night that his greatest achievements were yet to come. He also had something else to be elated about. As the world moved toward war, the American economy was slowly coming out of the Great Depression. That brought resurgence to the Hughes Tool Company. More and more orders were pouring in every day, and he was getting richer and richer.

Muirfield mansion adjoined the Wilshire Country Club. All Kate and Howard had to do was climb over a rather modest fence to play golf, sometimes thirty-six holes a day.

"Even if I talk, which as you know I do all the time," Kate told John Ford, "Howard can't hear half of what I'm saying. His deafness seems to grow worse by the day. I think one day he's going to live alone in darkness and silence—a sad life, really."

Pursued by reporters and photographers, Kate had entered the most ostentatious phase of her life as the so-called mistress of Howard Hughes. It was a world of vast amounts of money, of flying in airplanes he piloted, or sailing yachts down to Mexico or over to Catalina Island. Occasionally they went out to formal affairs, Howard having to rent a tuxedo or she having to borrow a gown, but mostly they avoided such gatherings, preferring to be by themselves or to entertain at home.

"They certainly believed in staying clean," their servant, Richard Dreher, would later say. "Miss Hepburn always took six to eight cold showers a

day, and the poor laundress, Florence Foster, was kept busy pressing their table linen and the five or six clean shirts Mr. Hughes insisted on wearing in one day. He was obsessed with germs and would change his underwear eight times a day—that is, on the days he wore underwear. He always insisted that his shorts be carefully pressed. He felt that the heat from the iron destroyed germs.”

“Even if he only had to urinate,” Dreher claimed, “he always carefully washed his genitals after he was through. If he had a bowel movement, he would insist on a complete bath followed by a shower to rinse off any residual uncleanness. It was truly amazing. The table would always be set with the best of crystal goblets and Haviland china. Even though sparkling clean, Mr. Hughes would often return to the kitchen to wash his plate, glass, and utensils before he would eat.”

Johanna Madsen was always amused when she’d bring Kate some tea in the parlor, Dreher related. Even on the hottest of days, a fire would be roaring in the large colonial-style fireplace. Howard never dressed around the house, but was seen wearing his favorite but tattered old maroon-colored robe and a pair of frayed house slippers. Kate insisted that the windows stay open, and she and Howard always fought over her demand, as he claimed she was letting germs into his house. They had other battles, too, mainly over her smoking. He could not abide tobacco smoke.

Sometimes, Kate could be persuaded to go out on the town accompanied by both Howard and Cary Grant. During one of these events, Kate made one of her infrequent appearances at a restaurant, the Cock ‘n Bull, and lit up. After she’d taken one puff, Howard leaned over and took the cigarette from her mouth, violently crushing it out in an ashtray. Cary thought that she might put up a fight, but he claimed she said nothing and immediately changed the subject and appeared light and gay for the rest of the evening.

Howard finally won the tobacco war. In time, Kate gave up cigarettes.

One night he came home early. He never told her where he was going or where he’d been. “Tonight I’m going to reveal my greatest dream to you,” he claimed. “It’s going to make us married before we actually wed.”

She misinterpreted what he’d said, thinking that at long last he was going to come to her bed to consummate their relationship.

Instead of coming to her bedroom, he invited her to go for a ride with him. “You’re going to see a part of me I’ve shown to no other woman,” he told her. “Only Cary Grant has seen it before you.”

“I assume you’re talking about your cock,” she said flippantly.

Impulsively, he slapped her face.

Before they reached the airfield, he apologized and won her forgiveness for slapping her. To make up, he promised to take her on a glorious trip to San Francisco. In the meantime, he wanted to share his special treasure with her.

He had hired Ralph Langer, a pilot he paid in cash off the books, to work at his hangar a few weeks. The young blond pilot was so startlingly handsome that Kate wondered if Howard wanted him for something other than piloting. Langer’s face lit up when he saw Howard drive up, although he showed disappointment—“perhaps jealousy” as she later told Cukor—when he was introduced to Kate.

Langer opened the hangar, and Howard ushered Kate in to see his sparkling Sikorsky S-43. This was a twin-engine amphibian with seating for a crew of six. It could hold enough fuel to fly across the Atlantic Ocean.

He was like a little boy with a treasured toy, showing off his new aircraft to Kate. He invited her aboard, smelling the scent of the new red leather upholstery with her. He pointed out all the features of the plane, even the camel-colored carpeting. “The plane cost half-a-million dollars,” he said proudly. “But I can afford it.”

He informed her that in this little plane, he was going to encircle the globe. “I won’t be some hotshot aviator in some fucking air race. I’ll make history. My flight will show the world that the future of commercial aviation is unlimited. Passengers will regularly fly from New York to London or Paris. Commercial aviation will mark the end of the great transatlantic ocean liners.”

He filled her with his enthusiasm, and she begged him to let her go with him on the flight. He refused.

“It was that very night, in spite of the jealous eyes of Langer boring in on me, that I knew I was truly in love with Howard Hughes,” she later told friend Kenneth MacKenna. “Maybe my love only lasted one week, but it was love for as long as it lasted. I was overwhelmed with his raw courage, his sense of adventure. Actors I had known such as John Barrymore and Van Heflin didn’t seem to matter any more. When compared to Howard Hughes, not even directors like George Stevens mattered. Even great writers such as Ernest Hemingway were diminished when compared to Howard. And, yes, my white heat passion for John Ford was mellowing into a friendship. As I became more and more involved with Howard, John seemed less and less real for me. Here I was standing with a man about to circumnavigate the globe and make history, and John didn’t even have the balls to leave that shrewish wife of his!”

She claimed that the next few weeks were like bliss for her. Sometimes, with her piloting their small craft, they flew to Catalina and swam nude in the tranquil waters of the lagoon. Although she normally liked to go to bed early, he would keep her up all night with plans for his global flight. She constantly pleaded with him to take her on the flight, but he had many reasons why that would not be possible.

He did fly her to San Francisco and surprised her with the purchase of an astonishing one million dollars worth of jewelry that night. He pressed his desire to marry her. She delayed the marriage date and even returned the jewelry.

Like movie actor George Raft, and like Frank Sinatra in years to come, Howard sometimes socialized with gangsters who included the violent mobster Lucky Luciano, who was widely suspected of ordering the death of Thelma Todd. Kate was astonished one night to learn that she’d be hosting a dinner for the notorious and possibly psychotic gangster, Bugsy Siegel.

She was also surprised to learn from Muirfield’s housekeeper, Beatrice Dowler, that Howard used “special dishes” for entertaining his mobster friends. Gone were the Haviland china and the crystal goblets. Out came the cheaper ware. “When the mobsters leave, Mr. Hughes orders me to destroy all the dishes they ate on. He feels their germs won’t wash away even if the plates are sterilized.”

Viewing it as a challenge and an adventure, Kate gallantly presided over the dinner for Bugsy. As she later told her friend Anderson Lawler, “Each of the rough-and-tumble cohorts he brought with him looked as if they could slit your throat at the slightest provocation. In fact, I’d hazard a guess that they had slit many a throat in their day.”

To her surprise, she found the so-called “Casanova of the Mafia” intriguing. She even admitted to Lawler that —“on some other day”—she might have entertained a sexual proposition from him. “I know why women like Jean Harlow were attracted to him.” Long before he became a bullet-riddled body in a Mafia slaying, Bugsy was good looking, well-groomed, and wearing smartly tailored clothes when he met Kate. “He was far better dressed than I was,” she later said.

He might have started out small, stealing cars in Brooklyn, but he was at the height of his power when he was entertained by Howard and Kate. She was startled to learn that the Countess Dorothy di Frasso, the multi-millionaire divorcée, had taken up with Bugsy. The Countess had even taken Bugsy to Italy with her, where she’d introduced him to, among others, Benito Mussolini.

Kate had met the Countess previously through her friend Anderson Lawler when di Frasso became sexually involved with Gary Cooper, thereby infuriating Lawler, who was deeply in love with Cooper at the time.

Bugsy utterly fascinated Kate and Howard with his stories of adventure, including a tale about an expedition with the Countess to the Cocos Islands, a coral-based archipelago, also known as the Keeling Islands, in the Indian Ocean northwest of Australia and south of Sumatra. They’d acquired a rare, supposedly antique map in the hopes that it would guide their way to a vast trove of treasure believed to have been buried in the eighteenth century by the captain of a Spanish galleon. “We used enough dynamite to blow up New York City blasting for that damn treasure, but came up empty-handed.”

A pal of George Raft, and a close acquaintance of both Clark Gable and Gary Cooper, Bugsy lived the life of a high-rolling movie star, evocative in some ways of Rudolph Valentino during his heyday. He went on gambling sprees to the French Riviera with Raft, seduced one starlet after another, and even invited Kate and Howard to spend a weekend in one of the illegal gambling houses he operated aboard an offshore casino ship.

Before his departure that evening, Bugsy shared his greatest dream with them. He claimed that “in no time at all,” he was going to turn the little desert town of Las Vegas into a gambling mecca.

“I’m going to build a resort hotel out there that all of Hollywood’s big shots will flock to,” he predicted. He leaned over to Kate. “In fact, pretty lady, I’m going to give you the honor of naming the joint. What’s it gonna be called?”

Looking over at a large photograph Howard had taken of bird life in the Florida Everglades, she said, “Oh, I don’t know. Flamingo, I suppose. Something as inappropriate to a desert setting as that.”

“Okay, pretty lady, you’re on,” Bugsy said. “Flamingo it will be.”

Noah Dietrich always believed that it was at this very dinner that Howard began to think about a future dream—and that was to become the King of Las Vegas one day.

Kate was with Howard the night he learned that another Sikorsky amphibian had crashed. He was subsequently denied approval by “the Feds,” as he called them, to fly an equivalent plane. At first enraged, he was then galvanized into action.

In the days and weeks ahead, he ordered his workers to begin adapting a new Lockheed 14. Unlike the disqualified six-seater Sikorsky, the new craft had room for twelve passengers. Glenn Odekirk worked for two months getting the Lockheed ready to circumnavigate the globe. The craft had to be fitted with new engines and its fuel capacity increased. Howard had purchased and installed the very latest technology and electronic equipment.

Remembering his near-death experience over northern Arizona and his loss of air and radio contact, he ordered a trio of completely independent radio systems in the event one or even two of them shut down. He also arranged for the installation of a self-contained oxygen supply system.

Kate was almost vicariously living Howard’s life until the offer of a lead in a film arrived from the offices of Pandro S. Berman, then studio chief of RKO.

It was *Stage Door*.

Howard urged her to take the role, knowing what a juicy part it was. But he had serious misgivings. Kate would be cast opposite Ginger Rogers, who was rapidly toppling Kate from her throne as queen of RKO.

In truth, Howard was unable to commit to Kate, even though he kept urging her to marry him. Unknown to Kate, he continued to see Ginger both in New York and Los Angeles, even in San Francisco. That she was married to the handsome actor, Lew Ayres, at the time didn’t seem to bother either Ginger or Howard.

A seventeen-year-old blond-haired Adonis, Robert Stack, quite by accident learned about the Hughes-Rogers affair when he was skeet shooting at his club. He’d just won the National Skeet Championship in St. Louis and practiced daily at the Los Angeles Skeet Shooting Club. At the time, skeet shooting was one of the most popular sports in Hollywood, taken up by such stars as Robert Taylor, Gary Cooper, and Carole Lombard, each of them a former lover of Howard’s. Even Clark Gable and Ernest Hemingway were taking skeet shooting lessons.

One day Robert Stack remembered seeing Ginger Rogers in “form-fitting pink slacks,” arrive at the club with a “mystery man, a tall, lanky figure with a fedora hat.” Robert had been impressed that the club owner, Harry Fleischmann, was so taken with this figure that he carried the man’s gun, and he never did that to even the most important of his clients, including Gable himself.

It was a month later that Robert found out that the mystery man who had accompanied Ginger was Howard Hughes himself.

Robert had a way of ingratiating himself with the Hollywood elite, and he desperately wanted to get to know Howard, since he harbored a dream of breaking into movies. He hoped that Howard would be the key to a film career.

Young Robert Stack was familiar with celebrities. His mother was a dazzling California socialite who had attended the wedding of Rudolph Valentino to Natasha Rambova. His father was an advertising executive responsible for such slogans as “the beer that made Milwaukee famous.” His family had regularly entertained such celebrities as Will Rogers, Ezio Pinza, Edward G. Robinson, and Nelson Eddy.

Robert Stack was a very heterosexual young man, and would in time be romantically linked with some of the greatest beauties in Hollywood, as would his best friend, a very young John F. Kennedy.

In 1980, when he published his autobiography, he called it *Straight Shooting*, a reference no doubt to his skeet shooting. But it could also be an indication of his sexual preference.



Robert Stack

When he approached Howard one afternoon on the skeet-shooting range, and boldly introduced himself, it cannot be known if Robert were aware of Howard's bisexuality. But if any young man was the ideal type for Howard, it was the strikingly handsome, well-built, clean-cut all-American boy, Robert Stack.

Howard was immediately taken with the young man. In some ways, as Howard later told his associates, Robert Stack reminded him of Robert Taylor. In fact, in his debut film, *First Love*, Stack admitted to "doing a Robert Taylor imitation." Released in 1939, this film would make Robert Stack famous. In this Cinderella-like tale, he gave singing sensation, Deanna Durbin, her first onscreen smooch.

Obviously, in his autobiography, Robert didn't go into the extent of his involvement with Howard. He did admit knowing him and seeing him. The full extent of their relationship may never be known at this point.

However, shortly after Howard's initial meeting with Robert, the young man was sailing aboard the *Southern Cross* to Catalina. One of the crew members, Jeffrey Hubbard, recalled seeing Howard and Robert sunbathing in the nude. Although there were guest cabins, Robert shared the master suite with Howard at night.

Robert was flown to Mexico by Howard, and they were spotted together in San Francisco. "Their relationship lasted at least until Robert Stack joined the Navy," Noah Dietrich later claimed. "Although Howard was dressing pretty sloppy himself at the time, he purchased a new wardrobe for the kid. He bought him jewelry too. I should know because I paid the bills. I have no way of knowing if they had sex or not. Stack, I was told, was girl crazy but he spent time with Howard whenever Howard wanted him to. He once told me the kid was like a son to him. If Robert Stack were Howard's son, I think it sure looked like incest to me. During Howard's 'romance of the century,' as the fan magazines called it, with Kate Hepburn, I'd bet my bank account that he slept with the kid more than he did with Hepburn. That is, if he ever slept with Hepburn."

"Around the time he was living at Muirfield with Hepburn, and running around with Tyrone Power, Robert Taylor, and Robert Stack, Howard admitted to me he was experiencing one of his periodic bouts of impotence with women," Dietrich claimed. "He eventually solved that problem, at least temporarily. It was a unique solution."

New York/Hollywood, 1937

The newspapers were still filled with stories of the imminent marriage of Kate to Howard. Very few of the reporters, except for the most savvy ones, knew what was really going on. Although in later years press-shy Kate herself suggested that her relationship with Howard was one of the great loves of her life, ranking up there with Spencer Tracy, the evidence suggests otherwise.

At the time when Howard was supposed to be wooing Kate, she was spending many of her nights with film editor Jane Loring, who at least temporarily had replaced the American Express heiress, Laura Harding, in her affection.

Almost as if to humiliate her, Howard continued to date Kate's arch rival at RKO, Ginger Rogers, on the side. Once in New York, during the previous year, their dates even became public when he was seen dancing with the blonde beauty at fashionable nightclubs. One reporter, James Langford, who sometimes wrote articles for *Modern Screen*, said, "I saw Ginger and Hughes dancing together at the St. Regis Roof. I'd never seen two people so much in love. He held her real close. When they sat down at table, he didn't even look up when a waiter came to take their order. He never took his eyes off her."

It's amazing that news of Ginger and Howard didn't make it into the press, even though he continued to date her.

During one of Howard's stays at the Drake Hotel in New York, he'd invited Ginger and her overpowering mother, Lela, to sail with him aboard the 388

Southern Cross. They were later spotted together at the estate of industrialist Sherman Fairchild at Lloyd's Neck, near Huntington, Long Island.

Apparently, one of the Fairchild employees, Bertha Milton, reported to Walter Winchell that Howard and Ginger were in residence and sharing the

same bedroom. What Ginger's formidable mother had to say about this is not known. In those days the powerful columnist sometimes paid good money for tips like the one from Bertha. But for some reason, he didn't run this very tantalizing item.

Back at Muirfield, Kate—or so the servants and her friends reported—had not heard from Howard in weeks, even though she was living in his house.

Rather brazenly, Howard was spotted by dozens of workers when he took Ginger on a widely publicized visit to the Sikorsky helicopter plant. Surely Lew Ayres, Ginger's husband, must have been informed of these "outings," but by that time the Ayres/Rogers marriage was coming apart, even though she still professed a love for her emotionally troubled and deeply religious bisexual husband.

When Kate, in California, did receive word that Howard was flying back to Los Angeles in his Racer, she sent a message to the Drake Hotel in New York that she'd meet him at the airport. Howard cabled her not to show up. As it turned out, the reason for that was that he was flying Ginger back on that Racer because she had a film commitment at RKO.

Kate got her revenge. When Ginger returned to RKO wearing a mink coat that Howard had bought for her on Fifth Avenue in New York, she called up to the open second floor window of studio chief Pandro S. Berman. Unknown to Ginger, Kate was in the office at the time. Hearing Ginger's voice, Kate took a pitcher of water and tossed its contents down over Ginger's head and her new coat. "If it's real mink," Kate called down provocatively, "it won't shrink."

During the time Kate lived at Muirfield, Howard continued to ask for her to set a date for their marriage. He might do that when they were on the golf course of the Wilshire Country Club. At night in the arms of Ginger Rogers, he also pleaded with her to marry him.

When he experienced serious bouts of impotence in 1937, during preparations for his global flight, he devised "cures." First, he ordered Pat DeCicco to introduce him to only the most glamorous and big-busted of the young starlets arriving by train in Los Angeles from the vast plains of America. When these "luscious babes," as Pat called them, "didn't do the trick," Howard found other means to restore his vigor in the bedroom.

He'd heard that Errol Flynn and other stars, some of them aging, were patronizing a new bordello that was jokingly nicknamed "Tequila Nights." Underaged and sometimes very beautiful Mexican girls were up for grabs. The Madame of the bordello discreetly advertised that "most requests would be considered."

Howard revived a form of sexual activity remembered from his childhood. With him, he carried the pink porcelain bowl that his mother, Allene, had used when she'd gone through a brief period of masturbating her son. Instead of turning to a mother figure, however, Howard took that bowl to Tequila Nights, where he hired young Mexican girls to perform the ritual, with variations, for him.

Howard told Pat about this particular form of amusement, and Pat later reported it to his cousin, Cubby Broccoli. "I thought it was pretty disgusting," Pat claimed. "But who am I to judge? I've done some things in life I'm not proud of."

One night at Muirfield, when Kate was spending the evening with Jane Loring, Howard's housekeeper, Beatrice Dowler, said that he sat in his living room "sobbing his heart out. Here was a man who had everything in the world, or so it seemed, and he was desperately unhappy. I didn't know what to do. I'd never seen him in such despair. I felt he was going to harm himself. I went and called Cary Grant, and asked him to come over right away. In times like this, Mr. Grant seemed to know what to say to make Mr. Hughes come out of these deep, dark moods."



Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant

Los Angeles/London 1937-38

Howard's major attention in the winter of 1937 and the early spring of 1938 was focused on his upcoming flight around the world. When not otherwise occupied, he devoted some attention to his live-in friend, Kate, joining her whenever he could for a game of golf at the Wilshire Country Club. Somehow he still managed to fit in private rendezvous with Tyrone Power and the very young Robert Stack. "Even so," Cubby Broccoli once said, "Ginger and Cary remain the prized horses in his stable, and forgive me for comparing either of them to a horse."

Noah Dietrich, who should know, said that Howard managed to work all these people into his life at the same time "because he saw them in shifts. Hepburn was always in bed by nine o'clock. He often had a late dinner with Ginger before going on a midnight sail with either Power or the young Stack boy."

"Actually, Howard never had to worry about Hepburn," Dietrich claimed. "She was so god damn self-sufficient that I don't think she even noticed if Howard were in residence at Muirfield or not."

Kate had her own problems to think about. In an episode that caused her great humiliation, the Independent Exhibitors of America (theater owners not

controlled by the studios) took out full-page advertisements in Hollywood trade papers declaring her “box office poison.” Other “poisonalities” included Joan Crawford, Mae West, Greta Garbo, Fred Astaire, and Marlene Dietrich.

At one point during her greatest despair, fearing RKO was planning to dump her, Kate stepped out on the ledge of the two-story makeup building at the studio and threatened to jump. It was Cary Grant who was summoned to talk her into coming back inside. No one knew where Howard was at the time. When Pat DeCicco got in touch with Howard and told him what had happened, his boss issued this not-quite-on-target comment: “Forgive me, but I’m incapable of committing to any one woman.”

Kate told George Cukor and her other friends, “I’m madly in love with him and he about me.” Cukor, an intimate friend (not a lover) of Cary Grant, knew the inside story but listened patiently to Kate’s protestations of love. Privately, he confided to friends such as Joan Crawford, “It’s promoted as the Hollywood romance of the century. Non-romance would be a better term.” Crawford promulgated gossipy stories about Howard and Kate to half of Hollywood. For some reason, and even though she’d repeatedly turned down Howard, she seemed to take delight in exposing the sham of the widely celebrated Hughes/Hepburn romance.

Ginger’s friends, and even her RKO boss, Pandro S. Berman, were told that Howard had personally assured Ginger that he was not sleeping with Kate—and never had. “We’re golfing buddies,” Howard is reported to have said. “Nothing more. Besides, who could fall in love with a woman who eats kidneys for breakfast? Do you know how many germs reside in the kidney of an animal?”

As Howard labored like a blue-collar mechanic at Burbank, Kate was busy making *Bringing Up Baby*, a comedy in which she was starring opposite Cary Grant. As part of the incestuous Hollywood link, Howard’s favorite director, Howard Hawks, was in charge of the picture. During the shoot, Howard Hughes himself visited the set on various occasions. Privately, Hawks said, “I don’t know if he’s coming to check up on Kate or Cary. He spends equal time in each of their dressing rooms.”

During one of his studio visits, Howard received an urgent call from Louis Preysing at Muirfield. In broad daylight, with the house fully staffed, a thief had broken in and gone directly to Kate’s bedroom. There he’d removed all the jewelry, including diamond and ruby bracelets, along with a mink coat, that Howard had given her.

That night, racing back to Muirfield, the engineer in Howard began to design an intricate alarm system. It was jokingly termed a “Rube Goldberg contraption.” It was so sensitive—and so loud because of Howard’s growing deafness—that even stray animals such as dogs or cats, could set it off in the middle of the night, waking up Hancock Park.

As soon as he’d finished designing it, he rushed back to Union Air Terminal at Burbank. He’d come up with a unique feature for his L-14. He began work on the design for a commode with air suction to install in his plane. Instead of letting human waste collect in the plane, which would cause germs, the airborne toilet would blow the waste into the atmosphere.

His comment, “Birds do this all the time. If someone gets hit in the eye with a pile of shit, they’ll think it’s from a very large bird.”



The Aviator: Howard Hughes Jr.

He sometimes spent as much as thirty-six hours at a stretch preparing for his around-the-world flight. In New York, Mayor Fiorello La Guardia had asked him to rename his plane, *The 1939 New York World’s Fair*, and Howard had agreed.

In Burbank, he faced one delay after another, the main problem centering on the fact that the L-14 Lockheed was simply too small to carry the huge storage tanks of aviation fuel needed. To make matters worse, he’d equipped his plane with extra tanks, running the very grave risk of fatally weighing it down. Some of those tanks had been crowded into the compartment that would be shared by the fliers themselves. In case of an accident, such a move ran the risk of turning the pilots into human torches.

He was bitterly disappointed when U.S. aviation authorities refused to grant him a certificate of air worthiness. That meant he had to fly immediately to Washington where he fully expected to prevail. The refusal of U.S. Aviation Authorities also meant that he would not be allowed to fly over England’s air space. That country was vital territory in his global flight plan.

Howard had a strong point to argue. Since he was flying from the East Coast of America over the Atlantic, his heavily loaded plane would not cause any damage to U.S. territory if it exploded, the way a transcontinental flight might do. Also, he argued, by the time he reached the coast of England, his fuel would be low enough so that he would no longer pose a threat. After considerable argument, American authorities granted him the right to fly across their air space upon his return journey. But he still had to convince the stubborn brass in London. He flew to England to persuade authorities to give him permission.

Coming back to his suite at London’s Savoy Hotel one afternoon, he was walking across the lobby when he encountered the delicate, almost porcelain beauty of Barbara Hutton, the Woolworth heiress. At the time, she was richer than he was.

Howard greeted her and invited her out to a dinner party. “Mr. Hughes, do you plan to add me to the already notorious list of the world’s beauties you’ve seduced?” she provocatively asked him in front of her two gossipy male escorts, both of whom were homosexuals.

“I may have known some of the world’s most glamorous women,” he gallantly said, “but the woman of my dreams has always eluded me. That is, until now.”

In spite of this flirtation, Howard had known Barbara before and had spent several evenings with her, admittedly in a party of other friends. In the early 1930s, he had attended some of her parties at Harlem’s Cotton Club, famous for its great jazz bands and dance floor. But until meeting her in London, he’d never shown any romantic interest in her.

Actor David Niven would in a few years join in some of these parties. He once said, “I think Hughes liked to attend because Barbara always picked up the tab.” Throughout her life, the heiress paid for thousands of evening festivities. “It’s expected of me,” she said.

Not wanting Howard to be lonely in London, Cary Grant had arranged for him to meet young Frederick Brisson, the actor’s on-again, off-again lover. Even though he was involved with Randolph Scott at the time, Cary had fallen madly in love with the 22-year-old Frederick, who was the son of Carl Brisson, a Danish-born matinee actor and a former professional middleweight prizefighter. Cary had become intrigued with the charming twenty-two-year-old, Frederick, when he was filming *Thirty Day Princess* at Paramount, a movie that was released in 1934, costarring Sylvia Sydney. At the time, Cary was enduring a difficult marriage to actress Virginia Cherrill. Visiting the studio that day, Frederick had approached Cary and asked for his autograph. Apparently, this was one fan with whom Cary became immediately smitten.

Two months later, and it’s not known how, Virginia learned of her husband’s romantic involvement with Frederick. Dressing for a party, she confronted Cary with what she knew. As she was slipping on a pale blue evening gown, he was so furious at his exposure that he struck her so hard she fell on the floor. Her face hit an iron fender in front of the bedroom fireplace. She later claimed, “I was cut wide open, and blood drenched my face. I lay there in agony, as he stormed out to drive alone to the Brisson party to meet his little Freddie.”

Cary’s fascination with Frederick would continue for years. In 1939 he made *His Girl Friday* with Rosalind Russell, whom he sometimes dated, although she was no more than a “beard,” covering up his own relationship with Randolph Scott, which was receiving far too much press at the time, even though the printed references to the two men were “veiled.”

One night Cary invited Frederick to join Rosalind and himself. As it turned out, Frederick was a bisexual, and as a result of that meeting, he fell in love with Rosalind and married her in 1941. Apparently, the very hip future Auntie Mame knew of the young man’s other life when she married him. She didn’t appear to be threatened by his sexual preference the way Virginia Cherrill had been when confronted with the startling news of Cary’s bisexuality. But unlike Cary, Frederick wasn’t a wife-beater, and his marriage to Rosalind was successful.

Frederick was in London at the time of Howard’s visit to meet with British aviation authorities, and he was also staying at the Savoy. Perhaps wanting “to share the goodies,” Cary had arranged for an introduction between Howard and the charming young man. Details are lacking, but Frederick was soon sharing the master bed in Howard’s suite. As David Niven would later remark, rather cattily, “Howard was just breaking in Freddie for Rosalind.”

On that trip, Howard turned out to be a true bisexual when he’d encountered Barbara whom he hadn’t seen in several years. Why this sudden attraction? Maybe it was her new, thinner look, or perhaps her fashionable style in clothing and makeup, or even the vast amounts of press that she received for virtually everything she did, no matter how trivial. (Compared to Barbara Hutton, the amounts of press ink spilled over Paris Hilton’s modern-day exploits appear almost inconsequential.)

Howard invited Barbara to join his dinner party which also included Frederick. Frederick was later to recall witnessing both Howard and Barbara “looking very sweet, holding hands, misty-eyed.”

Since his arrangement with Howard was strictly sexual—there was no love there at all—Frederick didn’t seem jealous. The reason for that became more obvious later. Frederick had developed a fondness for British stage actors, his favorite being Laurence Olivier. When he wasn’t with Howard, he was occupied.

When she launched her ten-day affair with Howard, Barbara may or may not have known that Frederick and Howard were also lovers. If she did, it didn’t interfere in her fondness for “my darling Freddie,” as he soon became in her rich world.

Both Cary Grant and Howard Hughes would rapidly move into Barbara’s orbit. And when Frederick married Rosalind Russell, he remained friends with Barbara. And when Cary married Barbara, the two couples often spent evenings together, even sleeping over at each other’s homes.

Sometimes Howard would join the foursome as the odd man out. He was to learn that Frederick had enjoyed a brief affair with Barbara before his marriage to Rosalind. “Oh, my God,” Billy Haines said. “When all of that gang got together, everybody had slept with everybody else except poor Rosalind, who had enjoyed only the charms of her Freddie. I can assure you it was chaste dating between Cary and Rosalind. If Howard had followed his usual custom, he would have tried to seduce Rosalind, too. For some reason, even though she was attractive, she never appealed to Howard. Personally, I think she was too smart for him, and that was a turn-off.”



Barbara Hutton

Back in London during the infamous Hutton encounter, and while Kate occupied her days at Muirfield plotting her Hollywood comeback, Howard divided his time between his own suite with Frederick and the even more lavish Savoy boudoir of Barbara.

The exact details of their liaison would never have been known if Barbara hadn't kept a diary. She also talked candidly about the affair with her friends, especially her notoriously gossipy cousin, Jimmy Donahue. He spread the word about the coupling of his famous cousin and the handsome, super-wealthy aviator. It is not known if Kate Hepburn learned about this affair. Surely she must have, as word spread from London to New York to Hollywood via an electric grapevine.

Apparently, Howard and Frederick were very sexually compatible. Regrettably, Howard and Barbara did not turn out to be ideal sexual partners. He could not bring her to orgasm, which she so desperately wanted. As she was to record in her notebooks: "He sees that I have difficulty reaching orgasm, tries desperately to make me do so the first time, thereafter pleases himself and tells me I won't have one anyway. If I touch myself, he brushes my hand away with an angry snort. He can't take it when a woman loses herself in pleasure. Howard feels he has to be able to control a situation. When he doesn't, panic sets in."

It is not known how such a private, terribly personal, entry in her diary became public, and was published, much to her embarrassment.

In spite of their unsuccessful sessions in bed, Barbara retained a sisterly affection for Howard in the years ahead. She was a most understanding wife in the Forties when her husband, Cary Grant, slept with Howard and not with her. What she didn't understand was Howard's affection for Kate Hepburn. As she told Jimmy Donahue, "A boy would have been a better choice for Howard, instead of a *faux* boy."

After Barbara returned to America, she appraised Howard in her notebooks: "Howard has a talent for making enemies. People think of him as a half-deaf, stuttering billionaire whose only interest in life is money. For myself, I've never met a less materialistic man. He owns two suits and no tuxedo—if he needs one he borrows it. He usually wears tennis sneakers, the result of bad feet, and when he travels he packs a cardboard box with a few shirts and pairs of unmatched socks. He eats nothing but salads and would sooner sleep on a cot than in a comfortable bed. That is, when he sleeps at all. He is an easy person to be with. Doesn't bombard you with a barrage of ideas, doesn't pry, never argues. The charming thing about Howard is that he isn't charming."

San Francisco, 1938

The coming together of Howard with Johnny Meyer will forever be cloaked in mystery. Even when Meyer, a few months before his still unexplained death in 1978, made revelations about his connection with Howard, he mixed the truth with lies, preferring the "limited hangout," to quote a future term used in the era of Richard Nixon.

The timing of Howard's first meeting with Meyer is clouded in mist. Some biographers have put it in 1939, others as late as 1943. Noah Dietrich, who should know since he was in charge of issuing Meyer's paycheck, placed it in San Francisco in 1938. Incidentally, Dietrich also noted that "paycheck" wasn't exactly the right word. For virtually anything commissioned by Howard, Meyer demanded to be paid in cash and off the books.

Who was Johnny Meyer? During his notorious career, he was known by many names. Writers Peter Harry Brown and Pat H. Broeske labeled him a "Tinseltown bottom feeder who hustled girls for Charlie Chaplin and Errol Flynn." That was somewhat accurate except in Errol's case, Meyer hustled both girls and boys—more to the point, young girls and boys. This was especially true when Errol went on secret visits to Mexico away from the noisy gossips of Hollywood where some of his nocturnal adventures would have destroyed his career if word had leaked out.

Meyer was a procurer, with ties to the mob. He might have described his occupation as "pimp" on his Internal Revenue tax form—that is, if he bothered to report any of his under-the-table earnings.

It is not known exactly how Howard heard of Meyer, although by the late Thirties in Hollywood he was already a notorious underground figure.

"Any movie star in those days who wanted anything immoral or illegal," Howard Hawks once said, "could count on Johnny Meyer. From what I was told, he didn't actually supply drugs, but he could hook up a star with a dealer. If a dirty old man like Charlie Chaplin wanted to pierce the hymen of a fourteen-year-old virgin, he called Johnny. For a fee, Johnny delivered. He was also known for delivering the best looking and the most well-endowed male hustlers to Hollywood's closeted homosexual stars like Basil Rathbone and James Cagney. His services were eagerly sought out. It was just a matter of time before Hughes himself got interested in what Johnny could supply."

Veteran character actor, Walter Abel, who had appeared with Errol Flynn in *Green Light* in 1937, and knew Johnny Meyer, said at a dinner party in New York in the 1960s: "Meyer's famous boast in Hollywood back in those days was that 'There is no human desire that I can't satisfy through some of my connections.' I cannot vouch for it but word spread in 1938 that Meyer had fulfilled a very special request from this famous producer, whom I will not name even though he's dead. Johnny, if reports are to be believed, secured a beautiful young Mexican girl for this guy. On a boat off the coast of Catalina, the girl's head was forcibly held underwater while she was viciously sodomized so the creep could enjoy the poor thing's death spasms."

Howard was on one of his mysterious trips to San Francisco with a “paid companion” (name and sex unknown) when he heard that Errol Flynn, accompanied by Meyer, was in town. Howard was staying at the Fairmont, as were Errol and his party. Their suite numbers were not given out, but a ten-dollar bill at the reception desk produced the numbers for Howard.

Howard—and Noah Dietrich is largely guessing at this point—placed a call not to Errol’s suite but to Meyer’s quarters. One can only speculate as to what Howard and Meyer discussed during that conversation. Obviously the hustler in Meyer saw creative possibilities with this rich new client.

A relationship between the two men was formed that afternoon at the Fairmont Hotel that would last for many years to come, even becoming the topic of a Senate investigation in 1947. “If Errol Flynn had been Johnny’s main source of revenue up to then, before nightfall Howard became Johnny’s sugar daddy,” Dietrich later claimed.

In the late Thirties, Errol was famous for his nude parties and orgies. Howard was eager to attend one of these parties, wanting to meet this dashing Robin Hood/Captain Blood “who rode into Hollywood like the devil on horseback,” as Ida Lupino characterized his arrival.

Meyer arranged for Howard to be invited to a private mansion on Nob Hill, the lair of a multi-millionaire, Philip Mahon, a homosexual who was known for his orgies. To these affairs, he invited gays as well as both straight men and beautiful women because he was more a voyeur than a participant at his parties.

At the time of Howard’s meeting with Errol, he was—more so than any other actor in Hollywood—a symbol of masculinity and virility. “Back in those days all virile red-blooded men and little growing boys who’d learned to masturbate wanted to be like Errol Flynn,” his close friend, actor Bruce Cabot, once maintained.

Howard told Meyer that, even though he wanted to attend the Mahon party, he would not appear without his clothes. If Howard wanted to get involved in any of the action, it would have to be conducted in one of the private bedrooms upstairs and not in front of an audience. Errol, even at that time, had no embarrassment about performing sexually in front of an audience. In fact, he often preferred some of these performances more than he did his roles on the screen.

Before meeting him that night in San Francisco, Howard had seen *The Perfect Specimen*, a film in which Errol had co-starred with Joan Blondell under the direction of Michael Curtiz. From the photographs Howard had seen of Errol’s physique and his film appearances in green tights, Howard felt that the title of the movie aptly described the Tasmania-born star, whose early life in such places as New Guinea had been filled with more adventure than many of his screen performances.

The party at Mahon’s lavishly decorated mansion was in full swing when Meyer and Howard were met in the foyer by a butler and ushered into the sunken living room. It was filled with at least thirty handsome men and women still in evening dress. The night was young. Almost all of the guests, both male and female, had been invited because of their good looks. The only ugly creature in the large room was the host himself, Philip Mahon.

At center stage Errol stood at Mahon’s grand piano. Although fully dressed, his trousers were unzipped, and he sported an impressive erection. With his penis, he was playing “You Are My Sunshine” on the piano.

Howard must have liked the way Errol played the piano, because the pair became fast friends after their introduction. In later years, Meyer would give various stories about how he introduced Errol to Howard, but witnesses reported that their first meeting occurred at the Mahon party that night in San Francisco.

Around two o’clock in the morning, Howard and Errol disappeared into one of the upstairs bedrooms at the Mahon mansion. Their host later asserted that the pair didn’t emerge until forty-eight hours later. “I sent them room service,” Mahon claimed to his gossipy San Francisco clique.

Meyer had told Howard that Errol was a “sexual athlete” with women (or girls) and men (or boys), and Howard seemed eager to sample the handsome actor’s already legendary charms. At the time of their inaugural meeting, Errol was known for making such quotes as: “I like my whisky old and my women young.” Or, “any man who still has ten grand left when he dies is a failure.”

Some biographers have claimed that after meeting Howard and spending time with him, Errol claimed Howard was a “deaf haddock,” and didn’t want to have anything to do with him. Errol was capable of making such catty remarks, and David Niven once swore that Errol used those exact words in describing Howard.

Even if Errol privately mocked Howard, the star became what is known today as a “toy boy” of the multi-millionaire for a number of months. Howard took Errol on several trips aboard the *Southern Cross* to Mexico, where they pursued various pleasures, and they made frequent weekend trips to San Francisco. Of course, both men had no sexual fidelity to each other and continued to pursue various male and female lovers.

No less than a month into Howard’s relationship with Errol, Meyer went on Howard’s payroll, although he continued his association with Errol on some level. Strictly heterosexual himself, Meyer “auditioned” many starlets for Howard, the way Catherine the Great of Russia would order her ladies-in-waiting to sample the charms of her studs at court before actually testing their skills herself. Meyer never auditioned the male hustlers he supplied to Howard, but had them thoroughly “vetted” by his homosexual friends before presenting a young man to his new boss.

When Errol was appearing once again in a film directed by Michael Curtiz, called *Four’s a Crowd* for Warner Brothers, he confessed to Howard that he had plans to seduce Olivia de Havilland, his Maid Marion co-star in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. The actor told David Niven, Bruce Cabot, and others that Olivia “was a tough nut to crack,” but he claimed that victory would one day be his. He also had plans, or so he claimed, to seduce Bette Davis as well.

Howard must have silently played a game of one-upmanship with his newfound friend, because he eventually chalked up both Bette and Olivia as conquests for himself.

During the filming of *Four’s a Crowd*, Errol invited Howard to become a member of the all-male Olympiads, a small group of fun-loving men consumed with letting the good times roll, no matter what the cost. Howard refused, but not because the club was anti-Semitic. He had no problem with the club’s politics, but worried about a possible exposure in the press. Members included the handsome actor, William Lundigan (Errol’s sometimes lover), along with Errol’s other lovers, Bruce Cabot and Patric Knowles. Even John Barrymore and WC. Fields were members. Jack Warner and Edward G. Robinson had wanted to join but were turned down because of their Jewish backgrounds.

Members of the Olympiads sometimes sailed aboard Errol’s own yacht, *Sirocco*, enjoying an endless supply of young women, liquor, and most definitely cocaine. It was during Howard’s courtship of Errol, that the actor taught the aviator to cover the head of his penis with cocaine to obtain greater sexual pleasure.

During his months with Howard, Errol claimed that he more or less had the role of Rhett Butler wrapped up in *Gone With the Wind*. The actor also claimed that Bette Davis “was all but set” for the role of Scarlett O’Hara. Howard, who had not yet met Bette, suggested that Errol fly to New York and make a secret screen test with Kate Hepburn that he would personally finance and send to David O. Selznick. Errol agreed and made the test with Kate, both of them dressed lavishly in costumes appropriate to antebellum plantation life in the Deep South. He also seduced her during their brief time together. That privilege had not been claimed by Howard himself even though the bisexual actress was in residence at Muirfield.

At some point, or so Meyer claimed, Errol confessed to Howard that he preferred sex with girls ages thirteen to sixteen, but he liked his boys older, perhaps seventeen to nineteen. Howard, based on his record of seductions, liked fifteen-year-old girls, although that did not prevent him from seducing A-list female movie stars considerably older. Like Flynn, he preferred his boys a bit older, certainly in their late teens. Most often he requested hustlers in their mid-Twenties “when their bodies are fully formed and they have more experience.”

Sexual experience was not something he demanded or even wanted from most of his women—or more accurately, his young girl conquests. “The more innocent the better,” Howard told Meyer.

Howard never bothered to clear up his sexual contradictions. He also claimed he still liked recently divorced women, all of whom were much older than fifteen. Finally, when forced to admit the truth, as when confronted by Tyrone Power or others, Howard said that what he was attracted to could change from hour to hour.

In some ways, Errol shared that same changeable nature.

Both men were extremely fond of oral sex, and, according to the crew aboard the *Southern Cross*, indulged themselves freely in fellatio. “Those two spent more time aboard with their clothes off than their clothes on—not that they had anything to be ashamed of,” one of the crew members claimed.

Once in Mexico, they visited a millionaire friend of Errol’s and spent nearly a week at his estate. Allegedly, the Mexican planned various “exhibitions” in front of the other guests, with young boys and girls. Although Howard watched like a voyeur, he did not participate and kept his clothes on.

Howard later expressed to Dietrich that he valued Errol’s companionship and held him in high regard as a “fuck buddy,” but he did not approve of the actor’s excessive drinking. He particularly infuriated Howard one night in Mexico when he stood up and took Howard’s hand, asking, “Wanna poke, sport?”

Howard later told Dietrich that he’d been infuriated at the impression Errol left, clearly suggesting that Howard was on the passive end of sodomy.



Errol Flynn

Errol promised to cut back on his drinking if Howard would sail with him on a Caribbean cruise in April of 1938, but Howard declined. Errol sailed without him, reaching Port Royal, near Kingston, Jamaica. The actor fell in love with this lush, tropical island and its people. He was especially drawn to the area around Port Antonio on the island’s northeast coast.

Leaving Jamaica, Errol sailed his *Sirocco* to Havana where he got involved in a nightclub brawl that made headlines in Hollywood. Claiming he was kicked out of Havana, Errol headed back to Hollywood. Once there, he resumed his friendship with Howard, urging him to go into a partnership with him to purchase huge tracks of virgin land in eastern Jamaica.



Tyrone Power

Once again Howard refused the offer. However, so as not to alienate Errol completely, he invited him for another cruise down to Mexico.

"I'll have a party favor for you," Howard promised.

"I hope she's gorgeous," Errol reportedly told him.

"I don't know if *she* is the right word," Howard allegedly said, "but gorgeous is certainly the right term."

Except for those fans in love with Robert Taylor, much of the movie-going public, at least impressionable women and homosexual men, thought Errol Flynn and Tyrone Power were the two best-looking men on the planet. It was called "idol worship." Ever since Tyrone found out that Howard had seduced Errol, he had been urging his friend to arrange a liaison with the star.

Power was around twenty-five when Howard first introduced him to Errol. "Robin Hood" was pushing thirty and still in remarkable physical condition in spite of such bad habits as consuming inordinate amounts of alcohol.

Crew members aboard the *Southern Cross* later reported that Tyrone was on deck in a skimpy bathing suit—unusual for the time—when Errol came aboard with Howard. The two actors had met only casually before and socially at parties thrown by the Hollywood hostess, Jean Howard. Neither man had expressed much interest in the other before, and were actually viewed as rivals, although working for different studios.

With his ethereal beauty, Tyrone seemed to glisten in the golden sunshine, which had bronzed his body. When Errol took in the almost naked man, with his dark hair, brooding eyes, and long, dark lashes, it was as if he were seeing him for the first time. "Thanks for inviting Ty along for the party, sport," Errol said, turning to Howard. Flashing his already world-famous, smirking smile, he added, "I like Mexican types."

That seemed to break the tension in the air. As Howard ordered his crew to set sail for Mexico, the *Southern Cross* carried three of the most desirable and handsomest men in Hollywood to their own private pleasures.

Roddy Johnston, a former Navyman who worked for Howard for two years sailing aboard the *Southern Cross*, later tried to sell the story of his experiences to any newspaper or magazine willing to pay for it. There were no takers because the subject of the homosexuality of Errol, Tyrone, and Howard was still taboo.

However, the Yale-educated gay actor, Vincent Price, recalled that when he first came to Hollywood to appear with Howard's former girlfriend, Constance Bennett, in a light comedy called *Service de Luxe*, the story of the *ménage à trois* of Errol Flynn, Howard Hughes and Tyrone Power was the chief source of gossip on the party circuit.

"Everyone knew about it, but no one wrote about it," Price said.

Roddy was an extremely muscular and handsome sailor. Some of his clients claimed that he was even more "movie star handsome" than the more famous trio sailing aboard the *Southern Cross*. He was not only handsome but was known for his sexual endowment. He called himself a "walking streak of sex." He later claimed, "If I saw a ten-dollar bill, extended by a man or woman, I got an instant hard-on."

If his stories are to be believed, Howard invited both Errol and Tyrone into his master stateroom to share his bed. Privately, Roddy claimed that he serviced all three famous men at various times during their sail to Mexico. He said that both Howard and Errol were "sword swallows," but he called Tyrone "a brownie queen," meaning the actor preferred to take the passive role in sodomy.

Errol was completely different. Usually he didn't like his male conquests to be of equal rank. He preferred "the young, the beautiful, and the not too bright when it came to boys," Roddy said. "Present company excepted, of course. He went after male teenagers, although he made an exception for me. I was all of twenty-three at the time before I lost my looks and got flabby from too much booze."

"Howard and Errol liked to perform oral sex on each other," Roddy claimed, "but in his developing relationship with Errol, Ty was the woman, Errol strictly the man. I once overheard Errol complaining that Ty was exhausting him because he demanded to be 'poked' so much."

Again, if Roddy is to be believed (and he remains about the only source), Howard often "supervised" the love-making of his two beautiful actor friends. More and more, Howard was moving deeper into voyeurism, and Errol and Tyrone didn't mind putting on a show for him, or even inviting Howard to join them at some point.

But as the Flynn/Power romance progressed, Tyrone rebelled when Errol wanted him to put on a show with just the two of them in front of his Hollywood friends, including actor Bruce Cabot.

"From what I gathered, Tyrone fell in love with Errol in the months ahead, and all Errol wanted was to have a hot piece of ass," Roddy said. "I mean, let's face it. Who wouldn't love to fuck Tyrone Power? Darryl F. Zanuck once reported that, 'The handsome bastard gave me a hard-on when we were in the sauna together, and I'm the only real bona-fide heterosexual in all of Hollywood.'"

When Johnny Meyer first came to work for Howard, he was pleased with the procurer for hooking him into the action that was developing between Errol and Tyrone.

“I thought I’d be hustling far more women for Howard than men,” Meyer later confided. “But it wasn’t quite like that.”

In an interview with biographer Charles Higham, Meyer once assessed his pimping for Howard: “Howard Hughes in my opinion was—and I was close to him as anyone—definitely bisexual. That whole image of his, of having women stashed away in apartments that were set up for him was a lot of baloney. In fact, I deliberately set up these women as a disguise for him. In most cases, he never even went to bed with them. He would go by and discuss the latest events and disappear, in the confident knowledge that the press was following him to the front door and would report on the period he spent there, imagining all kinds of macho events going on inside. The fact of the matter is that I doubt if Howard went to bed with these girls more than once or twice, and then only for a quick fuck and departure. I don’t think he could satisfy women, and I very much doubt if he ever had an orgasm with one. On the other hand, he was fascinated by men. In complete secrecy, I would arrange assignations for him with boy hustlers.”

Back from his voyage to Mexico with Hollywood’s two handsomest actors, Howard decided to turn his attention once again to his upcoming global flight and to revisit the “mistress” he’d installed at Muirfield, who seemed to be doing just fine without him.

“The one good thing about Kate Hepburn,” he told Errol, Tyrone, and Roddy, “is that she never asks where you’ve been when you finally go home.”

Old Saybrook, Connecticut, 1938

At Fenwick, her family home built on the water’s edge of Long Island Sound, Katharine Hepburn awaited the arrival of Howard. To her, Old Saybrook had never looked more beautiful, as the fruit trees had burst into bloom with their snow-white or cherry-pink blossoms. The oaks stood proudly along the coast, overseeing the sand dunes and salt marshes once roamed by Indians.

He had at last agreed to be presented to her family. One of her regrets involved the arrival of Ludlow Ogden Smith, her “beloved” former husband and now a major family friend.

She feared that her bisexual ex-husband nurtured a romantic fixation on Howard, because he collected dozens of photographs of the aviator, which he proudly displayed in his New York townhouse. Luddy had told her that he was not only anxious to take his own pictures of Howard, but had brought along some of his cameras so he could “catch him in action.”

She’d warned him that Howard didn’t like to be photographed, but Luddy had turned what she called “his deaf ear to me.”

Before arriving at Fenwick, Howard had told Cary Grant and others about his three grand plans: To marry Katharine Hepburn “before the frost comes on the pumpkin,” to circumnavigate the globe in record-breaking time, and to make Hughes Aircraft the biggest player in the aviation industry.

On the morning of Howard’s arrival, Kate had told her family, having previously informed her friends, that “Regardless of what happens, my career must come before love. I must prove myself as an actress before becoming some famous man’s playtoy.” She seemed to have forgotten that at the very beginning of her career, she’d already won an Oscar.

What she didn’t realize that beautiful May morning was that her aviator had plans so big that they would eventually dwarf her own “silly ambitions,” as she was later to refer to them.

Before meeting the Hepburn clan, Howard had good news for Kate. Back in California, he had negotiated a deal with Pandro S. Berman, chief of RKO, after Howard had learned about the studio’s reluctance to invest more money into the release and distribution of *Bringing Up Baby*, in which Kate had co-starred with Cary Grant. Howard purchased the film himself and would soon be distributing it through the Loew’s chain. He’d seen the movie and had told Kate by phone as well as Cary that “my two favorite stars in all the world have a hit on their hands.”

Howard was right, but it would take decades for the film to become a classic. Despite rave reviews, moviegoers, for the most part, avoided the film upon its initial release.

Finally, the aviator with his right-wing conservative views arrived to meet the Hepburns, one of the most socially progressive and liberal families in New England.

“It was a disaster waiting to happen,” Noah Dietrich claimed.

Kate had taken previous “beaux” home to Fenwick in Connecticut to meet her family, including the sometimes sadistic producer Jed Harris, known at the time as “the vampire of Broadway,” as well as the hard-drinking and closeted bisexual director, John Ford. The Hepburns tolerated Ford but despised Harris. Dr. Thomas Hepburn said, “If a rattlesnake could inhabit a human body, then it lives within Jed Harris.” Ford fared a little better.

Arriving at Fenwick, Howard was distant and remote. He had been going through a particularly difficult time with his hearing, and he complained constantly of “a ringing in my head.” In addition to other complications, he’d developed a severe ear infection. Sensing his distress, Dr. Hepburn sent him to an ear specialist the following morning.

Back at Fenwick that night, Kate’s mother, Kit, found Howard a rather sullen figure. He sat at their dining table not actually sharing either dinner and certainly not their conversation, even assuming he could hear what was said. Kate spoke directly into his face, theatrically exaggerating her words so that he could almost read her lips.

Howard would go down to the kitchen and cook himself a steak and heat up a small can of peas, which he’d carry back to his room upstairs and eat alone after the Hepburns had retired for the night. Kate slept in her own bedroom, and, from what is known, was never once visited by her suitor.

Dr. Hepburn complained that Howard never joined in any of the family debates. The subject of birth control didn’t interest him the way it did Kit. However, one night Howard showed a keen interest in Dr. Hepburn’s views of venereal disease, especially the dangers of syphilis and how the disease could eventually cause brain damage. Howard, because of his own health problems, had a very personal interest in listening intently to that lecture.

With his camera, Luddy relentlessly chased after Howard on the golf course, sometimes disrupting his concentration on the game. Howard complained to Dr. Hepburn, who said, “Luddy has been taking pictures of us every day since he first arrived at Fenwick. He’ll no doubt be taking them long after you’ve gone. Now let’s get on with the game. Drive. Incidentally, you’ll need a seven iron.”

Howard followed the doctor’s advice. He sunk the shot in two. As Kate remarked, “Cool in a pinch.”

The golf game went reasonably well, but Kit that night at dinner remained extremely distant from Howard and never once addressed him. It didn’t improve relationships between Kit and Howard when she referred to Luddy as “our dear sweet ex.”

In spite of her family’s disapproval, Howard continued to plead with Kate to set a date for their wedding. Miracle of miracles, she finally agreed. How serious she was in her agreement is not known. George Cukor, her confidant, later claimed that Kate might have said yes to Howard’s proposal merely to stop his annoying requests for her hand in marriage. The director seriously doubted if his friend ever had the slightest intention of marrying Howard. “She knew him too well,” Cukor claimed. “Besides, in spite of her disastrous first attempt at marriage, she was just not the marrying kind.”

“Kate was more skilled at stealing other women’s husbands or other husband’s wives than she was in walking down the aisle herself,” claimed her gossip friend, actor Anderson Lawler.

Somehow, word of her upcoming marriage leaked back to Hollywood. On May 28, Louella Parsons in the *Los Angeles Herald*, carried the scoop under the headline: HEPBURN TO WED HUGHES. Believing the marriage would actually take place, Howard ordered Noah Dietrich to redesign the master bedroom aboard the *Southern Cross* for their honeymoon. This was the same bedroom he’d so recently shared with Errol Flynn and Tyrone Power.

With Kate’s final reassurance that she’d marry him before the end of that summer, Howard left Fenwick for New York, where he was going to fly back to Los Angeles to continue making plans for his upcoming flight around the world. He seemed as eager to leave Fenwick as the Hepburns were to see him go.

After Howard’s departure for New York, Dick Hepburn, Kate’s brother, called all the family into the living room to hear his new play, *Sea-Air*. For weeks he’d been typing madly in his bedroom.

As he read deeper and deeper into the play, Kate was shocked that its premise was based on “a handsome, good-looking [a bit redundant] millionaire who comes to visit the New England family of a young woman who is a bigtime Hollywood actress and Oscar winner.”

Even before Dick had finished reading his play, Kate was on her feet denouncing it, claiming he had “maliciously and wickedly invaded my privacy—Howard’s privacy, too.”

Both Dr. Hepburn and Kit agreed, joining Kate in her demand that Dick burn the play in the fireplace page by page. Dick held his ground and adamantly refused to destroy his work. He claimed that he was going to shop it from Broadway producer to producer.

The history of what happened to *Sea-Air* is not known. The noted writer and friend of Kate’s, Garson Kanin, said that he read the play and found it “amusing, insightful, and entertaining.” He claimed that the character based on Howard functioned as an unwitting catalyst within the context of a New England family that was evocative of the Hepburn clan, tearing away their pretenses.

On Broadway, rumors abounded that Kate had purchased the rights to the play to keep it from being produced. Kanin speculated that it was Howard himself who bought up all copies of *Sea-Air*. “I heard he sailed on the *Southern Cross*, tossing the pages one by one into the Pacific Ocean.”



Luise Rainer

While at Fenwick, Kate received some distressing news. There was a lot of gossip that as soon as Howard had gotten back to Hollywood, and in spite of her agreement to marry him, he’d taken up again with Ginger Rogers. The second piece of news was that Ginger Rogers had dethroned her as queen of RKO.

The following day, another tantalizing piece of Hollywood gossip reached her when Anderson Lawler called to report on “the latest.” Howard was not only “wooing Miss Ginger again,” but he was also in ardent pursuit of Luise Rainer, or so it was said.

“You’ve got to be kidding,” Kate said. “I can believe he’s taken up with Miss Rogers. After all, she’s nothing but a cheap blonde floozie truck-stop cocksucker.” When Kate wanted to, she could talk like a drunken sailor. “But the willowy, ethereal Miss Rainer. Hell, she’s got even smaller tits that I do. Everyone knows Howard’s a breast man!”

Los Angeles, 1938

Call it the romance that never was. The press continued to publish stories about the “greatest romance of the century,” the so-called affair of Katharine Hepburn and Howard Hughes. But insider Hollywood was gossiping about another romance, real or imagined—the “affair” of Luise Rainer and Howard. At the time, Rainer was at the apogee of her celebrity, having won back-to-back Oscars for her performance as the showgirl, Anna Held, in *The Great Ziegfeld* in 1936 (the shortest role ever to win a citation) and for her portrayal of the Chinese peasant woman, O-Lan, in Pearl Buck’s *The Good Earth* in 1937. Dark-eyed, dark-haired, and with a pixyish face and a charming accent, the petite and delicate Viennese beauty was not exactly Howard’s type. (In a few months, Jane Russell and her big bosom would be viewed as Howard’s ideal woman.) But confidants of both Rainer and Howard have either

denied the existence of an affair between this odd couple or else admitted it and contradicted it later. A confused mess.

Howard's close friend, Cubby Broccoli, once suggested that, "Howard may never have met Luise Rainer."

In Los Angeles, Howard learned from Cary that the marriage of Luise Rainer and Clifford Odets, which had occurred in 1937, was unraveling. At the time, Odets was the leading playwright in America.

Cary, meanwhile, had formed an intimate bond with Odets and was frequently seen with him in public. It even appeared to Hollywood insiders that Odets had replaced Randolph Scott in Cary's affections. But in spite of the arrival of Odets in Cary's life, Cary still continued his intimate link with Howard, a bond that would not be broken.

It is entirely believable that Howard might have pursued Rainer, and it's highly likely that if Howard knew her at all, that it was Cary, thanks to his friendship with Odets, who made the introduction. At that point in his life, Howard was on a campaign to seduce female Oscar winners. The list of his Academy Award winning girlfriends over the decades would indeed prove impressive: Katharine Hepburn, Ginger Rogers, Joan Fontaine, Olivia de Havilland, Susan Hayward, and Bette Davis.

Cubby suspected that it might have been Howard himself who fueled the rumors of an affair with Rainer. Although Howard went to great lengths to hide from the press, he was known from time to time to call his old friend, Louella Parsons, with a choice tidbit if it served his purpose.

"I personally think Howard was more impressed with Rainer's two Oscars than the physicality of the actress herself," Cubby claimed. If Rainer and Howard were having a hot affair, they weren't seen dancing cheek-to-cheek at the Cocoanut Grove. If a Hughes/Rainer involvement occurred at all, it must have been the most discreet celebrity affair in Hollywood.

Frederick Brisson once claimed that Cary had admitted that Howard had had a short sexual interlude with Rainer. According to Cary, Howard pursued this affair as a means of distracting his mind from his upcoming global flight. If Cary is to be believed, Howard also wanted a distraction from his troubled, undefined relationship with Kate Hepburn.

Said Brisson, "The full story may never be known about Hughes and Rainer. What I do know for a fact is who Howard really had sex with before flying around the world. Ginger Rogers and Errol Flynn. On separate occasions, of course. I talked with Howard before he left Los Angeles for New York to begin his flight. He said, and I remember his exact words, 'In case I disappear like my buddy, Amelia Earhart, Errol and Ginger might be the final ass that I'll ever know' Somewhat taken aback by that remark, I then inquired about Kate waiting in New York. 'Yeah, what about her?' Howard said to me before putting down the phone without a good-bye."

Burbank, 1938

In Burbank, Howard nervously but meticulously made the final preparations for his around-the-world flight. He and Glenn Odekirk were convinced that his mechanics had created the best possible plane for the mission: a low-wing, sleek silver monoplane, a Lockheed Lodestar, capable of carrying 12 passengers. It had taken two years to prepare the plane for flight. Its pair of 1,200 horsepower Wright engines were the best that money could buy. Weighing close to thirteen tons, it required specially commissioned tires to ensure its ability to land safely. The plane carried 150 gallons of oil and 1,500 gallons of aviation fuel.

Howard had tried to foresee any emergency. He'd equipped it with a pair of high-powered rifles which he might need to fight off bears if the plane was forced to land in the rugged mountains of Siberia. A device had been installed to convert salt water to fresh. Some eighty pounds of Ping Pong balls had been stuffed into the hollow recesses of the wings and fuselage to provide temporary flotation in case the Lockheed, a land plane, was forced to land on water.

Glenn, who had been working night and day for months, had lost 35 pounds. He was far too weak and exhausted to endure a strenuous trip of some 15,000 miles, so Howard found a replacement for him.

For his crew, Howard selected the best technicians in America. Richard Stoddart, age 38, signed on as communications expert. He was a former shipboard radio operator and communications engineer from the National Broadcasting Company. For his co-pilot, Howard hired a skilled navigator, Harry P. McLean Connor, who had flown as co-pilot aboard Captain Erroll Boyd's historic 1930 flight from Montréal to London. At the age of 39, he was the oldest crew member aboard. Also among the team members was Lieutenant Thomas Thurlow, a 33-year-old member of the U.S. Army Air Corps, and an aerial navigator noted for his innovations at Wright Field. Finally, Edward Lund, aged 32, came aboard as Howard's air crew mechanic.

Clearly, he was Howard's favorite. Howard called him "my fellow Westerner," since Ed was born in Montana. He'd proven his skill by working on Howard's Sikorsky and DC-1. There was another reason for hiring him. He was as tall as Howard and bore a physical resemblance to his boss, with his bushy eyebrows and piercing dark eyes. Even their lips and ears resembled each other. If not look-alikes, Ed and Howard could clearly have been brothers. Howard planned to use Ed as a decoy. It was agreed in advance that at refueling stops during the flight, Ed, wearing Howard's typical clothing, including his signature Fedora, would get off the plane first. With his hat pulled down over his face, he'd distract the crowds, allowing Howard to slip undetected out of the cockpit and into the privacy of a hangar.

WC. Rockefeller, a meteorologist, was a member of Howard's ground crew based in New York. His mission involved the creation and the supervision of a 24-hour weather forecast center at the New York World's Fair grounds, monitoring weather conditions along the plane's route and crafting reports for transmission to Howard and his crew. The framework he set up for this became the forerunner of today's Flight Advisory Weather Service.

Before his departure, Howard received a visit in his private office from Noah Dietrich, who interacted with him for more than an hour, reviewing Toolco business that had to be conducted during Howard's absence.

Dietrich noted a picture of the one-eyed pilot, Wiley Post, hanging behind Howard's desk. He'd been impressed with Post's solo flight around the world in 1933 in a single-engine plane, *Winnie Mae*. Howard later told the press, "That was one of the most remarkable feats of all time. I really don't know how that man could have done it alone." Now, Howard was setting out to break Post's record.

After their business conference, Howard showed Dietrich his Lockheed and explained the new fuel system whereby the tanks had been coated with neo-prene to make them self-sealing. His radio transceiver was actually an interconnected series of three separate radio systems. His innovative "Sperry Gyro Pilot" was an automated device that could fly the craft while all the other aviators and technicians snoozed. Howard may have invented the term, "blind flying."

His final visitor was Cary Grant, who'd arrived for a goodbye with his dear friend. Glenn noted that the two men disappeared into Howard's office for only fifteen minutes. Later, only Cary emerged.

Glenn claimed that when he shook the actor’s hand goodbye, there were tears in Cary’s eyes. Glenn confirmed what Howard had already told Cary. For vast stretches of this dangerous flight, there were no maps. “That mountain that you think is 10,000 feet might actually be 12,000 feet,” Glenn said.

New York, 1938

When Howard’s Lockheed landed at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, at the time the only airport within the boundaries of New York City, some 10,000 well-wishers turned out to greet him. Surrounding the plane, they were held back by 1,000 policemen. He was shocked at the turn-out. In spite of his efforts to keep his mission secret, word had obviously leaked out. Crewmember Ed Lund later reported that Howard was at first flattered by the welcome but soon dismayed. Disguised as Howard, Ed got off the plane first, hoping to lure the crowds and the press away from the real Howard. “I haven’t broken any fucking record yet,” Howard had told Ed, “so why are they going crazy?”

Grover Whalen, the head of the 1939 World’s Fair, after which Howard had agreed to name his plane, was at first fooled by Ed’s disguise. But he soon caught up with the real Howard in Hangar 7, and as New York’s official greeter, welcomed him on the dawn of his historic flight.

Everyone expected Howard to stay at Kate’s Turtle Bay residence in Manhattan. But to avoid reporters, he was stashed away in the apartment of Laura Harding on East 52nd Street instead. Laura was Kate’s longtime lesbian lover and confidante. Not seeing Howard arrive at Turtle Bay, reporters falsely assumed that he was staying at one of the residence halls being readied for the World’s Fair of 1939.

That night Kate and Howard talked not of love but of the minute details and challenges of his upcoming flight. He was frank in relating to her the dangers involved, or so she later claimed to her friends. “Other pilots have lost their lives doing exactly what I’m trying to do,” he allegedly warned her. She didn’t need such warning. Kate had met the doomed pilot, Amelia Earhart, on at least three occasions, and had played a doomed pilot herself in the 1933 film, *Christopher Strong*.

It is also believed that Howard told Kate that before leaving California he’d made a new will which had been placed in a safe deposit box at the First National Bank in Houston. Thirty-eight years later, after Howard died, the will could not be found. Howard told Dietrich and Kate that he’d ordered his executors to establish the Howard R. Hughes Medical Research Laboratories in Houston “to combat the most important and dangerous diseases.” It is not known today where the will is, or if it exists at all. Chances are, it was destroyed. But by whom?

Kate later claimed that she didn’t know if she’d ever see Howard again, but expressed complete confidence in his Lockheed Lodestar, saying that she “just knew” that he’d beat Wiley Post’s trans-global record.

Instead of making love with Howard, Kate insisted on making sandwiches for the crew. Not wanting to take a chance, Howard had tested nearly two dozen different breads for their nutritive value. Deciding on one, he’d purchased several loaves for sandwiches, made with roast beef, ham, and turkey. Kate and Laura wrapped their freshly made sandwiches in brown butcher paper and packed them like carry-out lunches.

Howard had contributed very little to the news frenzy circulating around his flight: In fact, he’d issued a terse “No comment!” to reporters upon his arrival at Floyd Bennett Field, not wanting to reveal any details of his mysterious flight. But that afternoon, one of the New York newspapers had been delivered to Laura’s apartment. Its headline screamed: LOOK OUT WORLD—HERE COMES HUGHES!

The following morning, Howard climbed into the back seat of Kate’s Lincoln, chauffeured by her faithful servant, Charles Newhill, for the drive to Floyd Bennett Field. Howard held her in his arms, hugging and kissing her all the way. He vowed his eternal love for her, promising that he’d dip the wings of his Lockheed Lodestar as he flew over her family home at Fenwick en route to Paris. He also promised to cable her at every stop en route, as well as when he made radio contact with ships traversing the turbulent Atlantic.

Driving far too fast, Charlie heard the sound of a police siren behind him. As her chauffeur pulled over to the side of the road, she cautioned her hot-tempered driver to accept the ticket and not get into an altercation with the traffic policeman. For once, Charlie held his tongue and accepted the ticket with a smile. At no point did the ticketing officer look into the back seat of the Lincoln to discover its two world-famous passengers.

At the airfield, and with one final and passionate kiss for Kate, Howard emerged from the back seat of the Lincoln. He tipped his brown snap-brim felt hat to her. His last words to her, and she feared they might be the last words she’d ever hear from him, were, “You’ll be hearing from me, kiddo.”

Kate wanted to go into the hangar with him but feared the mob of reporters and well-wishers clustered at the Brooklyn airfield. She ordered Charlie to drive her to Fenwick, in Connecticut, where she’d sit by the radio, listening to news of Howard’s flight.

While working on last-minute adjustments, Howard was paid a visit by Sherman Fairchild, whose company, Fairchild Aviation, had installed the Fairchild-Maxon Line-of-Position computer in the Lockheed.

Fairchild’s friendship with Howard dated from 1931 when they’d become good friends. Fairchild was rich, good-looking, single, and shared Howard’s fascination with beautiful women. With their respective “arm candy,” the two men were often photographed together at New York’s Stork Club or El Morocco. Their dates often complained that they were left staring into space as Fairfield talked modern aviation or some new aerial navigation concept with Howard.

Because both Howard and Fairchild were interested in so many other things—Howard in movies, Fairchild in photography, boating, tennis—aviation experts tended to dismiss both of them as dilettantes.



NYC Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia with Howard Hughes

Fairchild had arrived at Floyd Bennett Field to adjust the magnetic compass, which he found difficult to do because Howard had insisted on keeping the engines running. “With the damn thing jiggling because of the engines, it’s hard to get the compass fitted,” Fairchild complained to Howard. “To hell with the compass,” Howard told him. “It’s more important that the engines run.” Fairchild reminded him that when one is flying around the world, often over uncharted terrain, “You need a fucking compass that works.” In spite of that protest, Howard demanded that the engines be kept running, and Fairchild had to manage with the calibration of the compass as best as he could.

With Glenn Odekirk and his other mechanics, Howard worked through Saturday, sending word to the reporters and well-wishers outside that there would be no takeoff on Saturday and requesting that they go home. A few hundred did, but many diehards remained, having brought sleeping bags. Dozens of people set up tents and enjoyed packed lunches in a neighboring field. These fans slept in shifts with guards posted. That way, all of them could be awakened in case Howard decided on a surprise takeoff.

All through Saturday night Howard worked with his crew, encountering headaches with the fuselage and the struts. He sent word on Sunday that it appeared that he and his heavily insured crew would take off that afternoon. One newspaper reporter asked Betty Compton, a housewife from Queens, why she’d remained so long at the Brooklyn field. “I want to see Hughes disappear into the sky,” she said, “perhaps for the last time.”

Hope dimmed in the late afternoon when Glenn discovered a malfunctioning magneto, one of the key elements of the navigation system. Howard demanded that the Wright Aeronautical Company supply one immediately from their warehouse, even though it was closed on Sunday. Arousing the storehouse manager, Howard got his magneto, which he and Glenn installed. After one final and thorough check, Howard at long last announced to his crew, “Let’s fly around the world, boys!” He embraced Glenn, holding him for an extra long time, as if this could be their final hug.

The city’s official “greeter,” Grover Whalen, rushed into the hangar, demanding that Howard say some “final words” to the reporters and assembled mob. He only reluctantly agreed.

On the platform he was greeted by New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia. After Whalen and the mayor addressed the crowd, Howard, in a strained and high-pitched voice, read a prepared statement. As was obvious to any observer, the world was rapidly drifting to war, but in his prepared statement, Howard said that he hoped his flight would “further international cooperation and friendship.” Even as he uttered those words, Hitler was threatening to have his Luftwaffe shoot down Howard’s plane if he entered German air space. Before leaving the platform, Howard apologized to newsmen and photographers for having earlier appeared “rude and impolite.”

Mrs. Connor, wife of one of the technicians, pasted a thick wad of chewing gum on the tail of the Lockheed Lodestar for good luck. “Be sure and bring it back safe to me—and you with it,” she told her husband before kissing him goodbye.

At long last the silver monoplane appeared on the runway, ready for takeoff, as the by now exhausted fans cheered its departure. It was exactly thirteen seconds past 7:19 p.m. Howard appeared in no condition to take such a draining flight around the world. At his farewell speech, one reporter noted that his “eyelids were practically closing on him,” and that his face was covered in stubble from his overnight mechanical work. One member of the press recalled how romantic and dashing Charles Lindbergh had looked in 1927 when he’d taken off for Paris. “Lindbergh was the movie star portrait of a dashing American aviation hero,” Cary Ramsomme wrote in *The Brooklyn Eagle*. “But not Hughes. He looked like a bum who’d fallen off the turnip truck.”

One radio announcer, Ralph Saxon, ominously reported that there was speculation that the plane might crash and burn on takeoff because it was “too heavily laden with fuel.” Fortunately, Howard and his crew didn’t hear that radio bulletin. With all the months of advance planning, one factor had not been figured in. The runway at Floyd Bennett Field was far too short to accommodate the takeoff of the Lockheed Lodestar.

Realizing belatedly the danger, Howard faced an immediate decision, and he was only a minute into the flight. He could either abort the takeoff or else continue down the runway and into a barren field, running the risk of crashing in front of the newsreel cameras and his thousands of admirers. With his stubborn, almost defiant streak, he kept the plane steady on the runway until its pavement ended. Then he continued the final stages of the takeoff from a bumpy stretch of field covered with crabgrass and patches of mud left over from a recent downpour.

Except for the increasingly deaf Howard, every member of the crew heard a loud snapping sound coming from the rear of the craft. Even though the sound presented a potential risk to their own lives, not one member of the crew reported this problem to Howard, fearing it would throw off his concentration on the most difficult takeoff of his aviation career.

Flying over Connecticut, Howard remembered his promise to Kate and dipped his wings as he flew over Fenwick. All the Hepburns were waiting out in their yard to wave hysterically at the plane, perhaps wishing him a *bon voyage*—in their minds, perhaps for the final time.

At this point, before beginning its transit over the vast darkness of the Atlantic Ocean, the progress of the Lockheed was still being measured from the ground. Air controllers in the tower at Boston’s airport reported that the craft went over their city at 8:26pm. By 9:55pm, the Lockheed was flying over remote Nova Scotia.

At 10:30pm, the first broadcast ever made from an aircraft in flight was carried by all the nation's radio networks. It was one of the biggest audiences ever reached by a broadcast. The voice of crew member Richard Stoddart, in his well-modulated NBC tones, came across, saying, "The flight is progressing smoothly. The weather is clear, but we cannot see anything below us because of a cloud cover. Mr. Hughes is busy right now, but he will be able to say something a little later."

Stoddart's report to the nation was far too optimistic. Actually, Howard was growing frantic. The Lockheed was gulping down fuel at a rate far greater than his estimates. Facing fierce headwinds, the Lockheed was averaging 175 miles per hour. He knew that by slowing the plane he could conserve fuel yet that would prevent him from breaking the speed record—or so he feared.

Later, when he returned to America, he told Glenn, "I thought somewhere over the Atlantic, long before I reached Europe, the plane would pancake into the ocean. But I could not turn back. I would not turn back!"

After drinking a pint of milk and refusing to join the rest of the crew in a catnap, Howard signaled to Stoddard that he was ready to say just a few words to the nation. His voice was beamed westward. "I hope we can get to Paris before we run out of gas," he told anyone still listening to the radio at that hour. Most definitely the audience at that time consisted of Kate Hepburn, who stayed up long past her bedtime to hear his voice. "But I'm not so sure," he continued. "All I can do is hope that we will get there. I hope that we have enough gas to reach land. I am throttling back the engines as fast as the reducing load permits." In that ominous voice, he signed off. Radio announcers immediately started referring to his mission as "perhaps a doomed flight."

Three New York newspapers prepared EXTRA editions, fearing that Howard and his crew would crash into the murky Atlantic "to join the Titanic," as one commentator put it.

At Fenwick the following morning, Kit Hepburn handed her daughter a cable that Howard had sent before leaving Brooklyn. "See you in three days. Love, Howard." What he told her before leaving was that if he could successfully circumnavigate the globe, setting a world's record, he would be "worthy" of her and that they could wed at the end of the summer.

He had slipped her a note in the back seat of her Lincoln, asking her not to read it until he was somewhere over the Atlantic. At Fenwick that morning, Kate tore open the hand-written note, "On this flight you are my silent partner, my spiritual co-pilot. Love, Howard."

"Who couldn't love a man who'd write a note like that?" Kate asked her family.

Before going to bed in the early dawn, Kate had listened to broadcasts, only to learn that the gambling ships off the coast of Atlantic City, outside U.S. territorial waters, were giving Howard a fifty-fifty chance of survival.

Paris, 1938

As millions of people around the globe avidly followed the flight of the Lockheed, Howard at midpoint over the dark Atlantic experienced a change of luck. He no longer had to fight the winds. "As if sent by God," Ed Lund later recalled, "a brisk tail wind got on our ass and shot us to the coast of Ireland." That resulted in a massive saving of precious fuel.

With some 100 gallons of aviation fuel aboard, and with the green hills of Ireland visible from his port wing, Howard decided that he had enough fuel to fly across the English Channel to Paris.

Lt. Thomas Thurlow made radio contact with the transatlantic liner, *lie de France*, requesting a bearing. He asked that the ship's crew radio the control tower at Le Bourget outside Paris, telling of the Lockheed's progress.

Howard sent two messages, one to the ship's captain, boasting that, "We'll see the coast of France before you do." A cable was also sent to Kate at Fenwick: "The Irish coast is breathtaking in its beauty. Will contact you from Paris, Howard."

Some aviation experts had predicted that it would take Howard at least 24 hours to land in Paris, but Howard landed in Paris 16 hours and 38 minutes after leaving Brooklyn. Averaging 219.6 miles per hour, he had cut Charles Lindbergh's historic record in half.

Thousands of jubilant Parisians stormed the airfield at four that afternoon, ignoring the light drizzle raining down from the gray skies that blanketed the city at that historic moment.

Howard was the first to emerge from his plane, looking unshaven, unkempt, and like a man who hadn't slept in countless days and nights.

On the airfield, the first greeter who stormed the plane was William C. Bullitt, the American ambassador to France. "Congratulations," the ambassador said. "Did you have a good trip?"

"We had a good flight," Howard said in a less enthusiastic voice. He turned down the offer to sleep in the luxurious comfort of the ambassador's Parisian townhouse.

Almost immediately, Howard was greeted not only by the well-wishers, but with bad news. That sound his crew had heard at takeoff was that of a rear landing strut that had been damaged.

French mechanics didn't think it could be fixed. The chief mechanic at Le Bourget, Pierre Mazarin, told Howard that, "*Le Lodestar, c'est fini.*"

"Fuck you!" Howard said in anger in front of his crew. "We'll be airborne in an hour!" Determined and very gritty, he ordered an exhausted Ed Lund and others to begin to repair the plane at once. "Precious time is wasting. Let's show these frogs what American ingenuity means."

Howard's boast of one hour proved a false hope. Eight hours later, the Lockheed was towed to the floodlit runway at the same spot where Lindbergh had landed his *Spirit of St. Louis*.

Hundreds of French people still remained on the airfield to wish Howard and his crew *bon voyage*. Despite crossing the darkened Atlantic, the most dangerous part of the flight was yet to come. Trouble began at once, as strong cross-winds were blowing across Le Bourget, making a takeoff in such weather risky.

His face locked in a bitter determination, Howard gave both engines full throttle. The Lockheed became airborne, climbing to sixty feet before it leveled off and dramatically dipped. Screams could be heard from the hundreds of rub-berneckers below, some of whom later reported to the French press that they fully expected to see the crash of the Lockheed before their very eyes.

With nerves of steel, Howard fought the winds. His entire aviation career seemed to hinge on this moment being played out in front of the eyes of the world. His hands were locked in an almost death-like grip on the controls. Miraculously and in spite of the winds, the Lockheed began to gain altitude. Within three minutes the craft rose over Paris and disappeared into the eastern skies, "which were black as a funeral cortège," as one member of the

French press called them.

Howard was coming into potentially the single most dangerous part of the trip. He had not only uncertain weather to deal with, but danger from enemy aircraft as well.

In London, the BBC reported that, “Luftwaffe pilots were itching to get the famous American aviator, Howard Hughes, in their sights. *The International Herald Tribune* trumpeted this bulletin: STERN WARNINGS FROM HITLER TO HUGHES.

The Nazi dictator had sent ominous word to Howard that his Lockheed would be shot out of the air if it flew over German territory. Hitler apparently feared that the aircraft was actually an American spy plane gathering valuable reconnaissance on the dictator’s preparations for a rapidly approaching world war. Howard’s response was that his craft would be flying 12,000 feet over Germany, thereby making any aerial reconnaissance impossible with the instruments of that era.

Nonetheless, the moment Howard’s Lockheed entered German air space, five fighter planes from the Luftwaffe were ordered into the sky to virtually surround the plane. The leader of the squadron, in making radio contact with Howard, screamed, VERBOTEN! VERBOTEN! into Howard’s nearly deaf ears.

Ignoring the warning, Howard stubbornly flew on. The Luftwaffe squadron kept the plane surrounded and kept screaming VERBOTEN! and other German expletives until the Lockheed had flown over Germany and had left its airspace to enter Eastern Europe for the final lap of the flight into Moscow.

The moment Howard cleared German air space, he turned to co-pilot Harry Connor and said, “Now we can breathe again.”

Moscow, 1938

“Hello, America,” came the greeting the following morning at 11:15am. “This is Radio Moscow.” The Russian announcer said that thousands of well-wishers were storming Howard’s *New York World’s Fair of 1939*. They ran onto the field at the Civil Air Fleet Aerodrome. The manager of the airport greeted Howard and his crew with a box of Kellogg’s Corn Flakes.

A lifelong hater of communism, Howard appeared warm and generous to the people of Russia, even though he loathed Josef Stalin. None of his hostility to the host government was evident in a strained but warm—at least for Howard—speech he delivered to the Muscovites, lauding them for their welcome, and expressing his admiration that the designers of the Aerodrome built it in a location that was convenient to the center of Moscow.

In London, the BBC broadcast the news of Howard’s safe arrival, claiming that “the Russians fell in love with the American playboy millionaire who had a patch on the seat of his trousers.”

Back at Fenwick, Kate heard Howard’s exploits broadcast hourly on the radio. He was clearly the man of the hour. In her narcissistic way, she told family and friends who called, “If Howard and I ever marry, he won’t become Mr. Katharine Hepburn but I will definitely become *Mrs. Howard Hughes*”

Among the Muscovites on hand to greet Howard and his crew were three Russian pilots—Mikhail Gromoff, Georgi Baidukoff, and Andrei Yumasheff—who had pioneered a transpolar flight from Moscow to San Jacinto, California, in the summer of 1937 in sixty-two hours.

Gromoff presented Howard with a container of the rarest of caviar from Stalin himself. Howard was forced to turn it down. “It’s much too heavy and on this flight every pound counts.”

“Fine,” Gromoff said. “I’ll take it home to my family tonight. But I’ll tell Stalin you thanked him profusely and will be eating it as you fly over Siberia.” Before departing, Gromoff warned of potential dangers awaiting Howard as his Lockheed flew over Siberia.

Before reboarding, Howard was handed a cable. Thinking it was from Kate, he discovered it was from silent screen comedian Buster Keaton. BE SURE TO BRING BACK A POT OF CAVIAR, the message urged. Howard merely laughed, crumbled the cable, and tossed it aside as he entered the cockpit for takeoff that afternoon.

In the United States, dozens of boy babies across the land were being named Howard. Even before his flight had been successfully completed, frontpage news and blaring headlines were proclaiming him a genuine aviation hero, the equal of “Charles Lindbergh if not a more daunting achiever.” *The New Republic* claimed that he’d “not been spoiled by inherited wealth.”

Having braved the murky Atlantic and Hitler’s Luftwaffe, Howard and his crew now faced the formidable challenge of the wastelands of Siberia, as his Lockheed flew east into the unknown.

On through the pitch blackness of night, they flew deeper and deeper into central Asia, finally landing at Omsk, an industrial city in the western part of Siberia, lying 1,300 miles east of Moscow. Ed later claimed that the airfield “looked like a cow pasture.”

Unlike their arrival at Moscow, the landing of the Lockheed at Omsk was anything but idyllic. Because of inadequate maps, he had to fly blind over much of the bleak and badly charted Siberian landscape. He flew over mammoth rain clouds. Upon his descent he encountered the aftermath of lashing rain, finding the airfield a sea of mud.

Howard had carefully planned to have an English interpreter waiting for him on the ground. But upon landing, barely coming to a halt before running over the too-short runway, he found that the person had come down with the flu. No one else at Omsk spoke English.

The natives were friendly enough, trying to invite him in for a dinner of caviar and champagne. Howard was frantic, wanting it understood that he needed fuel. Finally, in desperation, he drew a diagram of the Lockheed and its empty fuel tanks. An airport crew member was smart enough to understand the problem and ordered the tanks be restocked. To Howard’s dismay, he discovered that the fuel did not contain the ethyl he wanted. With a begrudging sigh, he allowed his tanks to be filled with 1,750 gallons of low-grade octane. He was forced to open containers of tetraethyl to add to the low-grade Russian fuel.

Not wanting to immediately face the relatively uncharted mountainous terrain of Siberia that lay before him, Howard and his crew remained on ground for ten and a half hours, losing valuable time for men intent on setting a world record.

After a difficult takeoff because of the poorly maintained runway and the fuel overload, Howard and his crew set out to penetrate deeper into Asia, flying over the steppes of Siberia bound for the town of Yakutsk.

As Howard would later claim, the outpost of Yakutsk in northern Siberia “was a god-forsaken place on the edge of the world suspended somewhere between the sun and the moon.” But as foreboding and unwelcoming as it was, Howard and his crew wondered if they’d ever live to see it.

Yakutsk, Siberia, 1938

Ten and a half hours after their takeoff from Omsk, the Lockheed approached the runway at the northern Siberian port of Yakutsk. Looking out the plane's window, Ed Lund later claimed that it "did not appear fit for human habitation."

Howard's co-pilot, Harry Connor, had a different view. "There was an air of unreality about it, like we'd left the Earth and were making our descent upon some remote outpost in the universe, perhaps something on Mars." Howard himself found the location of the port city, surrounded by fierce granite mountains, "rather awesome," the austerity relieved by the roaring Lena River.

Once on the ground, Howard and his crew faced the same problem they'd had at Omsk—the need for an English-speaking interpreter. Howard cursed himself for not bringing along a crew member fluent in Russian. Finally, a rotund teacher was summoned. He'd obviously consumed too much vodka early that morning, but he did know the English word for gasoline. Howard gave him the equivalent of one-hundred dollars in U.S. currency, but in Russian rubles. That was enough to get the teacher to instruct the airport crew to refuel the empty tanks. Howard's own crew took over the thorough inspection of the plane to prepare it for its flight to Fairbanks, Alaska.

Locals from the port town began to arrive at the airport in droves. At first Howard thought it was mere curiosity. But the teacher managed to convey to him the superstitions of the Yakutskites. The year was only 1938 but the plane contained "1939" as part of its name. The local rubberneckers thought that Howard's plane was some sort of spaceship that had flown back in time. They felt the Lockheed was an aircraft from the future.

As a final request to the teacher, Howard wrote down a cable for him to send to Kate at Fenwick. "Still safe, HH," was his terse greeting from bleak Siberia.

Bidding the gaping-mouthed people of Yakutsk a final goodbye, Howard and his crew had a beautiful takeoff. But he was extremely nervous, knowing that the maps supplied by the United States Hydrographic Survey were largely speculative in 1938 and had not been carefully plotted. "They were *guesstimates*," Howard later said. To compound his problem, he thought the maps were calibrated in feet. They were actually in meters.

At first the flying had gone smoothly. Something deep within Howard's soul seemed to bring out the poet in him as he later described the adventure to Glenn Odekirk back in New York. "The skies over Siberia were lavender with streaks of magenta. The sky would suddenly be pierced by bolts of the brightest golds and the most fiery reds, like a giant roaring bonfire fueled by kerosene."

Checking his instrument panel, Howard noted that he was flying at 7,500 feet above the earth as they approached a dangerous mountain range. Not knowing exactly how high these mountains were, he nosed the craft up to 8,500 feet. When one mountain came into immediate view, the craft climbed to almost 10,000 feet. Even so, the Lockheed barely cleared the 9,700-foot crest of the jagged mountain, only 25 feet below the plane. Richard Stoddart later said, "I could see every rock up close."

"The mountain was solid granite," Ed Lund later said. "Talk about tombstones!"

Howard had cursed the delay in Paris, but the stopover had saved his life and that of the crew. Without the delay in France, he surely would have been flying over these Siberian mountains in the pitch blackness of night and would no doubt have crashed.

Unnerved by the experiences over Siberia, Howard was eager to return to the North American continent. He pointed his craft in the direction of Fairbanks. "We're going home, fellows," he told his crew. "The worst is over."

Fairbanks, Alaska, 1938

It was 3:01pm on the afternoon of Wednesday, July 13 th , that Howard's plane touched down on the airport runway at Fairbanks. Waiting to greet him was the widow of Wiley Post. Her husband had been killed instantly in a plane crash with humorist Will Rogers in Point Barrow, Alaska, on August 15, 1935. Mae Post rushed to embrace Howard and kissed him on his cheek, with its three days' growth of beard. Tears were streaming down her face.

The widow talked briefly about Wiley's own successful circling of the globe in 1931. Suddenly, a ground crew member, in attempting to help with the refueling, opened the wrong compartment, releasing thousands of Ping-Pong balls Howard had stored there in case the plane was forced to land on water. Eager souvenir hunters, who had flocked to the Fairbanks airport, fought for the hollow plastic balls, which they rightly perceived would be worth a lot of money one day.

Spending as little time as possible at Fairbanks for refueling, Howard was wished "Godspeed" by Mae Post and waved goodbye as his plane headed south to Canada and ultimately to the United States.

News of Howard's arrival at Alaska was flashed around the world. "We're getting ready to give Hughes and his men a real New York welcome, Grover Whalen, "the greeter," announced to the press.

In New York, at Kate's Turtle Bay residence, reporters, the idle curious, and cameramen (they weren't called paparazzi back then) kept her townhouse under siege. "*Hughes-mania* is sweeping the country," columnist Walter Winchell proclaimed, "to all the ships at sea."

Howard planned another refueling stop in Manitoba. But a violent storm raging over western Canada prevented him from doing that. Changing plans at the last minute, he headed for a "pit stop" in Minneapolis instead.

Only one reporter was there to record the event for a world audience. On ground for only thirty-four minutes for refueling, Howard took off again, heading for his final stop at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, where it had all begun.

After becoming airborne over Minneapolis, he told his crew, "It's a cake-walk the rest of the way."

Such was not to be the case. Exhausted and so sleepy he could hardly keep his eyes open, Howard insisted on remaining at the controls. Stoddart felt he wanted "all the glory of the flight to belong just to him."



Howard Hughes, Fiorello LaGuardia

The weather abruptly turned against Howard, as he encountered one cloud bank coming in the wake of another across the Great Lakes. Fierce headwinds bombarded the Lockheed.

At two in the afternoon, the Lockheed passed over Scranton, Pennsylvania. It had begun its descent into Brooklyn.

From Floyd Bennett Field a message arrived for Howard. “You’re the toast of New York,” a control operator in Brooklyn notified him, as he was about to land. “Get ready to be mobbed!”

New York, 1938

From his pilot’s seat, Howard could see masses of people “like tiny ants,” some thirty thousand of them (estimates varied), converging onto the Brooklyn airfield to cause pandemonium. Although his arrival runway had been designated and a platform of microphones had been set up by New York’s “glad-han-der,” Grover Whalen, Howard made an impulsive decision. He steered his Lodestar to a more isolated strip on the field.

This sudden move completely upset everyone’s plans, including Police Commissioner Louis Valentine, who had summoned more than one thousand men in blue from New York’s finest to protect Howard, his fellow crewmen, and his plane.

Seeing Howard diverting the Lockheed and not wanting to miss any of the action, the unruly mob broke through police barricades and stormed toward the plane on the more remote airstrip. Howard was the last to emerge from the cockpit. Looking gaunt and with a four-day growth of beard, he stepped down onto the tarmac to the sound of thunderous applause, screaming, sirens, blowing horns, shrill whistles, and loud cheers. His “voyage into history” had taken three days, nineteen hours, eight minutes, and ten seconds.

He and his crew had flown a distance of 14,824 miles, beating the solo flight record of that one-eyed adventurer, Wiley Post, by almost half.

Screaming hysterically, fans, cameramen, and reporters rushed toward Howard and his weary crew. As reported in *The New York Times*, “Microphones were pushed in his face, flashbulbs blinded him throughout the episode, and the crowd became a mob.”

Huffing and puffing, Whalen, along with New York’s chubby mayor, Fiorello LaGuardia, finally arrived at the remote airstrip. A dozen policemen “cut a pathway” through to Howard.

Still trying to break through, a young staff member from Western Union fought the surging crowd to pierce Howard’s inner circle to deliver him a telegram. It was from Kate Hepburn, the first of thousands around the world to congratulate him on his epic voyage.

At the time of the landing and mass hysteria, Kate at her Turtle Bay residence in Manhattan was talking on the phone to Cary Grant who’d called her from Hollywood. He urged her to announce the date of her upcoming marriage to Howard in a hastily called press conference that following morning —“and for God’s sake set a date and stick to it.” The actor told her that her announcement of her upcoming marriage would be a marvelous way to cash in on all the worldwide publicity generated by Howard’s record-breaking flight. “It will revitalize your career,” Cary told Kate. Before ringing off, he also claimed that if she’d make an announcement in the press, “It will push David Selznick over the edge in granting you the role of Scarlett.”

He was referring, of course, to the role Kate coveted above all others—that of Scarlett O’Hara in the upcoming film version of Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone With the Wind*.

At the Brooklyn Field, Whalen practically dragged Howard to a position in front of the microphones, where LaGuardia addressed the nation. “Seven million New Yorkers offer congratulations for the greatest record established in the history of aviation.”

In his grating, high-pitched voice, Howard, his eyes sagging in exhaustion, spoke to the nation rather ungracefully. “The flight was wonderful and this is the world’s best crew. All I can say is, this crowd frightens me more than anything in the last three days! I’m glad it’s over. I expect to get as much sleep this week as possible. I want to bathe and eat, get a massage and a good shave.”

Whalen had reserved rooms for Howard and his crew at the Hampshire Hotel on Central Park. But he first invited Howard and his men to be driven by limousine to his house at 48 Washington Mews in Greenwich Village, which originally had been two adjoining stables for horses.

After chatting briefly with LaGuardia and reporters at the mews house, Howard excused himself claiming, “I smell like a skunk.” He quickly went upstairs where Whalen’s Filipino houseboy, Juan, had prepared a bubble bath for him.

After thirty minutes, Whalen came upstairs to offer Howard a clean white shirt. Howard’s already thin and lanky frame had shrunk even more after the flight, and the shirt didn’t fit. Whalen quickly summoned Juan to rush over to Wanamaker’s and purchase a smaller shirt, size 15 ½.

Howard promised his host he’d be down soon to join the mayor and reporters. When another thirty minutes passed, and no Howard, Whalen went upstairs again to investigate, finding that Howard had flown the coop. He’d crawled through a window, sneaking into the backyard and disappearing through a rose-festooned iron gate onto Eighth Street.

There he hailed a Yellow Cab to take him to Kate’s house at Turtle Bay. As the cab approached the house, Howard, to his dismay, saw that the street outside her residence was packed with reporters, photographers and rubbernecks. Each hoped to catch a glimpse of the dashing aviator as he appeared on the doorstep of his lady love.

He ordered the taxi driver to turn back and take him to the Drake Hotel instead. He registered under the name of Howard Alexander. In his suite, he called Kate and talked for thirty minutes, filling her in on the harrowing details of his around-the-world voyage. Before ringing off, he agreed to meet with her the following day.

There has been much speculation, often in print, about what Howard did on his first night back in New York. Most of these tales are romantic, spinning around the myth that he spent the night in the arms of Kate Hepburn making love. Of course, all these contrived stories fail to take into account that he was too exhausted to make love to anyone, even Cary Grant.

The most fanciful tale of all was written by actress Terry Moore in her tell-all book, *The Passions of Howard Hughes*. Terry was a longtime mistress of Howard’s, and, as she claims, one of his wives.

In her tale, Terry has Kate arriving at the Drake Hotel disguised as a bellhop to avoid reporters. She appears at the door of Howard’s suite in a “forest green uniform with gold épaulets on the shoulders, big brass buttons on the front of the jacket, and gold braid running down the sides of her trousers.”

Having disguised herself in such a way, we are led to believe, she delivers a bottle of Cristal Rodier, 1931, and sandwiches “for my flyboy.” As if a tape recorder existed within the suite, Terry reports the following dialogue.

HOWARD: Katie, do it to me.

KATE: Do what?

HOWARD: You know what. It’s all I could think about.

KATE: No, I’m not going to do it.

HOWARD: C’mon Katie, do it.

KATE: No, you haven’t been a good boy.

HOWARD: I’ve been a very good boy, in fact, I’ve been the best.

At this point Terry has Kate unfastening the buckle to Howard’s trousers to “feel for him,” as his breath becomes spasmodic. But instead of a night of passion as envisioned by Miss Moore, Howard told Glenn Odekirk the following day that he’d ordered a large piece of pound cake and a quart of cold milk from room service. A bellhop did arrive, a bona-fide man this time, wearing exactly the same uniform as described by Terry. After consuming the cake and cold milk, Howard claimed that, “I fell into the sleep of the dead.”

Accompanied by Mayor LaGuardia and Grover Whalen, Howard received the traditional ticker-tape parade that New York awarded during that era to America’s heroes. In an open car, he was driven up Broadway through the “Canyon of Heroes,” facing a paper snowstorm. At one point a New York telephone directory, weighing two pounds, nearly knocked him unconscious. Later the Sanitation department claimed that some eighteen hundred tons of paper were thrown at Howard, as compared to the sixteen hundred tons which rained down on Charles Lindbergh in 1927 following his solo transatlantic flight to Paris.

“One of the strange customs of New Yorkers is to bombard its heroes with trash,” columnist Walter Winchell later remarked. *The New York Times* estimated that a million well-wishers lined the parade route along Broadway. Another eight hundred thousand jammed onto Lower Broadway between the Battery and City Hall.

Finally reaching City Hall in the hot, steamy July weather, Howard had to sit through a barrage of speeches. Mayor LaGuardia made the opening remarks, as Howard sat nervously on the podium, with “the face of a poet and the shyness of a schoolboy,” one reporter from *The New York Times* noted.

As he waited to be introduced, Howard kept biting and licking his chapped lips. He took off his hat, only to put it back on again, and he repeated that action endlessly.

In his nervousness, Whalen at long last introduced “the star of the hour,” calling Howard “Edward Hughes.” Hat in hand, Howard told the adoring throngs that his flight had placed the United States into the number one position in world aviation.

As the day wore on, the acclaim, the speeches, and the adoration began to take a toll on Howard. He was clearly growing impatient, and even bored with his achievement. “I want to move on,” he told Ed Lund and Glenn Odekirk.

Eventually, after his return to Burbank, he would tell Lund and Odekirk that he planned another global flight, this time aboard a new Boeing model 307, the *Stratoliner*, the first fully pressurized, high-altitude aircraft. On this upcoming trip, he would fly to the major capitals of the world as part of a goodwill tour. But Hitler’s invasion of Poland and the launch of World War II the following year would put an end to Howard’s dream.

In New York, it was nearly nine o’clock that evening as Howard’s limousine, flanked by a motorcycle escort of two policemen, rode up Fifth Avenue. When it stopped for a red light, Howard suddenly jumped out of the car and ran through the front entrance of a deluxe hotel. Racing through the lobby, he headed toward its side entrance and his escape. On Fifty-Sixth Street, he hailed a taxi and ordered the driver to take him to an official reception that Whalen was staging for him along the Jersey Shore.

Upon reaching the New Jersey coast, he ordered the taxi driver to halt about a block from the reception. Parked on a dark streetcorner was a black Lincoln with its lights off. Howard handed the taxi driver a one hundred dollar bill, although he usually didn’t carry cash with him. He waved the driver off and rushed across the street to slip back into the back seat of the darkened Lincoln and into the arms of Kate Hepburn.

Her driver then drove both of them to the entrance of the reception hall, where America’s second-most-famous couple, after “Franklin and Eleanor,” appeared like a “photographer’s dream” as they entered the building. Kate had linked her arm with Howard’s.

Back in New York around midnight and on that same evening, the manager of the Drake Hotel personally placed a DO NOT DISTURB sign on the door to the Honeymoon Suite, rented by Howard as a love nest for Kate and himself.

The suite had two bedrooms. After finishing off a bottle of champagne, Howard retired to his room, after kissing Kate goodbye at the door to hers. Shortly before two o’clock that morning, if George Cukor’s story is to be believed, the tall, lanky frame of Howard appeared at the door to Kate’s

bedroom. He entered without knocking.

As she would later recall to her confidants in Hollywood, Howard was completely nude except for the felt hat he'd worn on his flight around the world.

That night marked the beginning of the end of their celebrated relationship.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

New York, 1938

Howard left early the next morning for Washington, D.C., to take part in another parade in his honor. Before checking out of New York's Drake Hotel, he delivered an ultimatum to Kate. She had just three days to set a date for their wedding. After that, he was "withdrawing the offer forever."

She immediately called Cary Grant and burst into tears. "He doesn't want a real woman. He wants me to be his mother. I can't do it. It won't work." Even so, Cary still pressed marriage onto Kate. "His demands on you will be few, and you can pursue other affairs." The actor had endlessly repeated this point to her, as if it were the major selling point of a marriage to Howard.

"Sounds like the perfect marriage," she said before ringing off.

She called George Cukor and told him what happened. "I think I love Howard. I think he feels the same way about me. But in the end, both of us want fame more than each other. I fear that ambition has won out over love." She paused. "Or should I say *like*?"

She spent the rest of the day contemplating whether to call Howard and discuss a possible marriage or whether she should let the three-day ultimatum pass without a response.

Finally, she called him, not to discuss a date for their marriage, but to invite him to join her for a weekend at Fenwick where she wanted to spend time with her family. He rather abruptly turned her down.

Unknown to her, he'd already accepted another invitation, planning to visit his friend Sherman Fairchild at Lloyd's Neck. Other than Howard, Fairchild had also invited another guest of honor: Miss Fay Wray, King Kong's would-be mistress (if the ape's plumbing and some fighter planes had not intervened). She was taking time off from films to appear in summer theater in New England, starring in a light comedy, *George and Margaret*.

Ironically, Fay was married at the time to Howard's former friend and cousin by marriage. The writer, John Monk Saunders, had first wed Avis Hughes, Rupert's daughter. Saunders and Howard had several battles over *Hell's Angels*, the writer claiming that Howard had been "much too inspired" by his own script of *Wings* when he began filming *Hell's Angels*.

Saunders and Howard had also tangled over another script he wrote, *The Dawn Patrol*, for Howard Hawks. Howard had actually sued Hawks for *Dawn Patrol*, insisting that much of that film's script was lifted from *Hell's Angels*. The suit was dropped.

Because of bad blood that existed between Saunders and Howard, he had no qualms about putting the moves on Fay Wray.

"Actually, with Howard, it wouldn't have mattered if Saunders were his best and most loyal friend," Fairchild once confided to a group of men at his club. One of the members, William Lund, reported that Fairchild said that not as a put-down to Howard, but with a certain gleam of satisfaction. "Fairchild did the same thing himself with women, married or not," Lund claimed.



Fay Wray

The daughter of a Canadian rancher, Fay was a dark-haired, rather fragile-looking beauty with delicate chalk-white skin. Her father had driven her by stagecoach from Alberta to resettle in Arizona. A fellow Virgo, she was two years older than Howard. He'd seen her on the screen, not only in *King Kong*, but when she'd appeared as a poor Viennese girl, Mitzi, opposite Erich von Stroheim in *The Wedding March* in 1926.

Fay had met Howard on at least three other occasions without arousing any passion in him. On meeting him again on the East Coast, she later said that she'd noticed an enormous change in him. "He'd lost that little boy shyness," she said in a rare 1976 interview she granted. "He was more self-assured. I guess being an aviation hero did that for him."

Both Fay and Howard had been invited as weekend guests at the home of Jock Whitney in Saratoga. Apparently, Howard did not know that Fay would be there until he arrived at the Whitney home. Sportsman and philanthropist, Jock is known today as the last publisher of *The New York Herald Tribune* and the chief financial backer of President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Jock and Howard had become good friends and often bragged about mutual conquests they'd shared, including Tallulah Bankhead. In spite of Charlie Chaplin, Jock was also having an affair with Paulette Goddard, whom he recommended to Howard "but only after I'm through with her." Jock also kidded Howard, claiming, "Joan Crawford put out for me, but kept her chastity belt locked for you."

Apparently, Jock asked Fay to Saratoga to seduce her, but foolishly he also invited his chief rival in the boudoir, Howard himself.

"When he arrived at Jock's house," Fay said, "Howard paid attention to no one but me. I was extremely flattered. Jock had invited a lot of his society friends to meet the conquering hero of the air. Howard asked me to step out on the terrace for some fresh air. What he wanted was to get away from his adoring fans. Out on the terrace, he took my hand and looked into my eyes. I still remember his comment. He turned to me and said, 'I thought you brought a virginal beauty to the screen.'"

"I'm no virgin, Mr. Hughes," I told him. I was a bit coy perhaps. Actually, I resented the virginal roles I'd been given. In Hollywood, I was the damsel in distress. Producers called me 'the screamer.' I was also a woman of the world. I'd had affairs with the likes of Gary Cooper, Hoot Gibson,

and even Ralph Graves. Decades later, a gossip friend told me that Howard too had had affairs with Gary and Ralph.”

She admitted her surprise that Howard was so obviously in hot pursuit of her because she’d practically read “nothing else in the papers but his passion for Hepburn.” She’d been skeptical of “this great romance” between Howard and Kate for some time. Ironically, at the time of her meeting with Howard, Fay’s agent was none other than Leland Hayward, with whom she was also having an affair.

Leland had admitted to her that he and Kate were also having an on-again, off-again affair, even though the press had her madly in love with Howard. “What a tangled web we wove with our romantic intrigue back then,” Fay said. “At least in Hollywood, we liked to keep our love-making all in the family. I was involved with Leland who was involved with Hepburn who was involved with Howard who was now trying to get involved with me.”

While houseguests of Jock, both Fay and Howard met a wealthy Long Island couple, Herbert and Margaret Swope. Assuming that Howard and Fay were “illicit lovers,” Herbert invited the couple for a weekend at his own Long Island estate. “You’ll escape the reporters there,” Herbert promised. Fay admitted her surprise when Howard so readily accepted the invitation. Intrigued by the offer as well, she also accepted.

In her aptly titled memoir, *On the Other Hand*, Fay remembered Howard’s arrival at the Swope home. He looked weary “with his shirt rumpled.” She recalled that he wore “blue serge trousers held up by a leather belt that was tied in a knot, the buckle missing.”

In her 1976 interview, she said, “He didn’t look much like America’s hero of the decade. But he had an undeniable appeal. My marriage to John Saunders was breaking up, and I was ripe for another affair. Howard appeared in my life just at the right time. I was feeling weak and vulnerable. Of course, women have used that old line for centuries to commit adultery.”

After the stay with the Swopes couple, Howard began to show up every night at Fay’s dressing room door at a Long Island theater. “He was a real stage door Johnny,” she confessed. “After an evening’s performance, he would drive me back to the Pierre in New York and gingerly kiss me goodnight—on the cheek no less. Once I invited him up to my room but, like the gentleman that he was, he declined.”

“After about eight nights of dating, he asked me to come and spend the weekend with him at Sherman Fairchild’s mansion on Long Island,” she said. “He tempted me by sending me a hundred blooms of the sweetest smelling gardenias God ever grew on this earth. I’d heard that he’d given the same floral tribute to Hepburn. Foolishly, I agreed to go.”

She was to meet him at the train station at Stamford, Connecticut. Arriving at the station, she spotted Howard running toward her. He claimed he couldn’t get on the train with her because he was being chased by a “gaggle” of reporters. He feared that both of them would be mobbed by the press, their pictures splashed all over the New York tabloids in the morning.

“Before disappearing again, he then directed me to return to my suite at the Pierre,” she said. “I did as he instructed. Once back in my suite, I got a call from him. This time he directed me to meet him at the Thirty Fourth Street Pier on the East River. When I got there, I found him waiting for me in a seaplane, a craft so small it could hardly contain his long, lanky frame.”

“We flew under the Fifty-Ninth Street Bridge,” she said. “I’d read that he’d pulled the same stunt with Hepburn. The gardenias, the under-the-bridge flight in the seaplane—I was beginning to feel that he was wooing me in the exact same way he’d courted Hepburn.”

He steered the plane toward Long Island where he landed on a small lake. From there, he escorted her along the short walk to the Fairchild mansion.

After dinner with Fairchild, she said she turned in early, as Howard remained downstairs to talk to his host. “I dressed for bed and put on a silk nightgown,” she said. “In less than an hour, Howard just appeared in my bedroom where I was resting comfortably in a lavish four-poster bed. A door at the far end of the room opened. Naïvely, I was surprised to see him. Realistically and emotionally, I knew I was not going to send him away.”

At that point in the saga, Fay in her memoirs dropped the subject. She grew up in an era on the screen when the shades were pulled as a man and woman came together in the boudoir for love-making. In her 1976 interview, she was more candidly revealing.

“Over the years, many other actresses have told me what a disappointing lover Howard was,” she said. “I think the word impotent was actually used. That was not the case with Howard and me. I found him a tender, loving male animal, emphasis on the *animal*. He rekindled a passion in me that I thought had been smothered during my difficult marriage to John, who was a notorious womanizer. I think I fell in love with Howard after that first night. Instead of looking upon it as an adulterous affair on my part, I viewed it as my honeymoon night.”

“I woke up the next morning looking like Vivien Leigh in *Gone With the Wind*,” Fay said. “Of course, the film hadn’t been made at the time. You remember the scene where Rhett Butler carries her up those wide stairs and rapes her, and she wakes up the next morning with a cat-swallowed-the-canary smile on her face. That was *moi*. Of course, Howard didn’t rape me. I was only too willing. What Kong didn’t get from me, Howard did. He did bear some resemblance to Kong, if you get my drift.”

She claimed that never once did he mention Kate Hepburn to her. “The papers were full of his upcoming marriage. You couldn’t pick up a magazine without seeing those two on the cover. What the world didn’t know at the time was that Howard wasn’t in Hepburn’s arms—that is, if he’d ever been in her arms—but was in mine.”

Over the next few days, Howard and Fay were seen everywhere together. For the first time, snippets of gossip about the Wray/Hughes romance began to appear in the newspapers, first in New York and then in Hollywood. Indiscreetly, Fay answered a call from Louella Parsons and confided that Howard had asked her to marry him—and that she had accepted. She said that this tidbit of gossip was off the record, and promised Louella that if she would not print the item now, she’d give her the full scoop of their intended wedding date.

When one reporter spotted Fay and Howard kissing at a Long Island Pier, he asked. “Are you engaged to Hughes?” The couple dashed away from him. Fay turned back coyly and called to the reporter, “Oh, is *this* Mr. Hughes?” Howard rushed her aboard a speedboat and headed back to the Fairchild mansion for privacy.

“By the way, what did those guys pay you for King Kong?” Howard asked Fay one night at dinner. “They made a bundle off of you.”

“Ten thousand dollars—that was it,” she told him.

“Were you afraid at any time?” he asked her.

“Are you kidding?” she said. “Kong was only eighteen inches tall. Actually, my fear was that I’d slip and fall from his fake arm which was eight feet long. They would bring this fake arm down and tighten it around my waist, then pull me up in the air. Every time I moved, one of the fingers would loosen, so it would look like I was trying to get away. Instead, I was trying not to slip through that hand.”

On yet another night, Fay claimed that Howard took her to the 102-story skyscraper, the Empire State Building, where the giant ape had placed her on a ledge before lunging furiously at fighter planes peppering him with bullets before he fell to his death. “If you want to own that building, I’ll buy it for you,” she claimed that Howard told her that night.

[When Fay Wray died in August of 2004, the Empire State Building dimmed its lights for fifteen minutes in her honor.]

At the time Howard was pursuing Fay, she was also being sought after by author Sinclair Lewis, then at the height of his fame. “Faced with a choice of handsome Howard or ugly Sinclair, it was no contest,” Fay said. “To me, Sinclair looked more beastly than Kong.” She remembered Sinclair, her

stalker, in her memoirs as “unattractive in appearance—tall, gangly, and skeletal, his narrow face pockmarked, his teeth and fingers yellow from smoking. A small amount of hair justified the nickname ‘Red.’”

Another writer, Clifford Odets, would succeed with Fay where Sinclair Lewis didn’t—that is, when Odets wasn’t with Cary Grant who wasn’t otherwise engaged with Howard himself.

“It was romance on the air and sea,” Fay later claimed. “Howard was picking me up at that East River Pier in New York and flying me to various mansions on Long Island Sound. We were visiting all his rich friends—acquaintances really—that he’d met in summers gone by. The only people we didn’t call upon were the Hepburns at Fenwick. He promised to revitalize my career and put me in big and important pictures which would blot out the image of me as the bride of Kong. ‘When you see the scripts I’ve got planned for you, you’ll view each one as a potential Oscar winner. No more screams for you. Your vocal chords won’t have to work overtime.’ I chided him: ‘Twas beauty killed the beast,’ I said before tumbling into bed with my handsome, rich beau.”

After thirty days, Howard abruptly dropped Fay and never called her again. He refused to answer her teary phone calls. “Our affair began like a dream and ended like a nightmare,” she said.

After being dumped by Howard, Fay did not repair her marriage to John. Conditions worsened after he injected her with drugs while she slept. He later sold their house and furnishings, keeping all the money for himself. For a time, he kidnapped their daughter, Susan, and disappeared.

John continued to brood about his wife’s affair with Howard long after it was over.

“Even when I was no longer seeing Howard, John told everyone I was divorcing him to marry Howard, which wasn’t true,” she said. “I think John knew it wasn’t true. But he still claimed it. It was an excuse for him to keep drinking more and taking more drugs. He was slowly killing himself. Apparently, a slow death was not what he had in mind. He committed suicide in Fort Myers on March 11 in 1940. We’d divorced the year before.”

Before his death, Saunders sent Howard a screenplay he’d actually completed in September of 1935. It was entitled *Lawrence of Arabia*. Howard briefly scanned the script and rejected it, finding that the subject of the adventures of Lawrence of Arabia had “no commercial appeal to the general public.” The subject of Lawrence would have to wait until 1962 when David Lean came out with his now classic version, much of the action having been preconceived long before by Saunders.

Fay was the final straw for Kate. She never confronted Howard directly but called Cary Grant in Hollywood to tell him, “There will be no marriage! Howard and I were never lovers. We were always good friends, and that’s how we’ll remain from now on. Our affair is over. Actually, it never began.”

Houston, 1938

Like New York, Chicago turned out en masse to greet Howard with a ticker-tape parade along La Salle Street on July 20, 1938. That afternoon he was hailed as “the new king of aviation.” *The Chicago Tribune* proclaimed, “As long as America has men like aviator Howard Hughes, Hitler’s Luftwaffe doesn’t even have a fighting chance.” Although the comment smacked of jingoism, Howard lapped it up.

In his silver Lockheed, Howard flew from Chicago for a long overdue appearance in Houston. As his plane landed at the modest airfield—rechristened by city officials as The Howard Hughes Airport—some ten thousand people were on hand to welcome their hometown hero.

As he stepped out of the cockpit, the National Junior Chamber of Commerce had recently proclaimed him as one of the outstanding young men of 1938, along with New York’s Thomas E. Dewey, who would run against Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1944 and against Harry Truman in 1948. Not only that, but the National Aeronautics Association had named him Aviator of the Year, and the editorial board at *Colliers* magazine had given him its coveted trophy for aviation achievement of the year. That latter triumph would bring Howard back to the White House where President Roosevelt himself would make the presentation.

Later that afternoon, 350,000 Houstonians—three-fourths of the city’s population—lined the streets of Houston to welcome Howard, greeting him with cheers and showers of confetti. He had a reunion with his long-suffering aunt, Annette Lummis, at the old family manse on Yoakum Boulevard, which seemed to stir up bitter childhood memories for Howard.

Even so, some fifty former acquaintances showed up on the back porch to welcome him home. Howard’s boyhood friend, Dudley Sharp, had asked to come but Howard turned down the request.

On the back porch, Howard chatted with men and women he’d known, enjoying Houston ice tea punch and slices of watermelon along with Annette’s “triple threat” chocolate fudge cake. After the well-wishers had gone, Howard told Annette, “I didn’t think any of my friends would speak to me again after I divorced Ella.”

That night his aunt accompanied him to a banquet hosted by Texas governor, James V. Allred. Howard appeared uncomfortable, and it became obvious that the constant parades, banquets, and speeches were making him restless.

Even so, he flattered the state of his birth in a speech. “Coming from Texas peculiarly fits a person for flying around the world,” he told diners at the banquet. “There’s nothing you can see anywhere that you can’t see in Texas, and after you’ve flown across Texas two or three times, the distance around the world doesn’t seem so great. Now we’d better sample this ice cream *à la Howard* on the menu before it melts.”

The next day, *Time* magazine referred to him as “the young man who looked like Gary Cooper and flew like Lindbergh.” Howard paid a visit to his employees at Toolco, where he was greeted with WELCOME HOWARD signs. At a dinner that night, Howard caught up on his much neglected business affairs with Noah Dietrich. At the time he told Dietrich that he’d already achieved his greatest ambition, which was to become “the world’s greatest aviator.”

Dietrich confronted him with Toolco business and was dismayed at Howard’s lack of attention, even though Toolco remained the source of his wealth. Dietrich quickly brought him up to date on the state of business affairs, even presenting him with evidence that one of his executives was stealing money from Toolco at the rate of \$250,000 a year. The executive had been so brazen that he would, for example, charge \$25,000 worth of paintings which he would then order delivered to his private home. To Dietrich’s surprise, Howard did not immediately order the firing of this official and refused to bring charges. “It’ll stir up bad will in Houston if I do because he has powerful friends who will get back at me by taking their business elsewhere.” Eventually, Dietrich was able to ease the executive out the Toolco door without charges or a scandal.

Although warm and gracious in public during the banquets, parades, and honors, Howard was “colder than ever, with his arteries pumping ice water,” according to Dietrich. He later claimed that Howard had become more ruthless in his sexual use of both handsome young men and beautiful

women. “After that flight around the world, he was to launch himself into the most callous period of his life, proceeding without any regard for the feelings of others. He did what he god damn pleased, regardless of how it might have impacted anybody else. He would simply devour people in the future, much like a Roman emperor, summoning them to his court and then discarding them when he grew tired of them like he’d done with Fay Wray. I never knew a man who was so totally devoid of emotion.”

That night, Howard told Annette, “There’s nothing to come home to when I get back to Muirfield. I don’t know what my next career move is going to be. I’m considering big things in aviation because a war’s sure to come. Airplanes will decide the ultimate victor.”

She inquired about his romance with Kate.

“That’s off!” he claimed. “I’m in the market for a new girlfriend.”

It was July 31, 1938 at 1:35pm at the Howard Hughes Airport. Toolco employees, Gano cousins from Dallas, Annette, Noah Dietrich and others watched as the *New York’s World Fair 1939* was refueled and prepared for takeoff.

Howard waved a final goodbye to his well-wishers. He roared down the runway in the Lockheed and disappeared into an ominous gray cloud that had suddenly appeared on the horizon. In its denseness, Houston and its memories were quickly blotted out.

At that very moment, *The Houston Post* was publishing an edition that asserted that Howard had returned to his hometown with “more glory heaped upon his slim shoulders than a dozen men ever know in lifetime.” A modest comment, for sure. Instead of dozen men, the Post might have more accurately reported millions of men.

Annette stood for a long moment after the Lockheed had disappeared. She could not have imagined that she would never see her nephew again. Even though he was destined to live for another thirty-eight years, he’d paid his final visit to his hometown and would return only as a corpse flying in on a plane from Mexico.

California, 1938-1950s

Even though barely twenty-one, Susan Hayward’s granite-hard Brooklynese spirit reminded Howard of Barbara Stanwyck. A sexy, gutsy redhead, she’d been born into poverty, the daughter of a Coney Island carnival barker, Walter Marrener, and his Swedish wife, Ellen. She’d hawked copies of *The Brooklyn Eagle* on street corners before graduating to the stenographer’s pool. Eventually she became a photographer’s model, which after a few short months landed her photograph on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*. There, it was seen by director George Cukor, who brought it to the attention of David O. Selznick, at the time searching for an actress to star as Scarlett O’Hara in *Gone With the Wind*.

Howard, too, had started to scan magazine covers looking for “new talent” to seduce. Like Cukor and Selznick, but unaware of their professional interest, he was struck by Susan’s beauty.

Selznick’s test of Edythe Marrener (Susan’s real name) “was terrible,” in the words of her first agent, Ben Medford. “She couldn’t act. Nobody liked her. She was a real bitch. But I saw talent there.”

Instead of playing Scarlett, Susan ended up in bit parts for Warner Brothers, including the 1938 Grade B flick, *Girls on Probation*. This brought her into contact with another B picture actor, handsome Ronald Reagan from Tampico, Illinois. She fell in love with him at once and began a passionate affair. Trouble was, he also made *Brother Rat* that same year with another rising young star, Jane Wyman, and she fell for Reagan too. At the time Howard met Susan, Jane was winning the race for Reagan.

Howard urged Johnny Meyer to goad Ben Medford to arrange a date between Susan and himself. Howard’s pimp made some vague promise that his boss was going back into the movie business, and that he was looking for an unknown to star in a film about Billy the Kid. Of course, the movie would eventually be released as *The Outlaw*, starring not Susan, but a bosomy Jane Russell.

Learning of his interest, Susan called Howard and invited him to her apartment for “a Brooklyn fried chicken dinner.” Hereadily accepted. “I wouldn’t be the first gal from Brooklyn who seduced a tall Texan,” she said to Medford.



Susan Hayward

As Howard later told Noah Dietrich, “I disliked her intensely, and she disliked me. Incidentally, do people in Brooklyn eat their chicken bloody? It was disgusting. She spent the entire evening talking about how crazy she was about Ronald Reagan and what a bitch Jane Wyman was. At least I learned something. She told me that redheads make better actresses than blondes because the emotions of natural redheads are much closer to their face.”

He quickly dropped Susan from his list, although he continued to watch her career as she won one Oscar nomination after another, appearing in powerful dramas such as *My Foolish Heart*, *Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman*, and *They Won’t Believe Me*. He’d even followed the progress—or lack thereof—of her marriage to Grade B actor, the college-hero-handsome Jess Barker. Howard knew that her marriage had a financial imbalance, with

Susan earning \$400,000 a year and Jess pulling in only \$650.

Howard ordered private screenings of all Susan's films, the good and the bad. Her beauty had captivated him when he'd seen her appear opposite Gregory Peck in *David and Bathsheba* in 1951. He was so intrigued, in fact, that he'd ordered a rough cut of *With A Song in My Heart*. After viewing it, he called Darryl F. Zanuck and told him that he wanted Susan for the female lead role in a property he was developing at RKO called *This Man Is Mine*. A horse trade was in the offing. Zanuck wanted to borrow Jane Russell, still under personal contract to Howard, for *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* opposite Marilyn Monroe. A deal was worked out, and Zanuck agreed to release Susan to make the film. The title had been changed to *The Lusty Men*, and her co-stars would be Robert Mitchum and Arthur Kennedy. Susan hated the script, rightly perceiving that it was a man's picture. "If anyone goes to see this stinker, it'll be for the rodeo scenes," she said in disgust.

On the set, Susan was warm and cordial to Howard, although there was no immediate romance. She detested Mitchum. "The script calls for me to be antagonistic toward Mitchum," she told Kennedy. "Believe me, that isn't acting on my part." Mitchum, Howard's favorite actor, didn't help matters by calling Susan "the old gray mare" every time she walked by. Before intimate on-cam-era scenes with her, he munched raw cloves of garlic.

Hayward's biographer, Beverly Linet, wrote in *Portrait of a Survivor*, "For all his bizarre behavior and varied sexual exploits, Hughes had an almost prudish morality in some way, which included a self-imposed proviso against bedding another man's wife." Nothing could be more unlike Howard. Although he'd become widely known for preferring recently divorced women—calling them "wet decks"—he liked married women even more. Billie Dove and Ginger Rogers were prime examples of that. In the case of Ginger, it might also be added that Howard liked bedding the husbands of beautiful actresses as well, particularly if they were young and handsome.

Not only was her own marriage to Jess Barker deteriorating, Susan was fascinated with Howard's charm and wealth. She even predicted to Arthur Kennedy that she was going to become the second Mrs. Howard Hughes.

Howard still had an abiding interest in A list actresses, although as the Fifties deepened he was seen more and more with starlets than stars. In the early Fifties, Susan Hayward was the undisputed queen of Twentieth Century Fox. The foreign press had dubbed her "The World's Most Famous Screen Star of 1952." Of course, an Eve Harrington was waiting in the wings to take over for Margo Channing in the film, *All About Eve*. In Susan's case, her dethroning would occur in only two years, when none other than Marilyn Monroe was unofficially crowned queen.

Howard began to pursue Susan with his usual intensity. Every day the most beautiful cut flowers in Los Angeles arrived on her doorstep. Even though still married to Barker, but separated, Susan began to date Howard. He'd arrive at her household to pick her up on dates. Her twin sons, Gregory and Timothy, had been born on February 19, 1945, and Susan introduced them to Howard as "Mr. Magic," never giving his real name.

As their affair deepened, a diamond bracelet arrived from Howard. Later, an elephant gray Rolls-Royce. Unknown to Susan at the time, Howard was dating starlet Jean Peters (his future wife) on the side. He was also linked with other star-lets, including Debra Paget, who coyly flashed a large diamond ring, "a trinket from Howard," at least according to columnist Walter Winchell.



Jess Barker

To camouflage her affair with Howard, Susan went out with other actors, notably cross-dresser Jeff Chandler, an extraordinarily handsome man with premature gray hair. "We're just two kids from Brooklyn," Susan told Louella Parsons, her old friend. Sometimes when Chandler would let Susan off at her doorstep, giving her a chaste kiss on the cheek, Howard would be waiting across the street in his darkened silver Duesenberg to take Susan to Muirfield for an early morning rendezvous.

One evening when Barker had been at Susan's house, after spending a day visiting with his twin boys, a violent fight erupted between the two of them. He pleaded with her to take him back, but she refused. When she denounced him as a failure both as a man and an actor, he struck her in the mouth, knocking her down.

With fierce determination, she picked herself up off the floor and grabbed a heavy vase, throwing it at his face. He ducked in time and punched her in the face again in retaliation. Hitting the floor, she suffered his kicks to her stomach. He then tore off her clothes as she clawed him. Still enraged, he crushed his heel into her face, bleeding her nose. He picked her up as she fought like an enraged tiger, and carried her onto the terrace where he tossed her nude body into the pool. When her head emerged, he forced it back down into the water, trying to drown her. He stormed out of the house.

Not knowing where he was, she feared he was going for a gun she kept upstairs in her vanity. Pulling her bloody and bruised body from the pool, she ran nude across the lawn and into a neighbor's backyard, screaming for them to call the police. The news of this blowup would make headlines around the world, and would become part of the testimony at her divorce hearing.

When Susan told Howard about her ordeal, he was furious and totally enraged at Barker, although Howard had slapped a few women in his day. She wanted vengeance, and Howard agreed to help her by setting a trap for Barker. He would arrange a meeting with him, holding out the prospect of a big role to help his stalled career. Secretly, Howard had arranged for two of Johnny Meyer's goons to lay in wait for Barker, with orders to "beat him to a pulp and bash in his face—but not kill him." According to Johnny Meyer, Howard promised Susan that "Jess Barker will never appear in front of a

camera again unless he tries out for monster roles.”

The rendezvous between Barker and Howard did not go off as Susan or even Howard had intended. He agreed to meet Barker at three o’clock in the morning near the port of Los Angeles. Barker had read in the papers that Howard often conducted business very late at night in parked cars in rough neighborhoods of Los Angeles. Presumably, Barker wasn’t too surprised at the circumstances of the invitation.

Meyer never knew exactly what happened on that night the handsome young actor got into the Duesenberg with Howard. All that is known is that when Meyer’s toughs came to “rearrange” Barker’s face, Howard called off the assault. Instead of giving him a beating, Howard drove Barker to the pier where his *Southern Cross* was waiting. As his crew readied the yacht for a sail to Catalina, Howard invited Barker into his master suite.

“Jess Barker, from all reports, was straight,” Meyer later claimed. “But what out-of-work actor would not drop trou for Hughes? All I know is that Howard got to find out what attracted Susan to Barker back in 1944.”

Somehow, word of this sail to Catalina got back to Susan. For reasons not known, she decided not to hold this transgression against Howard, but blamed her husband for it instead. Angrily she denounced him and called him “a queer,” which he really wasn’t.

When that big movie role didn’t emerge, and Barker realized he’d been had by Howard, he instructed his attorney to name Howard in his upcoming divorce proceedings against Susan, although not mentioning his homosexual liaison with Howard, which would have destroyed his last chance for a Hollywood career.

At a meeting in her attorney’s office, Susan waited impatiently for Jess Barker to show up with his own attorney. Finally, both Barker and the lawyer arrived, deliberately keeping Susan waiting for over an hour. They fought bitterly over the custody of their two boys. She also pleaded with him not to bring up Howard’s name in the divorce proceedings. He countered, “I plan to expose your sordid affair in all the papers.” At that point, her famous temper flared, and she crushed out her cigarette into his left eyeball. He was rushed to the nearest hospital.

In March of 1954, Howard’s name did come up in the divorce proceedings, which horrified him. He told Meyer that he was going to extricate himself from his affair with Susan.

In her court testimony, Susan claimed that her meetings with Howard were strictly business since she was scheduled to do a film for him. She also falsely claimed that she was trying to “get work from Hughes for my jobless husband.”

Howard limped along in his affair with Susan, not breaking it off right away. Actually he was spending more and more time with Jean Peters, other beautiful starlets, and male hustlers supplied by Henry Willson.

In a reckless, impulsive move, Howard on New Year’s Eve 1955, booked himself with three dates, all at the same time and on the same night within different areas of the Beverly Hills Hotel. He told Meyer that it was his banana split. “They are the three different scoops of ice cream. I’m the banana.”

Each woman—Jean Peters, Susan Hayward, and aspirant singer and starlet, Yvonne Shubert—was placed at a table in a different dining room, with the seemingly amused Howard racing from table to table. To explain his absence, he was summoned by the hotel bellhop, whom he’d already bribed, to take a lot of emergency phone calls.

Many observers of Howard’s love life viewed fifteen-year-old Yvonne Shubert as Howard’s “last hurrah.” After seeing her picture in a magazine, he’d signed her up and sent her to take vocal, dance, and drama lessons. Howard had promised to marry her, and the young and inexperienced girl had fallen hopelessly in love with the fifty-year-old movie mogul and aviation hero. With increasingly forceful promises of marriage, he’d installed her in a sprawling house in Coldwater Canyon. He’d also “permanently” reserved a suite for her at the Beverly Hills Hotel, where he’d assigned four guards to watch over her. He’d also bugged the phones in both her home and the hotel suite.

In the main salon of the hotel’s dining room, Jean Peters sat regally like a queen while waiters brought in chilled bottles of Don Perignon plus dozens of sweet-smelling gardenias.

Thinking she was going to get a proposal of marriage, Jean had never looked more beautiful. She wore a stunning white sequined gown, the creation of Jean Louis. Her brunette hair was piled on top of her head, and a slash of scarlet lipstick effectively set off her porcelain white skin. Howard launched his evening with her with a champagne toast and talk of their upcoming marriage plans when her divorce from Stuart Cramer III came through. When the bellhop arrived with an urgent message from TWA, Howard excused himself, but not before presenting Jean with a diamond-and-sapphire bracelet from Cartier.

Then he was off for a champagne toast with Susan, who had been assigned the best table in the Polo Lounge. Nearing forty, she too looked stunning in mink and a sheer white organdy gown by Edith Head. Upon her arrival in the Polo Lounge, she’d been presented with a nosegay of red roses. Howard delivered a diamond-and-sapphire bracelet from Cartier. Susan later claimed that she fully expected that Howard was going to propose marriage that night.

Excusing himself when the bellhop approached with the urgent call, Howard rushed into the garden to Yvonne’s bungalow table. He’d had four guards positioned at the hotel with walkie-talkies to warn him of the approach of either of the other actresses.

A champagne toast with Yvonne, who was technically too young to drink, was followed by the presentation of a diamond-and-sapphire bracelet from Cartier that was nearly identical to the one offered a few moments previously to the other actresses. Yvonne, too, had never looked lovelier in her yellow silk brocaded dress with chiffon accents, the creation of Michael Woulfe, costume designer at MGM. He’d also filled Yvonne’s bungalow with “all the yellow roses in Texas.”

He pretended to enjoy the beef Stroganoff with her until summoned by an urgent phone call.

From the garden, he practically ran back to the main dining room and the table of Jean Peters.

Of the trio, Susan, the brightest, grew suspicious. She stormed into the main dining room where she caught Howard holding hands with Jean Peters and looking dreamily into her eyes. She came right up to Jean. “Hello, bitch,” she said loud enough for the room to hear her. “I’m date number one. I’m a star. You’re date number two. Always a starlet. Never a star.”

With that remark, Susan raced out of the hotel. Jean, after slapping Howard’s face, soon followed, ordering her limousine delivered to the main entrance. Neither woman knew of the presence of Yvonne back in the bungalow.

Yvonne later told writers that the evening was “incredibly romantic.”

At the stroke of midnight, it was Yvonne—not Jean or Susan—that Howard was kissing.

Somehow in the days that followed, Howard managed to get back into the good graces of both Susan and Jean. Yvonne still remained clueless. Fearing that Howard would never marry her, Susan grew more and more despondent in the weeks and months ahead. On April 26, 1955, her mother, Ellen Marrener, called the police. Her daughter had taken a near fatal overdose of sleeping pills.

Rushing to the scene, the police broke down her door and hauled her off to the North Hollywood Medical Center where photographers were waiting. A tongue depressor hung from her slack lips. In the emergency room, her stomach was pumped, and she eventually recovered, only to face a film that

would become lethal for her. “The sleeping pills didn’t do her in,” her mother said. “But Hughes’s *The Conqueror* did.”

Beginning in 1951, the U.S. government had launched nuclear explosions at Yucca Flat, Nevada, under Georgia O’Keefe skies. For background shots in *The Conqueror*, viewed today as “one of the fifty worst films ever made,” Howard ordered the crew to St. George, Utah. It was here that radioactive dust had rained down after the nuclear explosions across the border in Nevada. This section of the West was considered the most dangerous ground in the United States.

In sending his crew to such a lethal site, Howard could not totally plead ignorance. He’d produced the film, *Split Second*, with Dick Powell as director. Powell, husband of June Allyson, was also producing *The Conqueror*. *Split Second* dealt with the danger of radiation in Nevada caused by nuclear testing, so Howard was well versed on the subject.

In perhaps the worst case of miscasting in Hollywood history, John Wayne arrived on the outdoor set in Utah to play Genghis Khan. Susan, “the gal from Brooklyn,” was cast as a red-haired Tartar princess. Filming began on what would become a \$6 million epic.

Even after filming ended in Utah, several scenes had to be reshot at the RKO sound stages in Hollywood. For authenticity, Howard ordered that sixty tons of the radioactive dust from Utah be shipped to Hollywood. Once the earth arrived, Howard commanded Mexicans to spread it around the studio, hoping to recreate what would appear to be the Gobi Desert.

After the filming of *The Conqueror*, a picture Susan detested, she still continued her pursuit of Howard. Her hopeless quest reminded Louella Parsons of her attempt in the late 1930s to marry Ronald Reagan. When Susan was in Miami at the same time Howard was, she tried to call him at his hotel suite, but he wouldn’t return her messages.

Actually, Howard was in Miami with Jean Peters, hoping to establish a residence for her in her upcoming divorce from her husband, Stuart Cramer, whom she’d married in 1954.

Completely rejected by Howard, her dream of becoming Mrs. Howard Hughes a bitter memory, Susan sailed for The Bahamas. In Nassau, to forget Howard, she had an affair with a handsome, tall, and heavily muscled black man, whose appropriate nickname was “Bamboo.”

In the months and years ahead, dozens of the cast and crew of *The Conqueror*, including all of the stars, would die of cancer caused by their exposure to the radioactive set. Agnes Moorehead would become a victim of cancer, dying on April 30, 1974. Dick Powell succumbed to the disease on January 3, 1963. Pedro Armndáriz shot himself through the heart with a pistol he’d smuggled into the UCLA Medical Center in June of 1963 after learning that he had lymphatic cancer. Thomas Gomez died on June 18, 1971. Wayne himself fell victim to cancer on June 4, 1979, after a heroic fifteen-year struggle.

Susan would later fall victim to lung cancer, which would ultimately lead to brain tumors.

As she lay on her deathbed on March 14, 1975, she was still denouncing Howard and her other lovers, which included two future presidents, Ronald Reagan and John F. Kennedy. Her final comment on the subject was, “Men, I’d like to fry ‘em all in deep fat.”

Her last deathbed visitor was a mysterious woman in black who arrived at her doorstep. When Susan’s maid learned the woman’s identity, she immediately let her in, although Susan at that point was seeing only family members. Without permission, the maid ushered the mysterious woman into Susan’s bedroom. She immediately exploded in anger until the guest introduced herself. “Forgive the intrusion, Miss Hayward, but I’m your loyal fan. I’m Greta Garbo.”

The one person who did not appear to console Susan was Howard himself. He was almost as close to death as she was, lying in a darkened room, slowly dying with only his memories to keep him company. That and films.

His Mormon staff later reported that Howard ordered the screening of *The Conqueror* at least 150 times during the last years of his life. Critics panned the film, but Howard loved it, considering it his favorite. Eventually he bought back all the prints and withdrew it from circulation.

One of his male staff members reported that originally Howard masturbated as he watched the film until he grew too weak to do even that. Perhaps Howard identified with the role of Genghis Khan, as interpreted by John Wayne. The barbarian could select any victim in the world he so desired and order the person to submit to his sexual fantasies. Perhaps Howard found the idea of that stimulating now that he’d retired from the actual battleground himself.

Los Angeles, 1938

Although Kate Hepburn and Howard would never speak of marriage again, she did call him to solicit his help in jump-starting her career. Playwright Philip Barry had “a work in the oven,” a three-act play called *The Philadelphia Story*. Having been labeled as “box office poison” by film exhibitors, she was anxious for a comeback, both on the stage and on the screen.

When she called, Howard agreed to lend her a private plane to fly from Connecticut to Barry’s vacation retreat off the coast of Maine. Kate accepted his offer.

When she returned from Maine, she notified Howard that she liked what she’d read of the heroine, Tracy Lord, believing that the role was “the one” for her comeback. She planned to underwrite some of the production costs and needed Howard’s help. He told her to accept ten percent of the Broadway gross in lieu of salary and another twelve and a half percent of the road show take. He also advised her to put up twenty-five thousand dollars of her own money to secure the screen rights to *The Philadelphia Story* before it opened on Broadway.

At the time, that was never done. Prospective producers always waited until the play opened on Broadway and was a success, before attempting to purchase the screen rights.

He pledged \$30,000 to help her nail down the rights. That move turned out not only to be the greatest advice Kate ever received in her film career, but the money he invested in the play made a profit for him. *The Philadelphia Story*, of course, went on to become a big success for Kate, making her “the comeback kid,” both on the stage and in the movies. For the film, she’d wanted Spencer Tracy and Clark Gable, but “settled” for James Stewart and Cary Grant. She followed that role with the highly successful *Woman of the Year* (1942). That would at last bring her together with Spencer Tracy, whom she admired as an actor.

That film became a hit and would jointly launch them as a famous screen couple. Of course, they would be a couple of some sort off the screen as well.

Once she became involved with Tracy, Howard would see very little of Kate in the future. He was contemptuous of Tracy, calling him “the hired hand.” That no doubt was a reference to the fact that he’d hired Tracy to star in his film, *Sky Devils*. Howard was none too impressed with the actor,

telling Dietrich, “Kate’s got herself an old Irish drunk. I give the relationship three months before Tracy goes back to his wife.”

Howard was right about *The Philadelphia Story*, wrong about the endurance of the Tracy/Hepburn hookup. The two actors launched a troubled romance—more of a deep and abiding friendship really—that would last until Tracy’s death on June 10, 1967. As for Kate, she would “live forever,” as she once put it, dying at her beloved Fenwick in 2003.

Back in Connecticut in 1938, Kate was struggling with Philip Barry over rewrites for *The Philadelphia Story* when disaster struck at Fenwick. The hurricane that hit Connecticut in September of 1938 was one of the worst in the history of New England. Striking without warning, it destroyed Kate’s family home.

Hearing of her plight, Howard ordered one of his pilots in New York to fly in fresh water and food. When she received Howard’s care package, Kate held up a bottle of water. To her mother, Kit, and the rest of the household, she announced, “Water—not wine. Somehow symbolic of what my relationship with Howard has become.”

Kate Hepburn was hardly on Howard’s mind any more. He was involved in too many other love affairs. Since 1937, he’d also been involved in acquiring an airline.

Actually the news had come as a surprise to Noah Dietrich. Without consulting him, Howard had negotiated directly with Jack Frye, the president of Transcontinental and Western Airways, later renamed TransWorld Airlines or TWA. Called “the daredevil of the skies,” Frye wanted the check Howard had promised him.

To his shock and dismay, Dietrich learned that Howard had agreed to purchase 100,000 shares of TWA’s common stock, held by the Lehman Brothers, at ten dollars a share. (Actually, Howard would have needed only 99,293 shares of common stock for majority control of the airline.) Since Dietrich had told him that Toolco had earned thirteen million dollars in 1937, and that earnings would be even higher in 1938, Howard must have felt he was in the money. Indeed, he was.

Thanks partly to the arrival of World War II, Toolco would be earning \$22 million by 1941. Toolco profits would continue to rise throughout the war and into the post-war era. By 1948, Toolco was posting annual profits of fifty-five million dollars.

Before the end of the 1930s, Big Howard’s original drill bit had evolved into more than 200 different versions in all shapes and sizes. Whenever Howard heard of a competitor with a better bit, he purchased one of them and ordered his engineers to take it apart to find out what the innovation was. Once he learned what it was, he too went on the market with a new and improved bit. Often in the redesign of the bit, his engineers would make additional improvements. All this continued to give Toolco the “cutting edge” in the drill bit industry.

From the beginning stages of Howard’s acquisition of TWA, the onetime mail pilot, Frye, would be in fierce competition with Dietrich. The relationship between the two warriors got off to a bad start when Dietrich aggressively renegotiated the original agreement that had been struck between Hughes and Frye.

When he learned about TWA’s financial troubles, Howard told Dietrich to revise his original offer of ten dollars a share and get him the stock for eight dollars a share. “You be the bad boy,” he instructed Dietrich. “I don’t want to piss Frye off since I’ll be having to work with him.”

The new eight-dollar-a-share offer produced a screaming rage in Frye. He told Dietrich that he was “a shitass cocksucker hired to lick Hughes’s dingleber-ries off his crusty asshole.” That remark launched Dietrich and Frye into a tumultuous confrontation for the control of TWA that would last for months. After he settled down “and finished off a bottle of bourbon” that night, Frye called Dietrich the next morning, but not with an apology. In a plaintive voice, he asked, “Can I get eight dollars and twenty-five cents a share?”

Dietrich promised to check with the board at Toolco. He waited twenty minutes and amazingly didn’t even call Howard. Dialing Frye once again, he falsely claimed, “Toolco approves the deal.” Actually, it was Dietrich who’d made the deal, saving Howard \$200,000 of the monies he’d originally promised Frye. The ace pilot took the deal but was “forever pissed” at the hard-nosed Dietrich.

As much as Frye hated Dietrich, the former daredevil pilot endlessly admired Howard and his achievements in aviation. Both men shared adventure stories of their exploits in the air during the early days of aviation’s barnstorming era. Frye had seen *Hell’s Angels* a total of twenty-eight times, flattering Howard by calling it “the greatest movie ever made—and Harlow’s tits were easy on the eyes too.”

Although unspoken, it was obvious that Howard had a private reason for taking over TWA. He remained just as jealous of Charles Lindbergh in the late 30s as he was when “Lucky Lindy” made his historic flight to Paris. Even though Howard had beaten the aeronautical hero’s record, the jealous streak still cut deep into Howard. Lindbergh had founded TWA, and its silver mail planes—a virtual airborne advertisement for the aviator—were known as “The Lindbergh Airline.”

By 1940, Howard had acquired seventy-eight percent control of TWA by purchasing stock from all the “big boys” in the airline, including the dreaded Lindbergh himself. Once Howard assumed control, he ordered his maintenance staff to take silver lacquer and paint out the name of Lindbergh wherever it appeared on the planes. At one point Howard was tempted to order his men to paint in his own name, but at the last minute he rescinded the order.

Howard set out to make TWA a serious challenger of Pan American World Airways and in time American Airlines. In spite of his disappointment at the check for \$1.6 million, Frye called Howard “my savior.”

Howard would ultimately fail with TWA, as he did in so many other businesses, but initially the airline was a success. By 1941 TWA was transporting 260,000 passengers a year, an increase of nearly sixty percent since Howard’s takeover in 1939. He was an active stockholder, taking all the knowledge he’d learned during his record-setting flights and putting them to commercial use.

He installed an advanced hydraulic system in all his planes. Electronic advances included power steering. Cockpits were made larger, more spacious, and much safer. He created the first of the star-studded publicity flights, as when he’d fly movie stars from coast to coast, much to the delight of photographers waiting on the other end.

Writer Robert Sterling proclaimed that, “Howard shaped the line’s destiny as one would mold a piece of clay.”

After his takeover, Howard placed Dietrich on the board of directors, where almost daily he came into conflict with Frye. TWA boasted as a slogan that it was “An Airline Run by Fliers.” Dietrich was contemptuous of that, feeling that businessmen should be running the financially troubled airline.

After two years, Frye “danced in the streets” when he got Howard to agree to remove Dietrich from the TWA board. Even though off the board, Dietrich continued to analyze the airline’s finances, sending disturbing reports of mismanagement to Howard, which showed that TWA was

overextending itself to fulfill Frye’s dream of becoming a global airline. In time, and in fear of losing control if TWA had to go public, Howard was forced to purchase another \$1,500,000 worth of TWA stock.

But during the war and its desperate need for air carriers, TWA’s fortunes soared. There was such a need for airline transportation that at one point Howard purchased six Boeing Stratoliners right off the assembly line.

The first four-engine, internally pressurized commercial plane, the Stratoliner was better than anything that had ever come on the market up until then. It could carry 40 passengers as compared to about two dozen who could fit into the typical DC-3 at the time. Once America entered the war, the Stratoliner became the commercial equivalent of the Air Force’s B-17. At the time, it was the only commercial airplane that could fly nonstop over the Atlantic Ocean.

In the early months of the war, Roosevelt’s Secretary of Commerce, Jesse Jones, appealed to Howard to sell or lease his planes at bargain-basement rates to the government.

Jesse Holman Jones, the silver-haired, “Biblically big” Houstonian, had been a friend of Howard Hughes Sr. back in Texas when Howard was just a boy. During Roosevelt’s New Deal era, he’d become known as “Emperor Jones,” and was regarded as the second most powerful man in Washington.

Howard proposed a deal so advantageous to himself that Jones abruptly cut off negotiations. Then, since it had the power to do so, the government officials merely requisitioned the Stratoliners from Howard, dictating their own terms and refusing to guarantee Howard preferential treatment during TWA’s future route applications, as he’d originally wanted. Howard defiantly held back one Stratoliner, claiming it was needed for his aviation research. The government bought that line and let him keep it.

As a footnote, Howard eventually lost his remaining Stratoliner in the 1950s when he sold it to Glenn McCarthy, a millionaire speculator from Houston. Dietrich was sent to collect the funds that had been promised for its purchase, but learned that McCarthy no longer had the money since his reckless investments—Dietrich called them “roller-coaster”—had nose-dived. When Dietrich tried to repossess the plane, he learned that McCarthy had so many liens on it that it would be “a financial disaster” if Howard actually took possession of his plane again. Ironically, he was forced to abandon the Stratoliner to creditors years after he’d stood off the U.S. Department of Commerce with its unlimited requisitioning powers during the world’s worst war.

In the middle of Howard’s negotiations with TWA, Kate Hepburn continued to call Howard. Initially he’d moved her out of Muirfield and into a cottage on the grounds. As *The Philadelphia Story* had gone from a hit stage play to a hit movie, Kate was gleeful to learn that Howard’s initial \$30,000 had turned a neat profit of \$500,000.

That impressive check didn’t impress Howard. Other than acquiring or inventing more airplanes for the war effort, he had yet another driving ambition. He was going to return to making movies as he’d done in the silent era and in the early era of Talkies.

He reopened Caddo Company headquarters on Romaine Street in Hollywood. Then he let word seep out through his oldtime buddy, the increasingly drunk Louella Parsons, that his first film was going “to be a Western masterpiece.”

Working hand in hand with Robert Gross, CEO of Lockheed, Howard dared to dream impossible dreams.

Gross recalled that one night at Muirfield, Howard came into the living room wearing only a frayed robe and battered sandals.

Soon Gross’s plans for a radically new series of airplane, the “Constellation,” were spread across the living room floor. At one point, Howard found his robe an annoyance and tossed it onto the sofa, revealing to Gross that he wore no underwear. Stark naked, he sat cross-legged on his living room floor, devouring the blueprints and astonishing Gross not only with his unconventional dress code, but with his knowledge of aircraft design. Finally, he stood up. “Give me a price, boy! I want them all.”

Gross quoted an inflated estimate of \$450,000 per plane, and was prepared for howls of protest from his client. Howard thought it over for a minute and then said, “All right, god damn the shit and fuck and to hell and back.” He smiled at Gross. “That’s Texas Plains talk for when we’ve made a horse trade. Since my fucking airline doesn’t have a pot to piss in, I’ll buy the fuckers myself. Just send the bill to Dietrich and listen to him scream. Hold the phone a foot away from your ear when you talk to him.”

Putting his robe back on, Howard was dressed when a maid walked in to deliver him a cheese sandwich and a tall glass of cold milk. He turned to Gross for a parting comment. “Don’t fuck anybody I wouldn’t.” Then he tottered off to bed, leaving the Lockheed CEO to crawl across the floor, picking up his blueprints.

The next morning, Gross was eager to share Lockheed’s good fortune with the world. Howard had purchased forty planes for a total cost of eighteen million dollars. This was the largest commercial airplane order in the history of aviation.

Gross was getting ready to make the announcement to the press when an urgent call came in from Howard. He did not want an announcement made and demanded that the Lockheed project proceed in utter secrecy. He even demanded that future communications between them be in code. Assigning code names to future communications, Howard designated himself as “God.” Gross would be the “Apostle Paul.” Jack Frye, over at TWA headquarters, would be referred to as “Jesus Christ.”

The Constellations were quickly nicknamed “Connies” by the engineers and mechanics when Howard’s planes came off the assembly line.

The Lockheed orders were processed in quick order. The scent of war seemed to pump adrenaline into factories around the world.

Howard himself flew one of the first Constellations, speeding from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C. in just six hours and fifty-six minutes, scheduling that would have been considered impossible just a few months before.

The Washington Post and newspapers throughout the nation hailed this new breakthrough. *The New York Times* announced that Connie is “the outline of things to come in the aviation industry—a great silver bird, shimmering in the noonday sun.”

In his classic biography of Bette Davis, *Fasten Your Seat Belts*, veteran Hollywood writer, Lawrence J. Quirk, wrote of Howard’s “idiosyncrasies, and something else—a homosexual side that filled him with guilt and self-hatred. His tastes ran to handsome airline mechanics and garagemen whom he often took flying—disappearing with them to one of his many retreats for weeks on end. Unable to be faithful to any one young man for long, he would

fire of them, pay them off, and sometimes set them up in business—then moved on, satisfying his endless curiosity with other males in an endlessly compulsive manner that only added to his guilt, confusion, and self-rage as the years went by.” Quirk noted that Howard “also suffered from impotence, especially with women. In forcing himself to live up to what was essentially a false macho image, he tended toward premature ejaculation and was a chronic masturbator, often finding it necessary to masturbate his way through sex with a female partner.”

Such was Howard’s state of being when Bette Davis sent him an invitation to be the guest of honor at the Tailwaggers Club Ball at the Beverly Hills Hotel. A dog lover, Bette wanted to raise money at the event to help stray canines and to train seeing-eye dogs. Howard sent her a check for \$2,500, although he was not a dog lover and didn’t even own a pet.

He’d been intrigued by Bette ever since he’d seen her play the bitch, Mildred, in *Of Human Bondage*. Howard felt that she should have won the Oscar for that performance. One reason he wanted to meet her was that he’d been told that she was a virtual shoo-in to win another Oscar in the next few months for her performance in *Jezebel*. She’d won her first for *Dangerous* in 1935. He always liked to seduce Oscar winners.

Bette later said that she was immediately attracted to Howard even though she was married to the failed singer, Harmon Oscar Nelson (Ham), at the time. Her ill-fated, six-year marriage was winding down when she met Howard.

In his rumpled double-breasted tuxedo, Howard was “so debonair and handsome—and so tall, but kind of shy and gangly, not the arrogant prick I’d heard he was,” according to Bette.

Although hardly the sexiest actress in movies, Bette had “never looked lovelier,” in the words of Louella Parsons, than she did the night she greeted Howard. She was wearing a sexy pink lace dress, evocative of the one she’d worn in *Jezebel*. “I thought Hughes would look at my breasts, since I was showing a bit of cleavage, but he looked into my eyes instead.” In later life and after the release of the song, Bette would alter her line, saying, “Instead of looking at my breasts, he looked directly into my Bette Davis eyes, my baby blues.” Her hair fell softly around her bare but freckled shoulders in her low-cut and tight-fitting gown. The color pink made her look younger. She had accentuated her beauty with a heavy coating of ruby-red lipstick.



Bette Davis, Howard Hughes (1939)

Welcoming him to the ballroom, she’d impulsively stood on her toes and kissed him fully on the lips. He would confide later to Randolph Scott, also at the ball, that he detected a “flicker of tongue—usually I’m the aggressor.”

“Davis has bigger balls than you, my good man,” Randolph quipped to his former lover.

Howard was seated at the head banquet table next to Bette, who was president of the club. He later told Randolph that at one point Bette reached under the table and gently squeezed his crotch. He would also make this confession to his future mistress, Terry Moore, who would write about it in her memoirs.

In the middle of the banquet, the dethroned queen of Hollywood, Mary Pickford, rose from her seat and walked over to greet Howard and Bette. He hadn’t seen Mary in years, not since his relationship had ended with her stepson, Doug Fairbanks Jr. But despite Pickford’s very visible presence directly in front of him, Howard pointedly ignored the faded star, giving all his attention to Bette instead. Angered, Mary returned to her seat, perhaps remembering days of greater glory when she was the most famous female face in the world and was treated like royalty.

In a few minutes, Doug Jr. himself came over to greet Howard. Bette sensed tension between the two men but didn’t know the reason why. After Doug had greeted both of them and left, she asked, “You know Doug Fairbanks?”

“It was a long time ago,” he said, eager to change the subject.

When Bette excused herself and got up to go “powder my nose,” the former queen of MGM, Norma Shearer, strode over to his table. Howard acted like he was meeting her for the first time, until she reminded him that they’d already been introduced by William Randolph Hearst, their host at Sam Simeon Castle. In spite of his rebuff, she slipped him her private telephone number and asked him to call her the first night he was free. He took the number and stashed it away.

Bette returned to table with a straw basket filled with raffle tickets. He bought every one of them.



Norma Shearer

Later, when Bette was dancing with Randolph Scott, Howard huddled in the corner with Errol Flynn. Across the room the volatile Lupe Velez, the Mexican spitfire, was standing talking with her handsome, muscular husband, Johnny Weissmuller, who was normally in loincloth making a Tarzan movie. “I could go for that beast of the jungle,” Howard whispered to Errol who later told Johnny Meyer. “You went for Lupe’s first love, Gary Cooper, so why not her second love?” Errol asked.

Later Errol introduced Howard to his wife, Lili Damita, who had survived a period of her career when she’d been marketed by her studio as “the new Garbo.” Born in Bordeaux, France, Lili was a sensual, beautiful woman with a fiery, dynamic personality. She also was a “switch hitter,” her affairs ranging from Marlene Dietrich to King Alfonso XIII of Spain.

Lili seemed furious with her husband Errol that night. The couple would soon divorce. She also showed contempt for Howard, no doubt well aware that her husband was having an affair with him. She turned to Howard and said, “From what I gather, Errol will do something to you he won’t do to me.” “And what might that be?” Howard asked. “He’ll go down on you but not on me,” she said. “He finds eating out a woman disgusting!” With that remark, she turned her back on both her husband and Howard and headed over to engage Lupe Velez in conversation.

When Lili had gone, Howard turned to talk about Bette. Errol was also pursuing Bette, but not seriously. “Her breasts are bigger in real life than they photograph on the screen,” Howard said. “I wonder if they give milk.” Then he added something both bizarre and enigmatic, so much so that Errol at first thought he hadn’t understood him: “I bet they’re juicier than Clark Gable’s breasts,” Howard said, leaving open the possibility that he might be jesting. “Sucking his tits is like trying to drain blood from a turnip.”

At the door, Howard kissed Bette goodbye, with a promise to meet again. The next morning he ordered that a wreath of flowers be delivered to her home at the rate of one per hour on a 24-hour basis. In the same way he’d romanced Kate, Howard began to fly over Bette’s house, buzzing it.

He announced to Dietrich that he was “all but one-hundred certain” that Bette would win the Oscar for *Jezebel*. In February of 1939, Howard’s prediction came true. She won with Spencer Tracy, who snared the honor for his portrayal of Father Flanagan in *Boys Town*. Bette later told friends that Tracy propositioned her that night. “We’ll have an Academy Award winning fuck,” he allegedly promised her.



Ginger Rogers, Cary Grant

A few nights after the Tailwaggers Ball, Howard finally made contact with Bette after playing phone tag. Her husband, Ham Nelson, was in New York, so she invited Howard to her house at 1700 Coldwater Canyon. Before putting down the phone, Bette warned him, "I kiss on the first date."

"I do more than that!" he assured her.

Details of their first rendezvous and subsequent three weeks of intense romancing would be unknown today if Bette herself hadn't spoken so frequently of her coming together with Howard. She literally dined out on their relationship and continued to tell stories about it long after it had perhaps faded from Howard's memory.

It can only be assumed that Howard's reputation as a Hollywood Lothario had preceded him and that Bette was anticipating a skilled seducer who'd bedded some of the most famous women of the world, including Marlene Dietrich and Tallulah Bankhead. "Those two alone should have entitled Hughes to some sort of merit badge," Bette later quipped.

After her first night in bed with Howard, a shocked Bette discovered a sexually dysfunctional lover who was impotent. Not only that, but if Bette is to be believed, she claimed that Howard confessed his guilt and shame about being a homosexual. Instead of being turned off by Howard, she viewed him as a sexual challenge. Allegedly she told him, "If I could get a chronic masturbator like my husband Ham to perform successfully with a woman, then I can accomplish anything."

From what a drunken Bette often told at parties—usually with a coterie of gay men listening to every nuance of her pronouncements—Howard did not achieve orgasm on the first or even the second night of their coupling. But on the third night, when he was unable to penetrate her, he demanded fellatio. She also learned that "he wanted me to talk scat. He said if I cursed and swore at him, like a sailor, he could shut his eyes and conjure up a vision of me as a handsome young man. He was right. He achieved orgasm that night and for many nights thereafter. Katharine Hepburn couldn't do that for him—and she's a real boy."

All during her daughter's heavy courtship with Howard, her mother, Ruth ("Ruthie") Davis was demanding that Bette manipulate Howard into marrying her as soon as she divorced Ham. When asked why she was encouraging her daughter to marry a man she didn't love, Ruthie said, "It's the money, stupid!"

When Bette divorces him, he'll settle so much alimony on her that she'll be fixed for life—and so will I."

During her brief affair, Bette was indiscreet in telling others about it, although Howard wanted to keep it hidden. One reason was that he was seriously dating Ginger Rogers on the side, telling her that "you are the only one for me."

But the romance with Bette became so public that the columnist, Walter Winchell, announced over one of his radio broadcasts that "Bette Davis is about to marry a millionaire as soon as she divorces her present husband." Winchell did not specifically name Howard in his broadcast.

The dynamic within the Davis/Hughes romance changed radically when Ham unexpectedly rushed back from the East Coast to see what was happening to his marriage. Bette denied to Ham that she was having an affair, although he didn't believe her and set out to obtain evidence to use against her in his divorce. He told friends that, "Half of what Bette owns is mine, and I'm entitled to my share."

Ham solicited the aid of his brother-in-law, Robert Pelgram, to audio-record Bette's pillow talk at Coldwater Canyon. Ham drilled a hole in her bedroom's floor, and Pelgram ran a recording wire up a basement wall and along the ceiling, channeling it through the hole in the bedroom floor. Ham then attached a small microphone to the wire, nailing it to the baseboard directly beneath the bed. After a test, Pelgram announced that Ham's voice had recorded perfectly during a test. All that remained was to capture the voices of Bette and Howard.

The wires from the bedroom led to a sound truck parked in a secluded spot in the Canyon overlooking the house Ham once shared with Bette.

Now that Howard's impotence was cured, Bette had planned a special evening. She wanted sex in the missionary position. Howard agreed, telling her that he wanted to make a slight change in their plans. He preferred her to be on top. For "my deflowering," as Bette later put it, "I purchased gardenias and personally picked off the petals spreading them across my bed."

On the night of Howard's seduction of Bette—or more accurately her seduction of him—the evening was going perfectly. Bette hoped to achieve orgasm for both Howard and herself.

Perhaps she would have if Ham hadn't used his key to the back door and entered the house. He went right to the bedroom where he caught his wife *in fla-grante delicto* with Howard.

Bette quickly removed herself from the bed and desperately reached for her robe. With full erection, Howard too jumped out of the bed and slugged Ham, bloodying his nose.

"I'll destroy both of you!" Ham shouted as he ran toward the door. He paused only momentarily to confront Bette. "You bitch! You fucking whore!"

The next morning, a blackmail note for Howard arrived at Caddo productions. It was from Ham demanding a settlement of \$70,000 in cash—or else he'd turn the recording disks over to the media. Howard was fearful that his dialogue with Bette would not only reveal his impotence but also his homosexual leanings. He was also fearful that he could be named correspondent in Bette's upcoming divorce proceedings against Ham.

Without even calling Bette, Howard dialed Johnny Meyer, ordering him to hire a professional killer, and to pay him a thousand dollars to murder Ham.

Later that day, Bette contacted Howard, expressing her concerns that if she were exposed to the public as an adulteress, the Legion of Decency would order a boycott of her films—a censorship which might destroy her career.

"Don't worry," he assured her. "Your boy Ham is being taken care of."

"Don't do it!" she screamed into the phone. "Call off your boys." Her dialogue sounded like something from one of Bette's own bad movies. "He's gone to the police. He told them that if he's found murdered, you're responsible." After hanging up on Bette, Howard called Meyer and rescinded his order just in time.

The next morning, Ham was delivered \$70,000 in cash by Meyer. Feeling that he'd been sucked into a trap, Howard abruptly withdrew from his relationship with Bette and refused to take her calls.

Her New England pride took over. Feeling guilty that she'd involved Howard in blackmail, she went to her studio chief, Jack Warner, and borrowed \$70,000 from him against her future wages. That very day, she sent Howard a check for \$70,000, which he cashed. The discs recording her sexual exploits with Howard were smashed in front of Bette. Ham promised he would not bring up Howard's name in the divorce proceedings.

When Kate Hepburn in Connecticut heard about the caper, she didn't seem jealous at all, calling the episode "a bedroom farce."

Howard would not encounter Bette again until, as head of RKO, he hired her to make a film, *The Story of a Divorce*. This was Bette's first film role after her dramatic exit from Warner Brothers in 1949. It was during the making of the film that she received a phone call from Darryl F. Zanuck, casting her as Margo Channing in *All About Eve*, a role she readily accepted. Bette at the time was having an affair with her co-star, Barry Sullivan. As soon as filming of *All About Eve* began, she'd also launch an affair with her co-star of that picture, Gary Merrill, which would lead to marriage.

The white heat of their romance long cooled, Bette and Howard clashed bitterly in the late 1940s over *The Story of a Divorce*. He demanded that the title be changed to *Payment on Demand*. And after the filming was supposedly wrapped, he also demanded that a new ending be shot. The film finally opened on February 15, 1951 at New York’s Radio City Music Hall. Bette later wrote Howard that “the new ending broke my heart. I’m also brokenhearted over the title change.” He never responded.

As a sentimental gesture, Howard had been sending her a long gardenia every year on the anniversary of her payment of the \$70,000 to him. The volatile actress was not impressed with this cheap show of sentiment and always tossed his flower in the garbage. “The god damn cocksucker’s got all the money in the world. He didn’t have to cash my fucking check!”

When it was clear that his thwarted romance with Kate Hepburn had ended, Howard told Johnny Meyer, “What do I want with the former Queen of RKO? I want the new Queen of RKO.”

In earnest, he began to rekindle his romance with Ginger Rogers, Kate’s bitter enemy. Kate was excessively jealous of Ginger’s recent success with all those musicals with Fred Astaire. Her box office clout had propelled Ginger into a salary of \$300,000 a year, which made her the highest paid actress in Hollywood.

Howard ordered that his assistants send five dozen yellow roses—her favorite flower—to her every morning. Delivery was received by Lela Rogers, the star’s overly possessive mother, who was Howard’s chief ally in romancing her daughter. Lela was strongly urging her daughter to divorce actor Lew Ayres and marry Howard instead “before some cheap little starlet whore—or even Bette Davis—entraps him.”

A second floral tribute would arrive every day in the late afternoon. This time it would be purple orchids and white gardenias that smelled so intoxicatingly sweet that Lela suspected that Howard had ordered them perfumed.

He used to address his love notes to Ginger as “My Princess.” And after Ginger dethroned Kate at RKO, he began addressing her as “Queen Ginger.”

He called Lela every morning and arranged the details of his romantic trysts with her daughter through her, not bothering to check with Ginger directly, which infuriated the star. “Why can’t Howard talk to me himself?” Ginger demanded to know of Lela. Her mother replied, “He told me he’s afraid you might turn him down.”

Some days he’d fly her for lunch to either San Francisco or Lake Tahoe, where they’d pick wildflowers before going for a nude swim. He’d order “champagne and caviar” picnics for consumption on the powdery sands of Coronado Island. Often he took her golfing, complaining later to Johnny Meyer that “her game isn’t as good as Kate’s.” Ginger said that Howard made her game “fifty times better” by teaching her tricks she’d never known before. He even tried to teach her to sail, but she ended up capsizing their little boat. They were rescued by the crew aboard Howard’s yacht.

On every date, he pressed marriage on her. She held him off, although at the urging of Lela, she did accept a five-karat, square-cut pink emerald engagement ring.

He kept urging Ginger to go to his lawyer, Neil McCarthy. “Old Neil can get you out of this damn marriage before a mouse can run up a clock.” “I’ve got to think it over,” she protested. “Don’t rush me.” Actually Ginger was having second thoughts about a divorce. She was still in love with her husband, and told friends that if Lew had only called and asked, she would have gone back to him. She also didn’t trust Howard or view him as husband material. She’d heard rumors about his recent episode with Bette Davis, but chose not to confront him with any of the details.

Through Noah Dietrich, Howard had purchased one of the most idyllic building sites in the Hollywood Hills. He planned to abandon gloomy Muirfield and erect a mansion on the mountain, somewhat in the style of William Randolph Hearst’s San Simeon. He’d already hired an architect to design it.

One moonlit night he drove Ginger up to the mountaintop to share his dream. Later, she told Lela and her friends at RKO, “I think Howard wants to hide me away like a princess in a castle. I’m not the Sleeping Beauty type. If I know Howard, he’ll put a moat around the damn castle and stock it with woman-eating alligators so that I can’t escape.”

During this period, Howard hired private detectives to trail Ginger wherever she went. He’d also ordered that her phone be tapped. That’s how he learned that while he was romancing her, she was having a torrid affair with James Stewart, whom she referred to as “my darling Jimmy.” Sometimes Ginger and Jimmy would go on double dates with his roommate and rumored lover, Henry Fonda. Fonda was dating Lucille Ball at the time. The two couples were seen dancing at Ciro’s or the Trocadero. Both actors were cheap, so instead of supper at the Cocoanut Grove, they’d often end up at a little hole-in-the-wall, Barney’s Beanery, on Santa Monica Boulevard. The owner kept a sign behind the counter: FAGOTS (sic) KEEP OUT!

To keep Howard at bay, Ginger kept blaming Lew, using him as the reason she couldn’t commit to Howard. She falsely said that he was “putting up barriers” to the divorce and making unreasonable demands.

Taking the bull by the horns, as Howard put it, he personally called the handsome young actor and demanded a meeting at his Caddo offices. To lure Lew over, Howard told him that he was returning to pictures, and he wanted to star him in the first film released by Caddo.

With bait like that, Lew showed up at exactly ten o’clock the next Friday morning. As Meyer would later relate, “I personally ushered Ayres into Howard’s office. Even though he’d been married for some time to a woman of the world like Rogers, Ayres still had a soft, delicate look to him. Rather innocent. If I didn’t know better, I could swear he was still a virgin.”

“When Howard came face to face with his rival for Ginger’s hand,” Meyer claimed, “I saw that Ayres’s virginal look wasn’t lost on Howard. It was love at first sight. One handsome bisexual meeting another handsome bisexual. Somehow I just knew that before the stroke of midnight on Saturday, Howard would be in the kid’s pants. And I was right, too.”

The “romance” of Howard Hughes and Lew Ayres, conducted at one of Howard’s off-the-record retreats in western Texas, lasted for three days. Ginger later confessed that she fell in love with Lew’s boyishly handsome face on the screen and later married him. Howard, too, watched movies looking for new partners, both male and female, to seduce. He’d been mesmerized by Lew when he’d first seen him on the screen with Greta Garbo in *The Kiss* in 1929.

When Lew had played the role of the innocent Paul Baumer in the anti-war film, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, in 1930, Howard had ordered that the movie be screened for him three times. Howard had been tempted to call his old friend Lewis Milestone, who had directed Lew in the film, to arrange for an introduction, but he’d never gotten around to it.

Meeting Lew for the first time, Howard discovered that he’d lost none of the youthful looks and charm he’d shown in his films. Howard’s spies had kept him informed about Lew’s private life, his late-night parties, and his homosexual affairs, including discreet dalliances with Spencer Tracy and Joel

McCrea.

Howard quickly learned that Lew and Ginger had signed a pre-nuptial agreement, so money wouldn't be the reason to slow down the divorce. When Howard pointedly asked Lew why he wouldn't divorce Ginger, he was stunned to hear the actor tell him, "I'd have no one to cook my breakfast or choose my ties."

It is not clear if Lew knew that Howard was urging an immediate divorce because he had plans to marry Ginger himself. Lew would have had to live in a cave not to know of his wife's romance with Howard. Louella Parsons was practically broadcasting the event.

No one can possibly know at this point what went on in the perverse mind of Howard Hughes. He had learned that Kate Hepburn had tried to seduce Lew when he'd played her drunkard, wastrel brother in *Holiday*, released in 1938. Perhaps Kate was genuinely attracted to the young man. But Howard suspected that she secretly wanted to get back at Ginger by seducing her errant husband. *Holiday* was directed by George Cukor. During the shoot, Cary Grant had chastised Kate, "I, too, have the hots for Lew, and you're completely monopolizing him, leaving nothing for Cukor and me."

In some devious way, Howard presumably felt he'd score some sort of coup by running off with Lew himself. It would be a secret triumph for him, scoring points over both Kate and Ginger. He was not surprised when Lew readily accepted his invitation to fly to a retreat he maintained in western Texas for secret getaways, most often with men since women found such wilderness hideaways too boring.

All that is known about what went on between Howard and Lew that weekend is the gospel according to Johnny Meyer. Apparently, Howard never spoke of his flying away with Lew with anyone else.

What is known is that sometime during their weekend together, Lew confessed to Howard that his real ambition was not to be an actor but to become a Renaissance man with the ability to compose a symphony like Beethoven, to create a sculpture like Michelangelo, and to write a play like Eugene O'Neill.

Apparently, Howard found sex with Lew most satisfactory, telling Meyer that the actor was "properly submissive and did everything I asked." It was only when Lew started to talk that he began to turn off Howard.

The actor told him that he fully expected the United States would soon be at war. If drafted, he said he would claim status as a conscientious objector. Howard took violent exception to this, warning Lew that if word of this got out, movie chains might possibly boycott his films, thereby ending his career. In this respect, Howard turned out to be a prophet. When the war did inevitably arrive, Lew's pacifist stance greatly harmed his career. His studio even replaced him with another actor, Philip Dorn, in Lew's highly successful Dr. Kildare series. As Howard watched from afar in the years ahead, Lew did make a comeback of sorts when he appeared in the 1948 *Johnny Belinda*, playing a sympathetic doctor opposite Jane Wyman's deaf mute. Lew gave the best performance of his career. Off-screen he launched an affair with Wyman. When her husband, Ronald Reagan, heard of it, he said, "Jane's entitled to a good affair from time to time."

By Monday morning, Lew was overcome with guilt for having indulged himself sexually with Howard. It was only then that Howard realized how deeply religious the actor was. He asked Howard to kneel by their bedside and pray for God's forgiveness for the "abomination" they'd committed. Howard, of course, refused, hoping to escape since he'd come to view Lew as some sort of nutbag.

Howard's response was, "I've got more money than God. If you want to worship someone, worship me."

Back in Hollywood after his weekend shack-up with Lew, Howard told Meyer, "The little holy-roller played the banjo for me—in the nude!"

As time went by, religion would consume more and more of Lew's mind. Eventually he'd write a book on the subject, *Altars of the East*. He announced that he was going to make a film of the work. After many years, he contacted Howard, begging him to finance the movie for him. Perhaps to show his contempt for the project, Howard sent Lew a check for just one hundred dollars. To it, he attached a note: "Thanks for the memory."

In 1964 and perhaps to get revenge, Lew agreed to appear in the film, *The Carpetbaggers*, a potboiling novel by Harold Robbins that ripped off Howard's private life. The year 1973 found Lew appearing in simian makeup in *Battle for the Planet of the Apes*. His career long faded, Lew Ayres died on December 30, 1966, confessing that, "I can't endure another year and must go on my way."

There was one artifact left from the ruins of the Hughes/Ayres weekend. On the Sunday afternoon of their weekend together in west Texas, Lew had invited Howard for a walk along the edge of a lake. Howard only reluctantly agreed. Along the trail, Lew discovered a piece of wood. Picking it up, he said he'd like to whittle it into a piece of sculpture.

Before flying out of Texas the following Monday afternoon, Lew had completed his piece of art. He gave it as a present to Howard. It was an almost perfect rendition of Howard's erect penis.

What became of Lew's artwork? For many years, Liberace in his Palm Beach living room displayed what he claimed was Lew's sculpted penis of Howard. Today, its whereabouts, or even whether it still exists, is unknown. It is not listed within the inventory of exhibits at Liberace's museum in Las Vegas.

Nassau, 1938

As America prepared for its Thanksgiving holiday, there was one seventeen-year-old girl who had more to be grateful for than most. Canadian-born Brenda Diana Duff Frazier, heiress to a multi-million-dollar fortune, had been named debutante of the year a few months before. Her beautiful face had graced the cover of *Life* magazine, and her fan mail was the equivalent, and sometimes exceeded, what was received by such reigning blonde Hollywood goddesses as Ginger Rogers and Alice Faye. As proof of how famous she was at the time, a letter marked simply, SHE, NEW YORK, was delivered to Brenda's hotel suite. As Tallulah Bankhead remarked, "That snot-nosed Frazier kid is more famous than yours truly, and God knows, I'm the most famous pussy on the planet since Cleo herself."

Throughout the U.S. heartland, teenage girls who didn't want to grow up to be like Joan Crawford wanted to be like Brenda Frazier. She was constantly being written about by reigning columnist Walter Winchell, who was forever interviewing her with her *beau du jour* at the exclusive Stork Club. In spite of her young age, she was often photographed smoking a cigarette held in a long ivory holder.

Following her much ballyhooed debut at the Ritz-Carlton, Brenda, with her Cupid's bow mouth, made headlines just by showing up somewhere. This world-wide celebration of herself, evocative of a latter-day Paris Hilton but on a larger scale, puzzled Brenda. "I don't deserve all this attention. I haven't done anything. I'm just a debutante." Rival heiress Barbara Hutton put it another way. "Brenda is famous just for being famous."



Brenda Frazier

Photographers became intrigued with “the Brenda Frazier look.” She was a pioneer of the “white face mask”—in fact, she was said to have invented that much copied look. She overly powdered her already too-white skin before “slashing” her mouth with a lipstick so bright red it would have intimidated even Betty Grable in Technicolor during her WWII musicals.

Brenda’s eyebrows were penciled around the corner of her eyes, and her hair was perfectly coiffed and described as “blue-black.” She never moved her neck in any direction out of fear of getting one hair out of place. Her appearance at any club, even one filled with celebrities, was usually met with stunning awe as all conversation came to a halt when she entered as a *celebutante*, Winchell’s coined word.

In 1938, within only a matter of months, Brenda joined the roster of other “poor little rich girls,” who included Woolworth heiress Barbara Hutton, tobacco heiress Doris Duke, and a future girlfriend of Howard’s, Gloria Vanderbilt, who would become Brenda’s chief rival as the reigning debutante, a title that stuck to both women long after they’d made their actual debuts.

Even before meeting Brenda, Howard had been captivated by her image, not only on the cover of *Life*, but in advertisements for Studebaker cars and Woodbury soap.

Hearing that Brenda would be in Nassau over the holiday, Howard flew there, ordering his crew to pilot the *Southern Cross* into the Nassau Yacht Club so that it would be at his disposal during his stay in The Bahamas.

Howard decided to pursue Brenda, although he knew he had a lot of competition, including every horny young rich boy at Harvard and Yale. Even young John F. Kennedy had expressed an interest in seducing her.

Howard encountered unexpected competition in Joan Crawford, the only A-list movie star he had failed to seduce. Through her good friend, Billy Haines, Howard learned that Joan was in New York sending flowers and expensive perfume every day to Brenda. Soon the two of them were photographed at the Stork Club one night and El Morocco the next night, both of them looking stunning. One entertainment columnist raised the provocative question, “What’s wrong with the red-blooded men of New York? Why do two of the town’s most glamorous gals, movie star Joan Crawford and debutante Brenda Frazier, have to dine alone two nights in a row?”

Brenda ultimately rejected Joan’s sexual advances. In their aftermath, and for years after that, the star referred to the little rich girl as a “debutramp.”

In Nassau, Howard accepted an invitation to stay at the mansion of Sir Harry Oakes. At that time, billionaire Oakes was possibly the richest man in the world. A tough old ex-miner, he’d built the largest private home in Nassau.

Unlike Howard, he didn’t inherit his wealth but discovered it at Kirkland Lake in Canada. There he stumbled upon what became the largest gold mine in Canada and the second biggest gold mine in the world.

To celebrate Howard’s arrival in town, Sir Harry threw a lavish dinner-dance at the British Colonial Hotel in Nassau. He invited Brenda, who came accompanied by globe-trotting Elsa Maxwell, the doyenne of society and its biggest sponger.

The stout, pug-nosed American hostess and tattle-tale columnist, the shape of whose body was often compared to a little brown jug, was born in 1881. She aptly described herself as “a short, fat, homely piano player from Keokuk, Iowa, with no money or background, who decided to become a legend—and did just that.” The press dubbed her “The Hostess with the Mostest.”

In the ballroom of Nassau’s British Colonial Hotel, all Howard had to do was slip Maxwell a five-hundred dollar bill.

Within a minute, she had taken Howard’s arm and had led him over to Brenda’s table. “Brenda, darling, this is the famous—or should I say infamous?—Mr. Howard Hughes. As if you didn’t already know and hadn’t been spying on him from afar all evening?”

“Your reputation has preceded you,” Howard said, bending at the waist and kissing Brenda’s extended hand. “Your photographers hardly do you justice.”

“Compliments will get you everywhere with me,” Brenda said coyly.

For a long moment after the introductions were made, it appeared that Howard had nothing else to say to Brenda. Social butterfly Elsa came to the rescue, as she so often did. “For the sake of Hell or Heaven, whichever it is, ask the fair damsel to dance.”

An acceptable ballroom dancer, Howard twirled Brenda around the floor. The body chemistry between them didn’t exactly explode, but they came comfortably together.

For the next three months, Howard launched what the press called a “whirlwind romance” with Brenda. Of course, whenever he flew alone to Hollywood, he resumed his “star dates” with the likes of Errol Flynn and Ginger Rogers, among others.

Howard sailed aboard the *Southern Cross* carrying Brenda and her lavish wardrobe. At one point he anchored at Palm Beach, where they were seen together at a series of lavish winter parties thrown by the glittering social elite of the East Coast, each hostess glad to snare such celebrated guests as Howard and Brenda.

At one party, Howard encountered his long-ago nemesis, Joseph Kennedy. Noting Brenda across the room, Kennedy mockingly told Howard, “Bet I could take that filly away from you if I wanted to.”

“I’ve already broken her in, Joe,” Howard said cockily. “Constance Bennett told me I have four more inches than you. Why would Brenda settle for a short Mick stub when she can have the Real McCoy?”

Angered, Kennedy stormed off.

In her palatial mansion at Newport, Doris Duke entertained the pair. On the first night, the heiress remained alone on her terrace after Brenda had retired for the evening. The interchange between Doris and Howard was later reported by Barbara Hutton, who found the story vastly amusing.

That night, Doris proposed that Howard dump Brenda and marry her. If Barbara is to be believed, Doris told Howard, “It will be the wedding of the century. The richest woman in the world marrying its richest man.”

He turned her down.

“Then it’s true what Barbara says about you?” Doris is alleged to have said.

“Just what does Barbara say?” he asked, no doubt recalling his aborted affair with her at London’s Savoy Hotel.

“That you prefer men—take Cary Grant for instance—over women.”

“No comment!”

“I could live with your preference,” Doris is reported to have said. “When you’re out with one of your boyfriends, I’ll indulge my lesbian streak. In the world of the very rich, bisexuality is almost mandatory—but you know that, of course.”

“Good night, Miss Duke,” he said, turning and walking away to join Brenda in a bedroom upstairs. He turned for a parting comment. “We’ll leave early in the morning—no need for you to get up and cook our breakfast.”

Rebuffed and no doubt feeling humiliated, Doris stood on the terrace watching him go.

Later, in a bit of sweet revenge, she would marry the one man who’d eluded Howard: the super-endowed Porfirio Rubirosa, stud of the Caribbean. Ironically, he would also go on to marry Barbara Hutton after his divorce and settlement from Doris.

While sailing aboard the *Southern Cross* with Howard, Brenda pressed the issue of marriage onto the aviator, who had already extended a standing marriage proposal to Ginger. He refused. Screaming and shouting, and threatening to drown herself, she became hysterical. She took to her bed, locking the door to Howard.

It was that afternoon that he learned that Brenda suffered from a form of edema, sometimes called dropsy. Under stress, it caused her legs and ankles to swell painfully.

After that, Howard never saw Brenda again, ditching her in New York. The edema attacks, and Brenda’s propensity for secluding herself, would become a pattern in her future, sometimes lasting for weeks at a time.

With the coming of World War II and other, more compelling headlines, Brenda faded into obscurity. Long forgotten by the press who had made her a media darling, she devoted much of her life to alcohol and pill-popping. Five separate attempts at “slashed wrist suicides,” two broken marriages, and her final blow—inoperable bone cancer—led to her demise. Her final comment on her life was, “When I was young, I drove my car in the fast lane but always knew I’d never make it to the finish line. For the entire ride of my life, I experienced engine trouble every mile of the way.”

Asked about Howard during her last known interview in 1976, she said, “We broke up—that’s all.”

“Why?” the reporter asked.

“Because he was a god damn cocksucking faggot!”

Los Angeles, 1938-39

Reports differ about Howard’s next major romantic tryst, and all the key players have told very different versions of what happened. What is known is that as the Thirties came to an end, Howard began to pursue a relationship with Tokyo-born Olivia de Havilland, who had been cast as milky Melanie in David O. Selznick’s *Gone With the Wind*.

For months, Howard had been intrigued by Errol Flynn’s ongoing attempts to seduce Olivia, stemming from 1935 when they had appeared as co-stars in the highly successful *Captain Blood*, released by Warner Brothers. Frustrated at her constant rejections of his romantic overtures, Errol in exasperation finally told Howard, “I don’t think Olivia has a hole between her legs.” In contrast, Olivia later wrote, “Errol is the most charming, the most magnetic man I will ever meet.”

Perhaps Errol’s practical jokes turned off Olivia. He was forever playing tricks on her. One time he put a mammoth dead rattlesnake in her pantaloons. Even more likely, Olivia might have been repulsed by Errol’s constant drinking and womanizing. “I think we felt a kind of love for each other, but I also know it could never have come to anything.” The handsome actor finally gave up on Olivia, calling her “a professional virgin.”

Howard’s friend, Louella Parsons, may have launched Olivia’s affair with Howard. She wrote that the actress had accepted an engagement ring from Howard, and that the couple was launched “into a whirlwind courtship.” The gossip maven got it wrong. Howard had never met Olivia.

Louella had a spy on the set of *Dodge City*, a Warner Brothers’ western released in 1939, in which Olivia was co-starring, once again with Errol. One Friday afternoon Howard sent a private plane to the set at barren Modesto, California, to pick up Errol and fly him to Los Angeles. It was understood that at the airport, a limousine would haul Errol to the *Southern Cross* for an off-the-record weekend on Catalina Island. Louella’s spy on the set of *Dodge City* mistakenly assumed that Howard had ordered the plane to bring Olivia to him—not Errol.

Louella’s mistake may have given Howard an idea. After the wrap of *Dodge City*, he called Olivia. “I read in Louella’s column that you and I are engaged. Ready to get hitched at any moment.”

“But I’ve never met you,” she protested.

“I know,” he said. “But since we’re going to get married—Louella is never wrong about matters of the Hollywood heart—I thought we should get together and check each other out. At least know what the other party looks like in the flesh.”

Somewhat reluctant, she agreed to invite him for tea at her home, Nela Vesta, where she lived with her mother, Lilian de Havilland Fontaine, and her beautiful sister, Joan Fontaine, who for a stage name had appropriated the name of her stepfather.

After putting down the phone, Olivia turned to her mother. “Hollywood’s most famous wolf—and I don’t mean Errol Flynn—just invited me out. He

sounded more like a shy little lamb than the big bad wolf. But who knows?"

The next afternoon, Howard showed up for tea. At long last he gazed into Olivia's "aesthetic face," with her brown, melting eyes and Mona Lisa smile. She took him inside and introduced him to Lilian and Joan.

Johnny Meyer had driven Howard to the home and remained in the car outside. "Can you imagine such a thing?" he later said. "Howard Hughes at a ladies tea? I didn't really want to go in—but of course, no one invited me."

Howard's dress shocked the carefully groomed and coiffed ladies. His navy blue yachtman's jacket had been patched several times and was bleached almost white in parts from the fierce sun. He wore ill-fitting, baggy pants that appeared to have been made of sailcloth. For a belt, he used a nautical rope. His famous sneakers were dirty and without laces. Unusual at that time, he wore no socks. His crushed fedora was riddled with holes as if bullets had been fired into it.

Olivia was startled by how highly pitched his voice was. She also later wrote of his "gangly shyness." Of course, he could have been playing country boy from Texas, using that hayseed façade to mask his true personality as a skilled seducer. Unlike Errol, Howard immediately brought out the maternal instinct in Olivia.

During the course of the tea, Howard, as was his custom, devoted most of his attention to Lilian. That ploy had worked on Ginger's mother, Lela. As it was later reported, Howard virtually ignored Joan. That, too, as it turned out, was some sort of ploy.



Olivia de Havilland, Joan Fontaine

The next evening, Howard arrived for an official date with Olivia. This time he drove himself, showing up at her doorstep in a shabby Chevrolet that was "an unintentional convertible." When it rained that night, water poured in through the rusty roof. In the car with him, she discovered that he wore no deodorant and may have forgotten to bathe in the last few days.

On the way for dinner at the Brown Derby, he made an astonishing statement. "You know, don't you, that I got the role of Melanie for you?" She knew nothing of the sort. Later she heard that Howard, for reasons known only to himself, had called producer David O. Selznick and urged him to cast her in the role. Through an invitation arranged by Cary Grant, Howard drove to director George Cukor's house and also urged him to cast Olivia in the role. He even called his East Coast friend, Jock Whitney, who was putting up a lot of the production money, and urged him to intercede on Olivia's behalf.

She countered by amusing Howard with a story that Joan had also wanted to be in the movie. "Actually, she wanted to play Scarlett. Cukor told her she'd be much more suited for the role of Melanie. That seemed to infuriate Joan. 'If it's a sappy Melanie you want, get Olivia!' Joan told Cukor before storming out of his office. I loved the part of Melanie and went for it right away. If you helped me get the role, I'm grateful."

At the Brown Derby, Olivia told Howard that Errol had taken her here a few months ago. "He's such a Tasmanian Devil," she said. "In the middle of our dinner, he released his pet raccoon. It ran up the legs of Kay Francis."

"I bet that was the first time any male ever got up that one's skirts," he said facetiously.

Over dinner, she took note of his eating eccentricities. He ordered a butterfly steak and some small peas. The waiter brought the steak and Howard pronounced it OK. But there was a scoop of small peas on his plate. He told the waiter to take them back to the kitchen. He wanted only twelve peas. The astonished waiter returned to the kitchen and shortly thereafter came back with Howard's dinner. This time the plate still contained the butterfly steak, but only twelve peas. "You can count them, sir, if you wish," the waiter told Howard.

Olivia may have been astonished when Howard, "the richest man on the planet," asked her to pay for dinner. He informed her, "I never carry money on me."

The whirlwind courtship that Louella had written about came true after all. No one knows how Howard managed to pacify Ginger, but he was "seen everywhere" with Olivia. Even so, he would often mysteriously disappear during their courtship, once for three weeks at a time. Every day that he was gone, three dozen white orchids would appear at Olivia's doorstep. Back in Los Angeles, Howard virtually demanded that Olivia take flying lessons from him. She agreed. Soon he was teaching her to become a lady pilot, as he had with Katharine Hepburn and even earlier with Billie Dove.

It is believed that at some point along the way, Olivia fell in love with Howard. One night he took her dancing at Hugo's Garden Room, a popular spot at the time where Clark Gable might show up with Carole Lombard, or even Ronald Reagan with Jane Wyman. At Hugo's, Olivia learned that Howard could fox-trot "and do a pretty good rumba—no Cesar Romero, of course," Olivia later said.

Once, she dared bring up the subject of love with Howard. "Perhaps we should talk of marriage."

He abruptly told her, "I've got other plans. A lot more to accomplish in aviation before I settle down. When I'm fifty—somewhere about 1955—I'll get married but not before. I'm not ready to give up my wild and wanton ways."

Rebuffed, Olivia informed him that she too had a career and "many, many other things to accomplish." That was true, of course.

In spite of his rejection of a marriage proposal, he would continue to date Olivia for the next few weeks.

But then he made one of those reckless decisions that only Howard in the heady Hollywood days of 1939 could conjure up. While still dating Olivia, while still proposing marriage to Ginger, he told Johnny Meyer that he was going to go after Joan Fontaine. Not only that, and even though he'd rejected Olivia's marriage overtures, he planned to propose marriage to Joan.

Whatever Meyer thought about this, he kept to himself. “You’re the boss,” was his only comment to Howard. Meyer later said, “I knew which side of my bread was buttered. Whatever Howard wanted, I tried to get for him.”

Maybe Olivia’s romance with Howard would have lasted longer if a party had not been thrown in Joan’s honor at the Trocadero. Howard was behind it all, putting up the money, presumably to celebrate Joan’s engagement to the dashing British actor, Brian Aherne. Olivia attended the event, escorted by Howard. Joan showed up in pink, looking dazzling, upstaging Olivia’s appearance in white organdy.

At one point during the party, Howard asked Joan, as guest of honor, to dance with him. Up close and personal, he whispered into her ear that he’d been in love with her ever since he’d met her at the tea party with Lilian and Olivia. Before the dance ended, he urged her to drop Aherne and marry him instead. “I’ll make you forget all about him,” was his whispered promise. “I can also do a lot more for you than he can,” which was true.

Joan was well aware that her sister was falling in love with Howard. “No one two-times my sister,” Joan later told her mother after Howard had slipped her his private telephone number. According to Joan’s version, she later called Howard “just to test the waters” to see how far he would go in betraying Olivia.

In the garden of the *faux* Polynesian restaurant, Trader Vic’s, Howard asked for Joan’s hand in marriage. He urged her to call Aherne that very afternoon and tell him that their engagement was off. Acting coy, she agreed to weigh his offer, having no intention of doing that. Joan was reported to have told friends that she found Howard’s high-pitched voice off-putting, making everything he said sound like he was whining. Unlike Olivia, she was not impressed with his shyness and awkwardness, finding it unconvincing in such a man of the world.

Instead of calling off her engagement, she fled that night back into the arms of her handsome, charming, and debonair lover. Joan viewed her engagement to Aherne as some-thing of a coup. After all, she’d rescued him from the arms of an international temptress, Marlene Dietrich. It is not known if Aherne ever told his wife-to-be that he had evidence that Howard was in love with Cary Grant, a dynamic he’d seen up close during the filming of *Sylvia Scarlett* with Katharine Hepburn.

When she returned home, Joan informed both her mother and Olivia that Howard had proposed marriage. That must have been scalding water in the face of Olivia, since he’d rejected even casual dialogue about a possible marriage to her.

She was furious at Howard for his proposal to Joan. “Boiling with rage,” she rushed to her bedroom and called Howard. After bursting into tears, she told him that their romance was over. “I don’t want to see you again,” she said. “Please don’t call.”

He readily let her go. But he persisted in calling Joan, who left instructions with Lilian to tell Howard that “Miss Fontaine is not at home.”

The conflict over Howard, and other disagreements, led to Olivia and Joan becoming known as “the feuding sisters.” Many of their conflicts were career oriented.

Sometimes directors considered both Olivia and Joan for the same key roles—that is, when they didn’t offer the parts first to Ginger Rogers, a longstanding member of the Howard Hughes kennel.

At one point, Ginger exaggerated but claimed that Olivia made a career out of playing roles foolishly turned down by her. In 1946, Ginger turned down *To Each His Own*, which brought Olivia her first Oscar. In 1948 Ginger passed on *The Snake Pit* which brought Olivia an Academy Award nomination. “Olivia should thank me for my poor judgment,” Ginger later said.

The feud between Joan and Olivia wasn’t helped when Joan learned that Olivia had originally been offered Daphne du Maurier’s classic *Rebecca*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock. After Vivien Leigh and then Loretta Young passed on it, *Rebecca* became one of Joan’s most memorable roles. It was Ginger herself who presented Joan with her first Oscar for the 1941 *Suspicion*. As Ginger later said, and photographs at the time prove, “I had my eyes closed at the time so I didn’t have to face her.”

Ginger falsely assumed that Joan had wanted to marry Howard instead of Aherne. She privately remarked, “Joan, Olivia, and I were at one time or another Oscar winners. But none of us actually were cast in the role each of us seriously considered—that of Mrs. Howard Hughes!”

Howard had made headlines when he’d romanced Billie Dove, “the world’s most beautiful woman” at the end of the 1920s. By the end of the 1930s, another sultry actress was being hailed as the world’s most beautiful woman.

“I want a piece of the action,” he confided to Johnny Meyer.

Forgetting Joan and Olivia, but still keeping a hold on Ginger, Howard set out to seduce Hedy Lamarr.

As the years went by, and from all reports, Howard didn’t bring many women to orgasm. Starlets, call girls, and Las Vegas chorines reported the same sad story. But in 1939 Howard met “the queen of orgasms,” as she was called in Hollywood.

In one of her first films, Gustav Machaty’s *Extase*, filmed in 1933, Hedy was billed as Hedy Kiesler. (Just before the launch of her film career in Hollywood, she was renamed by Louis B. Mayer as Hedy Lamarr in honor of Barbara LaMarr, one of Howard’s early girlfriends, and an actress who seems to have elicited genuine sorrow from Mayer at the time of her early death.) Released in America as *Ecstasy*, the movie had made Hedy a notorious figure in cinema. Howard had screened it ten times and had been fascinated by the scene that depicted her swimming, then running through the woods in the nude. The director had also asked the actress to play a scene in the film in which she simulated orgasm. In real life, Hedy didn’t have to fake such passion. It was genuine.

Howard was savvy enough to know that Hedy had little talent as an actress. But she was one of the world’s true beauties. “Even if she can’t act,” he told Dietrich, “I can always look at her.”

On a visit to the set of *Lady of the Tropics*, being filmed at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Howard encountered Hedy after she’d just finished playing a love scene with his sometimes boyfriend, Robert Taylor. They shook hands and looked into each other’s eyes before the actress retreated to her dressing room.

Later, when they were alone, Robert Taylor revealed to Howard that he was going to marry Barbara Stanwyck sometime in the very near future. He wanted to know if Howard had any objections to his wedding the bisexual star. Howard urged marriage onto the beautiful young man, claiming it would end speculation in Hollywood about Robert's homosexuality. Even though Howard had turned down a "lavender marriage" with Kate Hepburn, he thought it would be right for his friend. "Stanwyck will throw the bloodhounds off your trail," he told Robert. "Fan magazines will be writing about the great Taylor/Stanwyck romance and quit concentrating on what you might really be up to. Besides, it'll take the heat off me."

Before leaving the set that day, Howard knocked on Hedy's door and handed her his private phone number at Muirfield. "Give me a call some night," he suggested to her.

"Mr. Hughes, in Austria, where I come from, it is the gentleman who calls the lady."

"You're in America now," he warned her, "and we have different customs here, especially if we reside in Hollywood." He tipped his fedora to her and walked away.

Later, before its release, he had a copy of *Lady of the Tropics* sent to his home at Muirfield where he screened it in private. He later told Ben Hecht, writer of its screenplay, "Beautiful fuckable Taylor. Beautiful fuckable Lamarr. Beautiful costumes. Exotic story. Lousy picture. But just watching those two on screen will give you something to jerk off to."

In 1966 in New York, agent Jay Garon threw a party for Hedy, celebrating the release of her ghostwritten tell-all autobiography, *Ecstasy and Me*. At the party, she spoke candidly about her aborted affair with Howard. But, first, she showed this author the results of a recent "elbow lift." After an introduction to her latest boyfriend—"he's in porno, darling"—she launched into her tales of Howard. She was goaded on with an extra dry gin martini.

"I made a man out of Howard Hughes," she said, startling her attentive audience. "And on our first date. I met him on the set of *Lady of the Tropics* in which I was appearing with one of his boyfriends. I forget his name."

"Robert Taylor," Garon butted in.

"Yes, *that one*. Remember how Greta Garbo devoured him in *Camille*?"

She leaned back on the sofa and asked her porno star to take off her high heels and massage her feet. "At first I was angry when Howard asked me to call him instead of him calling me. But he was handsome, a little bit sexy, and very, very rich. I finally broke down and made the call. I don't know why. At the time I could have had any other man in Hollywood. All the big stars. Gable. Tracy, James Stewart—they were calling me." She looked with contempt at the young man massaging her shapely feet. "In those days I didn't have to pay for it."

When she reached Howard by phone at Muirfield, he invited her to come over right away. "I had pictured him inviting me to The Cocanut Grove and arriving in a big, fat limousine, with sprays of orchids. Nothing like that happened. I put on a simple dirndl I'd purchased in Vienna and drove over to see him. In that garb, I looked like a fourteen-year-old. I'd heard that Howard liked them young. At his home, his housekeeper showed me into his living room. The devil didn't even bother to get up. He was wearing a ratty old bathrobe and some shoddy bedroom slippers. Later that night, I found out he didn't even have on a pair of pajamas under that robe. What a very casual way to receive a lady, I thought."



Hedy Lamarr

"He just sat there looking at me," she said. "Didn't even offer me a cocktail. I sat across from him, and we chatted about my life in Austria, my career at MGM. At some point the conversation got personal. I told him that Louis B. Mayer had exposed himself to me in his office and had asked me to perform oral sex on him."

She related that Howard gave her some career advice. "He told me that a big war was coming, and that Hollywood would soon be churning out one war movie after another. He said that I should tell the studio to cast me only as beautiful Nazi spies. He thought I'd gain international fame if I stuck to playing Nazi spies. Later, I would play spies. But that night I thought that Howard was assuming I might have Nazi leanings, because my country was now controlled by Hitler. I informed him that I was a loyal American."

She did admit that at a party she and her husband, munitions king Fritz Mandl, had thrown, Adolf Hitler had kissed her hand. "Obviously he didn't know I was a Jewess."

"Howard seemed eager to learn about my background as Lady Mandl," she claimed. "I told him that I had two bodyguards and twenty servants in those days. Fritz gave me everything. All the jewelry in the world, beautiful gowns, eight cars. But he kept me a virtual prisoner and had me guarded day and night. He loved power and beautiful women. It was said that if he wanted to drum up some business for his munitions, he would merely start a war somewhere."

To assert her patriotism, she claimed that the U.S. Navy practically told her that her invention had won the war for them. A gross exaggeration, but Hedy is credited with inventing a radio-guiding system for torpedoes that indeed turned out to be a useful invention, one on which she took out a patent, although she was never to make any money on it. Supposedly she'd gained knowledge about this system from her Nazi sympathizer husband, Fritz Mandl. Her early version of frequency hopping used a piano roll to change some 88 frequencies. It was intended to make radio-guided torpedoes harder for

enemies underwater to detect or jam.

“Considering that Howard was practically ready for bed when he greeted me, I just assumed at one point he’d make a pass at me,” she said. “It was growing later and later. He made no move to seduce me. Finally, he asked me rather bluntly, ‘Would you like to make ten thousand dollars in cash?’”

“I was insulted,” she said. “I informed him that a prominent member of the Krupp family in Germany had once offered to give me half a million dollars in diamonds, emeralds, and rubies for ‘one night of ecstasy’ with me. I refused him.”

“Sensing that he’d insulted me, Howard apologized,” she claimed. “He said I had misunderstood him. For the ten thousand dollars, he wanted me to pose nude for him. From that photograph, he was going to instruct his engineers—if that’s what they were—to make a lifesize replica of me in rubber. Realistic down to the last detail. He even wanted my vagina molded from life so that my dummy would have an exact duplicate of my sexual organs. I was horrified at the suggestion.”

“He said that the reason for the dummy was that he didn’t feel worthy of taking the real me,” she claimed. ‘You’re too much of a goddess,’ he told me.”

At that point in her recitation, Hedy’s porno boyfriend mocked Howard’s comment. “I’ll have to use that line on some chick some night. Great seduction technique.”

Hedy scolded him for being “a naughty boy,” then continued. “I got up from the sofa and stood before Howard. ‘You’re worthy,’ I told him.” “I kneeled down on the carpet and opened his bathrobe,” she said. “I told him why bother with some stupid rubber dummy when he could have the real thing. I performed oral sex. Unlike Robert Taylor, I got a rise out of Howard. He took me into his library, and we made love all night. Don’t believe all those stories that jealous women spread about Howard being impotent. He was very virile with me.”

“Howard bedded me that night, and I think it was more thrilling for him than it was for me,” she claimed, “even though I experienced multiple orgasms. He seemed to view this as the greatest accomplishment of his career. I think he considered himself lucky if he gave a woman one orgasm. What he didn’t know was that I experienced frequent orgasms when having sex with most men. With some men, I had uncountable orgasms.”

Hedy Lamarr was perhaps the only movie star memoirist who ever wrote publicly of her tendency for multiple orgasms.

On another note, she added, “Men have told me that they can get an orgasm just by looking at me on the screen. I know for a fact that men attended my movies and masturbated under their jackets.”

After the night of the orgasms, Hedy claimed that Howard “fell madly in love with me and sent me flowers every day. Our affair lasted for just a few short weeks.”

“What went wrong?” she was asked.

“He wanted to marry me and make a prisoner of me,” she said. “I wasn’t ready for that. I had been married to Fritz when I became Lady Mandl, and he kept me under guard all the time, not wanting another man to look at me. I couldn’t go through an experience like that ever again.”

She was asked what the jealous Mandl thought of her nudity on the screen in *Ecstasy*. “He tried to purchase all the prints, but never succeeded because of bootleg copies. Benito Mussolini refused to sell Fritz his copy. I know for a fact that Hitler watched the film several times.”

“There was no way I could escape from Fritz and plunge into a marriage with yet another man who wanted to imprison me,” she said. “Of course Howard was very rich, like Fritz, and I tend to like very rich men. But on my own, I made thirty million dollars. Regrettably, I wasted it all and made many bad decisions. I stupidly turned down the starring role in *Casablanca*, fearing it might be too similar to my role in *Algiers*. The Swedish peasant got it instead. I also turned down *Gaslight* which the bitch also took. I finally told Howard I didn’t need him. Later in life, I would need him, but by then it was too late.”

She claimed that she repeatedly warned him not to fall in love with her, like so many other unfortunate men had done. She cited the case of Ritter Franz von Hochstatten, who came from one of Germany’s most distinguished families. “I wouldn’t give up my career to marry him, and he hung himself. I didn’t want that to happen to Howard, but I feared he’d do something drastic when I turned him down.”

“Had I married Howard,” she said, “he would never have had any need for another woman. When you have the world’s most beautiful woman in your bed, there is no need for any other.”

Before the end of that long-ago party in 1966, the agent, Jay Garon, Hedy’s porno boyfriend, and the author of this book assured Hedy that she was the most spectacular creature since God created Eve—and that she ranked up there with Helen of Troy. Even Agnès Sorel in the Middle Ages did not equal her beauty.

“Why else would Cecil B. DeMille cast me as Delilah?” she asked. “The temptress of the ages.”

“You sure knew how to deliver a mean haircut,” Garon said.

The day after Hitler ordered the unprovoked attack on Poland, and the world was plunged into World War II, Howard called Noah Dietrich at three o’clock in the morning.

“What’s important enough to wake me up,” Dietrich demanded of his boss.

“There’s a war going on, Noah,” he said.

“Don’t you think I read the newspapers and listen to the radio?” an impatient Dietrich asked.

“I wanted Hughes Aircraft to become a major player in this war,” Howard said. “Douglas, Lockheed, Northrop, Consolidated, even Vultee, are thriving. Why not Hughes Aircraft?”

“Those boys at Wright Field don’t trust you,” Dietrich said. “They acknowledge you as an aviation hero, but think you’re too much of a playboy.”

“Let’s figure out a way to change that image,” Howard ordered.

“Okay, I’ll get on it first thing tomorrow. Now, I’ve got to get some sleep.”

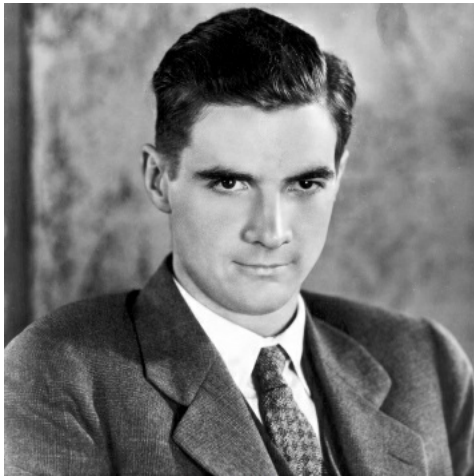
“One more thing,” Howard said, before releasing Noah. “I’ve decided to go back into the picture business.”

“Another *Hell’s Angels*?” Dietrich said. “We still have plenty of footage left.”

“Something better,” he said. “I’m going to make the first sex western ever filmed.”

“Westerns aren’t about sex,” the sleepy Dietrich protested. “They’re about shooting Indians. In Westerns, men love their horses, not women.”

“My Western is going to change all that,” Howard promised. “I’m going to make a Western so sexy that chapters of the Legion of Decency will be howling from coast to coast.”



Howard Hughes

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Los Angeles 1939-40

Howard still didn't like parties unless they served some purpose. When he was invited to the Trocadero in December of 1939, to a post-première celebration of *Gone With the Wind* that David O. Selznick was throwing, he agreed to attend only after he'd obtained a copy of the guest list.

Arriving on the scene, he didn't even pay his respects to the film's co-star and his former girlfriend, Olivia de Havilland. He wanted to meet not a beautiful actress this time, but the film's publicist, Russell Birdwell. Howard had been impressed with the nationwide publicity generated by Birdwell's "Search for Scarlett O'Hara."

One of Selznick's "yes men" pointed out Birdwell to Howard. The publicist was amusing Mary Pickford and Norma Shearer with stories of the filming of *Gone With the Wind*.

As Howard approached, Norma was claiming she turned down the role of Scarlett because her public "didn't want me to play a bitch."

Seeing Howard, Mary made a quick excuse and departed. She no doubt didn't want to face another snub from him, and was still bitter at his insult to her at the Tailwaggers Ball that Bette Davis had thrown. Norma still intended to pursue Howard romantically so she seemed delighted to see him. Merely nodding at her, Howard asked Birdwell if he could see him, privately. "Can't you see I'm talking to Miss Shearer?" Birdwell snapped, not recognizing Howard. Rebuffed, he stalked away.

After Howard had gone, Norma chastised Birdwell. "You're a publicist, for God's sake! How could you not recognize Howard Hughes? He's the second most famous man in America after FDR."

Realizing his mistake, Birdwell excused himself from Norma and searched the room until he found Howard hiding behind a potted palm. He immediately made excuses for his rudeness. Since Birdwell had obviously been told who he was, Howard didn't introduce himself. "I'm going to make a big motion picture. I want it to become more famous than *Gone With the Wind*. I might need your help. Interested?"

"Sounds most intriguing," Birdwell said

"I'll call you," Howard said. "Don't call me." Without a goodbye, he turned and headed across the large dance floor in the direction of the exit.

In the reception area at the coat-check desk, he encountered Norma again.

"Oh, Howard," she said, "I don't have my driver today. He's sick. Would you be a darling and give me a lift home?"

Although he had pointedly ignored Norma up to now, he suddenly seemed to view her in a different light. "For the Queen of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, I'd be honored to be her chauffeur."

It was the beginning of a new romance.

Another A-list actress—Hollywood royalty, in fact—had come into his life.

En route to Norma's elegant home, Howard became intrigued with her patrician profile, her impeccable manners, and her casual grace. A vulgar Jean Harlow she wasn't. Nor a flapper type like Joan Crawford. She'd pushed back her hair into a distinctive coiffure created for her by the effeminate Marty Franks. In a white satin, rather slinky and low-cut gown by Adrian, she looked seductive, very evocative of her role as Irina, the "countess," in *Idiot's Delight*, opposite her former lover, Clark Gable. He'd been astonished to find out that she never wore underwear. "That way, we wolves can better pick up her scent," he jokingly told Victor Fleming, who had directed him in *Gone With the Wind*.

What transpired that night between Howard and Norma would be lost to boudoir history had actress Merle Oberon not talked about it. At the time she was Norma's best friend and confidante, and not known for her discretion, particularly at cocktail parties. Merle, of course, never spoke for publication.

In the late 1940s, Norma also confided certain details about her romance with Howard to her dwindling sets of friends and colleagues. Again, she never spoke on record.

If these sources are to be believed, Howard first asked Norma, "Are you the same in person as you are in the movies?"

She looked flabbergasted, as if not understanding the question. "I don't exactly know what you mean."

"An emancipated woman, one who's been disillusioned by love—maybe marriage, too. One ready to indulge in some hi-jinks with the first good-looking stud from Texas who comes along."

"Mr. Hughes..."

"Call me Howard."

"Howard, that is for you to find out," she said coyly.

"One movie reviewer said you suggest playful eroticism on the screen," he said. "Just how playful and just how erotic?"

"Again a question for the mystery of the night about to unfold," she said, quoting a line from a screenplay, *The Loves of Martha Eggers*, that she'd just turned down.

Before the car pulled into her driveway, she told Howard that his Uncle Rupert had given a great boost to her career when she'd appeared in his rollicking farce, *Excuse Me*, in 1925. "Rupert went to Louis B. Mayer and told him, 'That little lady can do anything she sets her mind to.'"

"I'm sure my uncle is a man of great judgment when it comes to talent," he said, quickly changing the subject. Talk of Rupert made him uncomfortable. "I saw you in *The Women*. The only lady among the cats in that bitchfest. When it comes to bitches, it was perfect casting for Joan Crawford. As a bitch, she could just play herself."

"Meow!" she said. "You can say that again!" Joan Crawford was Norma's chief rival within MGM. Crawford felt that Norma got all the good roles because she was "sleeping with the boss." Norma had been married to Irving Thalberg, the "boy wonder" or "boy genius" at Metro and the second in command. Before his death of heart failure in 1936, he had been called "the Crown Prince of Hollywood." Once, Crawford sent a message to Norma, "You can tell Miss Shearer I didn't get where I am today on my ass!"

Norma amused Howard by telling him that she had at first mistaken Thalberg for an office boy when they were introduced in 1923.

Montréal-born Norma Shearer was nearing the end of a distinguished career when Howard first drove her to her swanky home. No longer living in a \$7.50-a-week room at 8th Avenue and 56th Street in New York City, she was the doyenne of a sumptuously furnished Hollywood mansion. She was

surrounded by antiques, paintings, and half of the outstanding stock of MGM, along with eight million dollars, left to her by her late husband. He'd also left her an ironclad contract to prepare herself for her upcoming battle with the tyrannical Louis B. Mayer.

Even before Howard met her, he was well aware of her reputation as a sexual predator. Thalberg's weak libido and even weaker heart meant Norma had to turn to more virile men to satisfy her strong sexual desires. By the time she'd met Howard at the Trocadero, she'd already had an affair with Mickey Rooney when he was only sixteen, twenty years younger than herself. Of the affair, which was "extinguished" by Mayer, fearing scandal, Rooney later said, "She was hotter than a half-fucked fox in a forest fire."

Howard's homosexual friend, Billy Haines, once confided that Norma "was one of the few women in Hollywood who ever got a rise out of me." Privately, Howard counted at least three actors both Norma and he had bedded, including not only Billy himself, but Clark Gable and cowboy star Johnny Mack Brown.

The man who escaped Norma's clutches was Howard's boyfriend, Tyrone Power. Norma desperately tried to seduce the handsome actor when they had co-starred together in *Marie Antoinette* in 1938. "She invited me frequently to her dressing room and to her home," Tyrone confided to Howard. "But I found her very unsexy. I heard that she was a nymphomaniac. On the set one day, I discovered George Raft banging her against the side of a wall when the crew had broken for lunch. The next week she was entertaining James Stewart in her dressing room. She was also known for having an affair with Robert Montgomery. They starred in some pictures together. I heard that faggot-hating Montgomery is a 'wham, bam, thank you ma'am,' type of lover."

In the comfort of her home, Norma enticed Howard to take two libations, unusual for him. She amused him at her piano, playing songs for him and singing, although she was no Jeanette MacDonald. She told him that at the age of "eight tender years," she had made her living performing in nickelodeons.

It was not Merle Oberon but Billy Haines who later provided details of the Hughes/Shearer romance.

As Howard discovered that first night, Norma spent almost as much time getting ready for bed as she did in the morning when she had to face the cruel lens of the MGM cameras. "I thought I'd wait all night before I got my chance at that honeypot," Howard told Billy. During their romp, she confided that she found sex with Thalberg unsatisfying because she liked it rough and he was just too gentle. "If rough sex is what she wanted, that's what I delivered," Howard said. "Texas style. At one point she wanted me to spank her bottom until it turned a rosy pink. That proved to be a prelude to a type of sex I'd never had with a woman before. She likes to get entered through the rear door. She claims that she prefers that more than entry into that deep passage she has up front."

Howard also told Billy that, "Norma can go all night. You'd have to call out the U.S. Marine Corps to keep that hot hole plugged. Her fingernails dug so deeply into my back I bled."

The next day Howard seemed pleased that, "I've bedded another Oscar winner." Norma had won the Academy Award for her 1930 performance in *The Divorcée* in which she played a young society wife who tired of her husband's indiscretions and set out to beat him at his own game.

Howard would continue to date Norma for only three more weeks, eventually asserting that "the bitch tired me out."

In some far-fetched way, she'd influence his life again, but only indirectly.

Vacationing at the Sugar Bowl Ski Lodge in northern California in the late Forties, and deep into her retirement, Norma was thumbing through a souvenir photo album left on a coffee table. In it she came across a fresh-faced beauty, Jeanette Morrison, posing seductively on the slopes of a snow-covered hill.

Since Norma still retained a financial interest in Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, she arranged for the young woman to have a screen test. It was successful. With a seven-year contract and a name change to Janet Leigh, the aspiring actress was soon playing opposite Van Johnson in *The Romance of Rosy Ridge*, set in Missouri in the 1860s at the time of the Civil War.

"I'll always be grateful for Norma for jump-starting my career in films," Janet later said. "That was wonderful. What wasn't wonderful was all the attention I was getting. That led me into the clutches of Howard Hughes himself. What a nightmare!"

Ginger Rogers had endured humiliation in her engagement to Howard, including his absconding with her estranged husband, Lew Ayres, and flying him to a vacation retreat in Texas. "God knows for what purpose Howard flew Lew there," she told her sometimes director, Gregory La Cava.

To divert Ginger, Howard had tried to be clever. While he was involved for a night with Bette Davis or perhaps Olivia de Havilland, and Ginger needed an escort for a lavish party or première, Howard asked Cary Grant to accompany her. Seeing the gorgeous pair together, some of the more foolish members of the press concluded there was romance in the air. As George Cukor impishly remarked, "That was about as likely as Kate Hepburn shacking up with Mussolini." It is not known if Ginger knew how intimate Cary's relationship with Howard was.

She referred to Cary as her "old chum." She also claimed that he was "as dear a gentleman as anyone would ever want." In her memoirs, she wrote, "To be friends with a male who is not your husband is a neat trick that works sometimes!" Privately, she once confessed to Fred Astaire that her so-called romance with Cary never got beyond a polite kiss on the cheek at the door to her Bel Air mansion.

By 1940 Ginger no longer had any intention of marrying Howard, although he was yet to be told that. She told her mother, Lela, and her sometimes lover, director George Stevens, that she was "growing tired and fed up with Howard's attempt to possess her totally, while leading another life as a predatory vulture." More and more, after her divorce from her sexually confused husband, Lew Ayres, became finalized, she was enjoying playing the field, as she could have her pick of the handsomest men in Hollywood. "I wanted a boyfriend, not a policeman," she wrote. "Things between Howard and me were coming to a head." Unknown to her at the time, Howard had tapped her phone and was even monitoring calls to her beloved mother, Lela.

The fuse to the inevitable stick of dynamite was lit by a rather innocent-sounding phone call. Ginger was in the middle of dinner with Lela and director Lewis Milestone, who had also been Howard's director. "The boss man" [Ginger's words] called and asked her if she would go to the dentist with him the following morning at 10:30. "Howard always insisted on calling the shots," she later claimed. "I couldn't believe it when he told me he'd also scheduled a cleaning for me. Howard Hughes telling me when I needed my teeth cleaned. What nerve!"

She refused to go with him, even when he offered to pay the bill. "God damn it, Howard," she shouted into the phone. "I make \$300,000 a year. I can afford to pay my own ten dollar dental bill."

"Okay, princess," he said, "you're making a big mistake."

Before she'd finished dinner, another call came in, this time from a writer friend of hers, Alden Nash. Her rather gossipy friend told her, "It's no

business of mine, but I don't like to see a friend of mine being two-timed by this big lug Howard Hughes." He may have had another motive for the call. Only that day Caddo Productions had rejected a screenplay of his on which he'd labored for eighteen months.

Nash claimed that for the past ten nights Howard's car had been seen parked in front of the driveway of the residence of Faith Domergue, who lived across the street from him.

"Never heard of her," Ginger said.

"She's just a teenager." After thanking him for the bad news, Ginger hung up the phone and returned to her dinner guests. When Lela and Milestone departed after dinner, she drove over to Faith Domergue's address. She was using a brand new station wagon Howard had presented her. Painted a maroon with lots of wood trim, Howard had ordered the station wagon custom-designed for her with pink leather upholstery, her favorite color.

She immediately recognized Howard's battered old Chevy in front of this unknown teenager's home. Ginger later confessed that she drove all the way back to Bel Air in tears.

Writing in 1991, and after the passage of decades, Ginger still would not reveal Faith's name in her memoirs, preferring to identify her as "the little actress," which had been how Nash had described the starlet.

When Howard called the following morning to urge her—once again—to go to the dentist with him, she shouted, "No! A thousand times no!" She slammed down the phone.

For the rest of the day, she wandered aimlessly around her Bel Air house, "fighting back tears."

Around three o'clock that afternoon, Howard's attorney, Neil McCarthy, called to give her bad news. Howard was in Room 418 of the Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital. On the rain-slick streets of Los Angeles, and en route to the dentist, his Chevy had collided head-on with a black sedan with two passengers—an unknown man and his wife—both of them injured but not killed.

Driving in anger, Howard had forgotten to turn on his windshield wipers. Even so, he was not the cause of the accident. Without warning, the sedan had suddenly veered into his lane, causing the crash. Howard's head was thrown forward, colliding with the windshield as it shattered into jagged pieces. A shard of glass slashed into Howard's head "like deli ham being sliced," as one of the attending motorcycle policemen wrote in his report. That patrolman and his partner found Howard lying unconscious at the wheel, bleeding heavily from a concussion. They didn't know how much blood he'd lost. An ambulance was summoned to rush Howard to the intensive care unit of the hospital.

He didn't regain consciousness for four hours. The moment he did, he stared into the face of Noah Dietrich and Neil McCarthy. Both men were ordered to "Get Ginger! Haul her ass over here!" As Dietrich remembered it, Howard didn't even ask about his medical status.

Alarmed, although still angry at Howard, Ginger asked McCarthy about his condition. "He's badly injured. His face, particularly the area over his left eye, required seventy stitches. He's so bandaged he looks like something from a Boris Karloff movie."

She hesitated about an hour, later stating that she was "at war with myself." Finally, she decided to drive the station wagon to the hospital. "Driving there, I was so mad I almost had an accident myself."

Given special clearance at the hospital—Howard was seeing no visitors—she was allowed into his room. Dietrich had stashed a burly bodyguard outside.

In the room, she was forced to give an autograph to the head nurse, an adoring fan, before she was allowed to be alone with Howard.

"He looked a fright," she later recalled. "All swathed in bandages. His sad brown eyes were at half-mast when they looked up at me. A pitiful look. But I was seething inside and had no pity for him. He told me he was so miserable that he felt he'd 'arrived in Hell or some place even worse.' I got even madder when he blamed the accident on me. He said he was denouncing me in rage on the way to the dentist and wasn't paying attention. 'I'll probably be sued for millions,' he said."

Before leaving her home, she'd put all the jewelry he had given her into a red satin-covered box with a pink ribbon. She tossed the box onto his hospital bed. "Faith Domergue needs these gems more than I do. If you have any left over, you can give them to Bette Davis, Joan Fontaine, Olivia de Havilland, and, yes, Norma Shearer. I know about that bitch too." She headed toward the hospital door. In a parting gesture that befits an actress, she turned to look back at him, staring into his soulful eyes, later comparing them to a bloodhound puppy in her brief account of their breakup in her memoirs. As a final gesture, she took off her emerald engagement ring and tossed that onto the hospital bed. "I am returning everything to you," she said. "We are no longer engaged." She then stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

She was never to see Howard Hughes again.

Fifteen minutes later, Dietrich entered Howard's hospital room to find his boss crying, a very unusual event. "What's the matter?" he asked. "The pain?"

"Ginger's left me!" Howard bellowed.

The next morning after a sleepless night, Ginger rose early to drive herself in her station wagon to the studio for some publicity shots. In her driveway, she frantically looked for her station wagon. It was missing. Fearing it had been stolen, she rushed to call the police. Waiting by the phone, she picked up the receiver an hour later when an officer called her back. He informed her that the station wagon was registered as being owned by the Hughes Tool Company of Houston, Texas. The car had been impounded and was being returned to its officially designated owners.

"That bastard!" Ginger shouted into the phone before slamming down the receiver.

Howard spent little time recovering from the accident and almost no time getting over his heartbreak with Ginger. In the hospital, he was reading a magazine when he discovered a picture of a beautiful seventeen-year-old girl, Gloria Vanderbilt. Like his former flame, Brenda Frazier, the teenager was another widely publicized heiress, and had gained national fame during a bitter custody battle in the 1930s that had occupied the country's headlines for weeks.

The day Dietrich came to the hospital to drive Howard back to Muirfield, he informed his head honcho, "No more slutty Hollywood actresses for me."

That was a promise Howard was not to keep.

"I'm tired of dating Hollywood matrons," Howard informed an astonished Dietrich. "I'm going to New York to bag me some beautiful teenage pussy. Not just any girl. One with a pedigree. I'm about to storm the rarified world of the Vanderbilts."

"But what about Faith Domergue?" Dietrich protested. "If you like them young, she's only fifteen. Two years younger than the Vanderbilt kid."

"Nothing like having a young teenage beauty on each coast. That way you save on having to transport them from the Pacific to the Atlantic."

"Like a girl in every port," Dietrich said.

"Something like that," Howard said, tossing off the hospital bedding, revealing that he was entirely nude. "Now, Noah, get me something to wear so I can cover up my balls and get the hell out of this joint."

It was Memorial Day, 1940. Howard had just returned to Los Angeles, having sailed the *Southern Cross* to a secret port in western Mexico. As if they already knew that the United States would soon be entering World War II, officials at the War Department were systematically appropriating large vessels like the *Southern Cross* for military use by the Navy. With Errol Flynn, he'd sailed to Mexico to hide the boat at a private marina owned by one of the actor's friends.

Back in Los Angeles, Howard was stalking the deck of his newly rented yacht, *Sea Queen*, impatiently waiting for the Memorial Day sail to begin.

Johnny Meyer had planned a special treat for him. Howard had told his pimp that he was tired of "dating mothers," perhaps a reference to Ginger Rogers and Katharine Hepburn, who were not exactly mothers. "I want to meet babes who are just on the borderline between being a girl and bursting into womanhood—virginal types, completely unspoiled. I'd like to meet a girl who has never even kissed a boy. That way, I can teach her to kiss like I like it."

"Finding a virgin, even a fourteen-year-old virgin, in Los Angeles will be difficult," Meyer said. "But I'll try."

Stated even more graphically, Howard requested a young girl who—unlike Kate or Ginger—"hadn't sucked off James Stewart."

Meyer had succeeded beyond his wildest dream, getting Jack Warner to allow several starlets he had under contract to go on this "publicity junket" sponsored by Howard. "If it gets their pictures in the paper, and they're all in bathing suits, it'll be good for the studio," Jack said. "It'll show the world we've got a second act to Bette Davis, and, brother, do we need one for *that one*."

Discreetly, and without a lot of publicity, Howard had been dating nineteen-year-old Susan Peters, a Spokane-born "starlet with promise" at Warners. It was not a very serious romance, but would continue on and off throughout much of World War II.

He'd continue to date "lovely, luminous" Susan even when she married actor Richard Quine. He knew of her dalliance with Howard. But Howard was such a powerful man in Hollywood that the ambitious Quine overlooked his wife's romance, thinking that Howard in some way might advance either of their careers.

She married Quine in November of 1943 when they had appeared in the 1942 Marjorie Main vehicle, *Tish*. Before her tragedy, Susan's career was starting to move, especially after she'd appeared in the 1942 *Random Harvest*, MGM's prestige film for the year. She'd won an Academy Award nomination as best supporting actress. Then tragedy struck.

On New Year's Day, 1945, Quine invited her on a duck-hunting trip outside San Diego. On the hunt, her rifle discharged accidentally, the bullet lodging in her spine, leaving her permanently paralyzed from the waist down. Rumors abounded in Hollywood that Quine had actually shot his wife out of jealousy because of her ongoing fling with Howard. Howard dreaded getting embroiled in another scandal, and quickly dropped Susan after her accident. "I don't make love to quadriplegics," he callously told Meyer.

Susan's marriage to Quine survived for five more years until their divorce. At the age of 31 on October 23, 1952, Susan died. She'd lost her will to live, and had literally starved herself to death, having not eaten in weeks.

Quine went on to enjoy minor renown as a director of such films as *Paris When It Sizzles* in 1964, co-starring William Holden and Audrey Hepburn. On June 10, 1989, Quine also lost his will to live. Using the same shotgun that had misfired into Susan's spine, he fired into his head, blowing his brains out.

"So many people who knew Howard ended tragically," Johnny Meyer said. "I began to think my boss was a jinx." Perhaps Meyer was foreseeing his own tragic early death.

On that bright day in 1940, however, future tragedies were hardly on anyone's mind as Susan Peters and her best friend, Faith Domergue, were driven to Balboa as part of Howard's yachting party for Warner starlets. Howard met Susan and her friend at dockside. He was dressed in white pants tied with a nautical rope and a faded blue yachting jacket that was a cast-off from Cary Grant. Howard's brown eyes, resting under a sea captain's visored hat, lit up when Faith came into his presence. He virtually ignored Susan.

A fresh-faced, raven-haired, Black Irish exotic beauty from the steamy French quarter of New Orleans stood before him. "Bayou baby!" he said. Susan had spoken several times of her friendship with Faith and her Louisiana background while dating Howard. He was immediately captivated by this striking fifteen-year-old and her lustrous eyes and vivid, sensual mouth set off by what was to become known during the war years as "Victory Red" lipstick.

He later told Meyer that he'd never seen such lips on a woman. But Faith would not become known for her mouth. Instead, she would be frequently compared to big-busted Jane Russell, another of Howard's discoveries. At the time Faith was introduced to Howard, her breasts had not yet blossomed into their full mammillary potential.

In spite of all the beautiful young starlets around him, including Susan, Howard never took his eyes off Faith during the sail to Catalina. He noticed that in a certain kind of light, her eyes became a shade of violet, evocative of a future Elizabeth Taylor, another teenager he would pursue.

At the end of the yachting party, Howard dismissed all his other guests, offering to personally drive Faith back to the home of her parents. It was after two o'clock in the morning when he pulled up in front of her doorway. He noticed that there were no lights on in the house, so he assumed the parents were permissive, or else they would be waiting up with a gun for the return of their errant daughter.

In spite of the way it appeared, Faith later claimed that "nothing happened that first night. In fact, when I got to my house in Howard's car, he had to wake me up. I'd fallen asleep. Not only was I tired, but I was bored. All day Howard had kept staring at me. But there was nothing to say to him. He didn't know what to say to me either. So all he did was look. That was okay by me. After all, I was trying to break into pictures and be looked at. So, what the hell!"

"You'll be hearing from me, kiddo," he promised, giving her a kiss on the cheek before driving off. Two months passed, and she'd virtually forgotten about the man old enough to be her father. Then one afternoon he called. But instead of speaking directly to her, he spoke for an hour with her mother and spent half as much time talking to her father.

Faith had only recently learned that she had been adopted shortly after her birth by her adoptive parents, Leo Domergue and Annabella Quimet. They had moved to California in the 1930s, enrolling her at St. Monica's Convent School.

Arriving at the doorstep of the Domergue household, Howard virtually ignored Faith, but began the process of wooing her parents. Learning that Leo was in charge of a car dealership in Los Angeles, Howard asked to be driven there. Once in the showroom, he immediately purchased an emerald green Lincoln from Leo. Weeks later when Faith asked Howard what happened to the Lincoln—he was driving a battered old Buick at the time—he said that he'd parked it outside some airport, but didn't remember which city or even which state.

On the afternoon of his meeting with the Domergues, he hired Leo, giving him a position at Hughes Aircraft Company. Since Mrs. Domergue didn't

want to work, he bestowed a gift upon her. Going to his Buick, he returned with his beloved mother's sterling silver tea set from Houston, "worth a king's ransom."



Robert Mitchum, Faith Domergue

Over dinner that night, he won over the parents, who agreed to let Faith drive to Palm Springs that weekend for a house party. He assured the Domergues that there would be many older women there, including Katharine Hepburn who would chaperone Faith. Kate was actually in New England at the time.

Once they got to Palm Springs, however, Faith learned that there were no other guests. The first night passed uneventfully. On the morning of the second day, he took her from shop to shop in Palm Springs, buying her a new wardrobe, which thrilled her.

Around midnight on the second night, he appeared unannounced in her bedroom. He told her that all afternoon he'd been studying her sensuous lips, and had decided she was a perfect candidate for fellatio. She told him that she didn't know what that meant. "I'm here to teach you." Moving toward her bed, he took off his robe, revealing his nudity. She later claimed that she was afraid but he was very gentle with her. "I felt protected when I was with him," she recalled. "Even though I tried, I couldn't bring him to climax. But he didn't seem to be disappointed in me. He masturbated himself in front of me before getting up. He kissed me on the lips. 'Tomorrow is another day' he said to me. 'With practice, you'll get it right.'"

In the weeks and months to come, Howard got the Domergues to agree not only to the above-mentioned long weekend in Palm Springs, but also to plane trips to Las Vegas and San Francisco, even moonlight sails to Catalina Island. "Day by day I was falling more and more in love with Howard Hughes," Faith later recalled. "And I got better at that other thing he wanted done to him."

He became obsessed with her sensuous lips, almost as much as he was with Jane Russell's breasts. He ordered his studio to endlessly photograph Faith's lipstick-coated mouth—her "luscious kisser" as he called it—and to blow up pictures of only her lips in extreme close-up. He then had about twenty of these pictures plastered across the walls of his library at Muirfield. He later confided to Johnny Meyer that he often masturbated while looking at those lips. "Kinky," Meyer told Dietrich, "considering that if Howard had waited three hours or so, Junior Miss would be home from high school, and he could have the real thing working him over."

Throughout his long relationship with Faith, which would endure for years, Howard preferred the act of fellatio. She claimed that at no time "did Howard and I have sex in the missionary position."

Slowly, and with the parents' permission, he was taking over every aspect of her life. That led to his decision to purchase her contract from Warner Brothers. He promised he was going to "make you the biggest screen attraction of all time. I did it for Harlow, who had no talent. You've got talent. Look what I'll do for you!"

She believed him and arranged for him to meet her agent the following afternoon. She would bring him to Howard's office at 7000 Romaine Street.

Exactly at three o'clock, Henry Willson, along with his discovery, showed up to meet Howard.

Even though both men didn't know it at the time, his meeting with Henry Willson became one of the milestones of Howard's life. It was a relationship that would last for years, yet was so secretive that most of *tout* Hollywood never knew that Howard and Willson were even acquainted.

Faith Domergue had been discovered by Willson, who at the time was working for the Gummo Marx Agency. Gummo was the only Marx brother who did not appear before the camera, but spent his time instead discovering talent for the movies.

At the time of his meeting with Howard, Willson was already one of the most notorious homosexuals in Hollywood. Pudgy, with a tendency to early baldness, Willson was no beauty. Yet he worshipped beauty. Male beauty, that is. It was said that before his career ended, he'd seduced more beautiful men in Hollywood than any other agent.

He was often compared to John Darrow, the former Adonis of *Hell's Angels*, who'd gone from acting to agenting as his looks faded. As an agent, Darrow had continued to pimp for Howard. But when Willson met Howard, he decided that he wanted to replace Darrow as chief pimp. In the future, it would be Willson, not Darrow, who would arrange for the handsomest men in Hollywood to spend time with Howard. Johnny Meyer was relieved to learn that he would no longer have to recruit young men for Howard's bed, because he found it distasteful. "I'm no pervert," he told Dietrich. Meyer, however, would continue to recruit young starlets for Howard.

To ingratiate himself with Howard, Willson, out of Faith's hearing range, invited him to a poolside party at his house. Through Darrow, Howard had already heard of these pool parties where some of the handsomest and most well-built young men in Hollywood showed up. Most of them were aspirant actors, who seemed only too willing to take off their bathing suits to become part of a "meat market."

Willson invited gay or bisexual producers, directors, cameramen, and other studio executives to these orgies. Various power brokers in Hollywood would then check out the young men before disappearing with one of them into one of Willson's upstairs bedrooms.

Eager to attend one of these events, Howard said that he'd show up, even though he had some concerns about flaunting his homosexuality in such a public way. When Willson told him all the big name stars, producers, and directors who had attended previously, Howard felt more assured that his privacy would be protected. Meyer said that Howard went over to Willson's house that Sunday afternoon. No details are known about what Howard did or did not do on that day.

In time, however, Willson would introduce Howard to young men who later became big name stars in the late 40s and especially in the 50s. Willson's biggest discovery, whom he pimped only to the Hollywood elite, was Rock Hudson—that is, when the agent himself wasn't enjoying the handsome star's favors.

Howard must have liked what he saw at Willson's pool. After only two weeks of knowing the agent, he ordered Dietrich to pay Willson two hundred dollars a week in cash. Dietrich asked, "What for?" Howard assured his chief honcho that it was "just a finder's fee."

In his capacity as an agent, Willson had negotiated directly with Jack Warner to sign Faith to a seven-year contract at Warner Brothers, where she was paid fifty dollars a week. Taking voice, diction, and drama lessons, she had not yet been cast in a film at the time of her first meeting with Howard.

Howard was determined not only to dominate her life, but her contract as well. Perhaps Willson himself tipped off Jack Warner about Howard's interest. Deciding he could make some extra pocket change, Warner held out for fifty thousand dollars as the price tag on Faith's relatively worthless contract. Determined, Howard paid it, even though he told Willson, "It's highway robbery—just like a damn Jew."

Once he'd secured her contract, Howard demanded that Faith go back to school. "Howard made me finish high school," Faith later recalled. "Or I would have dropped out. Looking back, I'm glad that he did."

When she wasn't in school, he ordered that she take drama lessons at his offices at 7000 Romaine Street. He even hired the best acting coach in the business, Katherine Braden, to personally supervise Faith. Braden had taught many starlets at 20th Century Fox, a number of whom had gone on to become big stars, notably Betty Grable.

At one point, Howard had Faith delivered to the house of the famous lesbian costume designer, Edith Head. He sent a note to Head: "Teach my 'Little Baby' how to dress like a lady. I'm going to make a big star out of her."

Years would go by before Howard actually cast Faith in a movie at RKO. Her only "credit" at the time was "uncredited." In 1941 she appeared in a jitterbug scene in the lackluster film, *Blues in the Night*, which co-starred Priscilla Lane and Betty Field and had been directed by Miriam Hopkins' discarded husband, Anatole Litvak.

Louella Parsons systematically maintained a network of spies who were stationed virtually everywhere, even at an exclusive resort in Phoenix, Arizona, where Howard had taken Faith for an off-the-record weekend. The spy fed Louella some misinformation. In her column the next day, Louella headlined the *faux* scoop: IS SHE MRS. HOWARD HUGHES?. Readers had to dig into the column to learn that SHE referred to the unknown Faith Domergue, not some big name Oscar winner like Howard usually dated. Even though Louella raised a question in the headline, the column actually reported the wedding as already having taken place. "The Gay Illiterate," as she called herself, claimed that Howard had wed Faith in Phoenix "at a very secret and very private civil ceremony."

It wasn't in Phoenix but at the Palm Springs Racquet Club that Howard proposed marriage to her. "It was the greatest thrill of my life," Faith later claimed. "As we stood on the terrace, he slipped the most beautiful emerald engagement ring on my finger, as a harvest Blood Moon shone down on us. I think Howard had ordered God to hang out that incredible moon that night."

Actually the emerald was the one that Ginger Rogers had tossed onto his hospital bed before storming out the door and out of his life forever. As he slipped the ring onto Faith's finger, he said, "You are the baby girl I always wanted and never had. So far, you've known only one man—and that's me. That's the way it's going to be. I don't want you messing around with other boys."

Her fantasy romance got a cold dose of reality when he moved her into Muirfield. For some reason, Howard had ordered his housekeeper, Beatrice Dowler, to put the estate in mothballs. "All the furnishings downstairs had been covered in white sheets as if no one lived there," Faith recalled. "I felt I'd been banished to a lonely castle."

Strangely, there was a scorched airplane propeller displayed in the living room. She asked about the ghoulish artifact, and he explained that this propeller had almost decapitated him during the filming of *Hell's Angels*. "Putting it here means that every night I'll be reminded of Death when I come home."

"Do you really want to be reminded of that?"

"It's not a reminder that I'm going to the grave," he said. "It means I looked Death in the face and cheated the motherfucker!"

All the windows had been shuttered. Evocative of his future as a recluse, he had already begun to withdraw from the world. Packed up and put into storage were the Tiffany lamps, crystal decanters, Venetian chandeliers, and Murano glassware. "I can't bear to look at the stuff any more," he'd told Beatrice Dowler, his housekeeper. Upstairs he'd ordered that the bedrooms once occupied by Kate Hepburn and Billie Dove be "forever locked," the keys thrown away. Once he'd been proud of the trophies he'd garnered as an aviator. But now he ordered that all of them be put in dead storage, even the one personally awarded to him by President Roosevelt himself.

Faith's days were bleak at Muirfield. She discovered that Howard would go away for weeks at a time and not even announce his departure. Most of her meals were taken with her parents, as she could not go out with anyone else. "Even when Howard would return home, he often wouldn't have anything to do with me," she said. "Sometimes we'd pass each other in those gloomy halls at Muirfield, and he wouldn't even speak."

He did let her go out, but only if accompanied by a chauffeur. She felt that the driver was a spy, reporting on all of her activities to Howard. He even insisted that the chauffeur be her escort at her senior high school dance at the end of the school year. "The driver seemed afraid to even speak to me," Faith later said, "much less dance with me." Unknown to her, the driver had been carefully vetted before getting his job as Faith's guardian.

Later in the 1950s, as Howard kept more and more starlets stashed away in apartments or homes in the Hollywood Hills, he demanded that all his drivers and assistants who looked after these girls be homosexual. Meyer said, "It was like eunuchs in the courts of the Sultans of old. Instead of having these guys castrated, Howard demanded they be gay instead. He did that ever since one of his favorite gals ran off and married one of his chauffeurs."

As time went by, Faith came to feel that Howard was becoming increasingly paranoid—that, of course, being her assessment later in her life. "At the time I don't think I knew what paranoia meant," she said. "I'd sit for hours at a time in his battered old Buick while he made all his business calls from pay phones scattered all over Los Angeles. He feared that all his phones at Muirfield and at Caddo were tapped."

Actually, as it was later learned, he was right. Years from that time, it was revealed that J. Edgar Hoover had ordered his FBI agents to tap Howard's lines. Hoover never trusted Howard, especially when his aviation company was doing more and more business with the government.

As the United States progressed through the war years, Howard and some of his associates would give the homosexual FBI director plenty of cause for alarm.

One week Robert Stack accepted Howard’s invitation to go sailing, but asked if he could bring a friend along. Howard reluctantly agreed, thinking it might be one of Robert’s young starlet girlfriends. In those days the extraordinarily handsome actor was making the rounds, seducing “a starlet a minute,” as he put it. Howard would have preferred to enjoy the actor’s charms alone but agreed to play host to whomever Robert brought along for their weekend sail to Catalina.

On the deck of the rented *Sea Queen*, Howard was introduced to the young John F. Kennedy dressed like a sailor, all in whites. “He’s Ambassador Kennedy’s son,” Robert said, introducing the young man who was twenty-three years old and a graduate of Harvard. He’d just published a book, *Why England Slept*, which had been ghost-written for him.

Howard detested the young man’s father, Joseph Kennedy, a feud stemming from the time the liquor dealer had been a power broker in Hollywood. On a few occasions, both men had seduced the same women, notably actresses Constance Bennett and Nancy Carroll.

When Howard later thanked Robert for inviting the young man for the weekend, Robert knew Howard was smitten. John soon became “Jack.” Howard confided to Robert, “He has the most perfect blue eyes I’ve ever seen on a man.”

The moment Jack flashed his soon-to-be-famous smile at Howard, the tall, thin Texan bonded with the New Englander, with his natural charm and grace. It was as if Howard had waited all his life to meet the perfect Prince Charming. The only problem was that the gleam in this young man’s eyes was not for Howard, but for every beautiful woman in Hollywood. Over dinner that night, Jack told Howard that, “I want to fuck every woman in Hollywood.” He called it “celebrity poon-tang.”

A lifelong lover of gossip, Jack admired Howard and was eager for anything he might reveal about all the legendary stars he’d seduced. For his Hollywood days, Jack wanted to use Howard as his role model. “You’re the swordsman out here,” Jack told Howard. “No doubt about that. Even dad admits it’s true, and he’s bedded a few beauties—not just Gloria Swanson. I’m the new boy in town and want to follow in your footsteps.”

Robert and Jack had become almost immediate friends the day a mutual friend, Alfredo de la Vega, had introduced them at Robert’s studio. Over Howard’s champagne and lobster dinner aboard the yacht, Robert told Howard about his secret hideaway, called “the Flag Room.”

It was a small flat that lay at the end of a cul-de-sac, Whitley Terrace, between Cahuenga and Highland in the Hollywood Hills. Here stood a jumbled mass of apartments stacked one on top of the other like a set of warped building blocks about to tumble over. The apartments opened onto balconies dripping in wisteria.

At the Flag Room, the name given to their rental, Robert claimed that he learned “about the birds, the bees, the barracudas, and other forms of Hollywood wildlife.” Both Robert and Alfredo had convinced their parents that they needed this small hideaway to pursue their studies quietly and without interruption from their families. Their parents fell for this line and agreed to pay the rent. “We studied all right,” Robert confessed. “Female anatomy.”

In the corner of the apartment was a small bedroom with room for only one double bed, with about two feet on either side of it. Alfredo and Robert turned this into their “chamber of seduction.” The ceiling was only five feet high, so both men had to bend over when they came into the room. On the ceiling they plastered flags of various nations, all except Nazi Germany.

When either Robert or Alfredo took a young woman here, they demanded that she memorize the order of the flags for a later quiz—or else she’d have to “Pay the Piper.” Since the victim was already spread out horizontally, she was in position to receive her “punishment” for flunking the exam. “All the girls flunked,” Robert said. “There were too many flags to remember.” One blonde beauty, who looked like a future Marilyn Monroe, was so enticing and alluring to Robert, that he claimed he “penalized” her three times that night.

Many young starlets were repeat visitors to The Flag Room. “Horny bastards that we were,” Robert said, “Alfredo and I rearranged the flags every night so that some foxy lady on her fourth or fifth visit would not be able to memorize the order and would flunk one more time.”

Robert amused Howard by telling him that Jack, although he’d just arrived in Hollywood, had visited The Flag Room a total of eight times, each time with a different woman. Years later in his memoirs, Robert facetiously claimed that he’d helped Jack in his geopolitical studies by teaching him which flag belonged to which country.

“I’ve known many of the great Hollywood stars, and only a few of them seemed to hold the attraction for women that JFK did, even then,” Robert said. He noted that even before his handsome friend entered politics, he’d just look at a woman and she’d “tumble.”

“I had a fixation on Carole Lombard,” Robert admitted years later when he agreed to talk candidly about his life with Howard and his friendship with Jack. “Except for posing for some pictures with me, she never gave me the time of day. I guess she was settling for Gable’s less than prepossessing inches instead of my fine and noble tool. Actually, Gable became a great friend of mine, and I wouldn’t have betrayed him anyway. Nonetheless, in those days I sought out starlets who looked like Carole Lombard, at least the dime store version.”



John F. Kennedy, circa 1940

“Unlike me, Jack had completely versatile taste in women—blondes, brunettes, redheads, young ones, mature ones, gals with large breasts, gals with lemons for breast,” Robert said. “Regardless of the girl, he always insisted on shapely legs.”

Even in later life, valet George Jacobs in his autobiography, *Mr. S: My Life with Frank Sinatra*, admitted this was true. Jack, by then president, was still fascinated by women with shapely legs, notably dancers Cyd Charisse and Shirley MacLaine. In MacLaine’s case, he also wanted to know if “she has a red pussy,” according to Jacobs.

Aboard his yacht, Howard seemed eager to learn about young Jack’s string of conquests, no doubt planning to conduct raids on the women himself if the seduction sounded enticing enough.

Robert later said that through “the humble portals” of The Flag Room passed a “guest list that ran the gamut from the chorus line to Academy Award winners.” In his memoirs, the actor claimed that “since I still live in California,” suffice it to say that he couldn’t “name names.”

In private conversations, Robert was much more forthcoming. When pressed, he cited Betty Grable as one of Jack’s early conquests. Robert himself had struck out when he’d pursued “America’s pinup with the dimples on her knees,” but Jack scored big.

Jack claimed that Grable told him that child actor Jackie Coogan had taught her “more tricks than a whore learns in a whorehouse.” She also confessed to him that she’d “seduced the unseductive” aspiring young actor Ronald Reagan.

For some reason, known only to himself, Howard didn’t pursue Grable himself, even though he’d go after—and win over—all the leading pinup girls of World War II: Lana Turner, Veronica Lake, Rita Hayworth, and Ava Gardner, among others.

Robert amusingly confessed that even though Grable and Howard didn’t make it with each other, they shared some of the same lovers, especially Tyrone Power and later Victor Mature. “Even that discovery of Henry Willson, Rory Calhoun, when he wasn’t otherwise occupied with Marilyn Monroe and countless others,” Robert claimed. “Rory one day told me that the trouble with Hollywood was that there were no good cocksuckers, with the notable exceptions of Betty Grable and Howard Hughes.”

Pert young actress Barbara Britton was another conquest for both Jack and Robert. Robert claimed that the actress had “luscious tits.” Britton had arrived in Hollywood straight out of college to decorate a Hopalong Cassidy western, *Secrets of the Wasteland*. She is remembered today, if at all, for her dominating image as “the Revlon Lady” on TV.

Margaret Sullavan, the sometimes caustic ex-wife of Henry Fonda, is famous in Hollywood history for her steamy affairs with the likes of James Stewart and Humphrey Bogart, as well as dozens of handsome young actors and studly men, many of whom she’d pick up in her car while cruising the streets of Los Angeles and Hollywood. Although not admitting to any appearances in The Flag Room, Sullavan later told her biographer, Lawrence J. Quirk, that Jack was “a beautiful, beautiful man. Even in his early twenties, he had all that cocky masculine charm.”

Robert claimed that he and Judy Garland were always “great chums,” although many insider Hollywood gossips thought this “cute couple” were having an affair on their dates. The actor said they never got around to going to bed. “But when I introduced Judy to Jack, she fell madly in love with him. It was a friendship that would last for all their lives. Even when he was in the White House, the President would call Judy in Hollywood and have her sing ‘If birds fly over the rainbow, why, then, oh why can’t I?’ Those words, and not anything from Camelot, were his favorite lines from any song.”

Lana Turner was an emerging blonde bombshell who would share her favors with both Jack and Robert—and later with Howard himself. Robert remembered her as “so vulnerable... so lost!”

“We even bedded Oscar winners,” Robert claimed. “Even before they won Oscars.” He cited Ingrid Bergman. Even though married to the Swedish doctor, Petter Lindstrom, Ingrid liked to have affairs on the side. In time, her impressive lineup would include her *Casablanca* co-star Humphrey Bogart (in spite of what the biographies say), along with Gregory Peck, Spencer Tracy, Leslie Howard, Yul Brynner, Anthony Quinn, David O. Selznick, Omar Sharif, Joseph Cotten, and Bing Crosby. “She’ll do it with doorknobs,” said her director, Alfred Hitchcock.

Before they reached Catalina Island, Robert realized that both Howard and Jack were true sailors, “born to ride the waves.” “The men quickly bonded,” he claimed. Robert said that he never told Jack about Howard’s homosexual streak. “I figured Jack could take care of himself. Many gays had come onto him. Besides, Jack told me that his best friend was a devoted cocksucker and always finished him off for the night when he didn’t score with a girl.”

The reference was to LeMoyne K. Billings, affectionately called “Lem” by Jack. The two men were considered bonded at the hip, and their friendship would endure through his marriage to Jacqueline Bouvier, through countless affairs with such stars as Marilyn Monroe and Gene Tierney, and through the Bay of Pigs, ending only by an assassin’s bullet in Dallas.

Somehow Howard and Jack struck a harmonious note with each other in talking about their sexual conquests. Robert later admitted he felt left out. At that point the only woman that both Howard and Jack had each had some form of sexual contact with was Marlene Dietrich. “That didn’t surprise me since Marlene did anything in pants or skirts, although she never got around to me,” Robert said.

He remembered Jack relating that he’d gone to the south of France when still a teenager as part of a holiday from boarding school. There he’d stayed in Antibes at the ultra-deluxe Hotel du Cap. He was introduced to Marlene Dietrich. “She was fucking my dad at the time,” Jack admitted.

He said it wasn't a complete seduction, but he'd gotten intimate with Marlene on the darkened floor of the grand ballroom at the hotel. "We were dancing real close, and she unbuttoned my pants and reached in and stroked my dick. Up and down. The band was playing Cole Porter's *Begin the Beguine*. She smelled like a French whore. I creamed in my tux. Can you imagine what a thrill that was for a teenage boy? To be stroked by Marlene herself."

On Catalina Island, Jack wandered off for about five hours," Robert said, "so Howard and I just assumed he'd gotten lucky. We know for a fact that he boarded another yacht in the harbor. The following Sunday we went for a nude swim. I couldn't help but notice Howard checking out Jack's equipment. Of course, Howard himself had all of us beat."

Robert said that he wasn't surprised when another invitation for another weekend was extended by Howard. "This time I was excluded, and it was all right with me. I got mixed up with Howard in the first place because I thought he was going to advance my career. By 1940 I'd come to realize that Howard wasn't going to do a god damn thing for me. He just wanted Hollywood's handsomest boy—namely me—to hang out with him."

"Jack told me he was going to Palm Springs for the weekend with Howard," Robert continued. "He said that Howard had promised him 'a pleasant surprise,' whatever that meant. I didn't warn Jack not to go. Why shouldn't he go? He dropped a bomb on me when he told me that Howard had convinced him that he should pursue a career as a motion picture star, even though the ambassador wanted him to go into politics one day. Two days before Jack left to join Howard in Palm Springs, I noticed that he kept looking at himself in every mirror he passed. I think every good-looking guy and beautiful gal in the world dreams of becoming a movie star. Why should Jack be an exception? He said, 'I can just hear dad shouting at me: No Kennedy becomes a movie star.'"

Ironically that same line would be uttered years later by Jacqueline Kennedy to her son, John F. Kennedy Jr., when he came to her and told her the startling news that he wanted to be an actor and had actually been offered the starring role in an upcoming movie.

The details of that weekend in Palm Springs remain sketchy. The only source of what happened was Robert Stack, who wasn't even there. He later reported that he "learned a little bit from Jack and not a lot more from Howard himself."

Howard had obviously set up the weekend to impress Jack. He seemed to bask in the flow of Jack's admiration for him. Jack had been bragging about his conquests to Howard, but the older man wanted to show the younger one that he too could round up two "hot dates" for the weekend.

Howard had flown to Palm Springs with his "two surprises." Jack had not been free to go along with them at the time, so Howard arranged for a long black limousine to pick him up later that day and drive him out to a desert setting where Howard either rented a villa or owned it—no one was ever certain which.

Jack later claimed to Robert that he was completely flabbergasted when he arrived at the villa to learn the identity of the two "dates" Howard had arranged. The young New Englander, it turned out, had been intimate on some level with both of the beautiful foreign-born ladies—one a Swede, the other German. Howard did not need to introduce Jack to Ingrid Bergman and Marlene Dietrich. Robert was asked how Howard had pulled off this coup. He could only speculate. "In Marlene's case, it was no big deal to get her to accept an invitation to Palm Springs," Robert said. Over the years, she became a frequent visitor to Palm Springs. George Jacobs, Sinatra's former valet, reported in his memoirs that he caught Dietrich swimming nude in his boss man's pool, kissing an equally nude Greta Garbo.

"Until Jack that day on the yacht told of his seduction of Ingrid Bergman, Howard had never met the star," Robert said. "I think he wanted to impress Jack that, even though he was an older Lothario, he too could snare that beautiful young Swedish gal for himself."

Robert said that Jack later reported that he was confused at first "about the pair-offs." Had Howard arranged for him to pair off with Ingrid or with Marlene? At first Jack assumed because of the differences in the ages of this quartet, that he and Ingrid would be the young lovers, and that Howard and Marlene would be the more mature romantic duo. But right from the beginning, Howard whispered to him that he planned to seduce Ingrid himself, "since you've already had the pleasure."

Marlene was to be Jack's date. "She was quite a bit older than me but still looked gorgeous, and dad said she was great in the sack," Jack later confided to Robert. Jack also said that Marlene's first words to him were "it looks like we've got some unfinished business." No doubt the reference was to her masturbation scene with him on the French Riviera when he was just a teenager.



Ingrid Bergman

Robert claimed that Howard’s ultimate plan for the weekend had been foiled. What he’d hoped to do on the following night was arrange a four-way with Jack, Ingrid, Marlene, and himself. “I think Howard voyeuristically wanted to see young Jack in action,” Robert said. “From what I was told, Jack and Marlene agreed to it.”

In later life, Jack as President would become notorious for three-ways. But Ingrid was the lone hold-out that weekend. The woman loved sex, and plenty of it. But, as she told Howard, “I’m not into orgies.” Robert also believed that Ingrid did not want to be on the receiving end of Marlene’s lesbian affection. “*That one’s*[meaning Marlene] reputation has already preceded her,” Ingrid told Howard.

Howard may not have been entirely pleased with Ingrid’s sexual performance in Palm Springs. He was even less pleased when he learned that their notorious weekend in the desert had become the talk of Hollywood. Nonetheless, he continued to pursue Ingrid for a few weeks, but ever so discreetly. He didn’t want any more scandal.

“There must have been something he liked about Ingrid,” Robert said, “although he complained to me about her preference for the missionary position. From what I gathered, the Swede refused to indulge Howard in his passion for oral sex.”

Even Ingrid’s second husband, Roberto Rossellini, the Italian director, complained about this to several of his friends. “She doesn’t do the things a whore does,” Rossellini claimed, telling his cronies that she always refused to fellate him. For that, he had to go frequently to one of the bordellos of Rome or other cities.

It is not exactly certain how Howard introduced himself to Ingrid, or how he persuaded her to travel that weekend to Palm Springs. Robert didn’t know. “I saw his eyes light up when Jack was telling him about his seduction of Ingrid. I knew that Howard had put her at the top of his list. In those days he was going down his list, crossing off one beautiful star after another when he’d had his way with her. I think I know how they met. Howard was a friend of David Selznick and would later try to marry his wife, Irene Mayer Selznick, when she divorced David. I heard that Howard got himself invited to a party at the Selznick home. There Howard met Ingrid who at the time was having an affair with Selznick. He once told me that the reason he liked Ingrid so much was ‘because she was the only actress in Hollywood who didn’t want to play Scarlett O’Hara.’”

After many years had gone by, Howard would resume seeing Marlene only briefly in 1952. Her longtime friend, director Fritz Lang, had cast her in a Technicolor western, *Chuck-a-Luck* for Fidelity Pictures. Howard got involved when as chief of RKO he agreed to release the film. He demanded an immediate title change. He told Lang, “What movie-goer in Europe will know what in the fuck *Chuck-a-Luck* means?” Howard’s new title was *Rancho Notorious*. His time with Marlene was brief. The star was then aging, although still “a beautiful antique,” as Lang told Howard.

After the resumption of his brief affair with Marlene, Howard informed Lang, “The thrill is gone.” Their boudoir performance had been lackluster, and so were the box-office receipts on *Rancho Notorious*. Most critics found it a poor man’s version of *Destry Rides Again*.

Old friends since the 1930s, Howard would never see Marlene again. “Each of them would watch the other decay from afar,” said Orson Welles, who cast Marlene in a guest appearance in his 1958 film, *Touch of Evil*.

After the Palm Springs weekend, Howard continued his hopeless pursuit of Jack, who’d soon be heading back to the East Coast. Howard didn’t get to see Jack in action with Ingrid and Marlene, but he did take him to the private studios of a tall Mandingo masseur, who called himself “Nobu.” During the war years, Nobu, from some unknown country, was famous in Hollywood for his thorough massages, which involved masturbating his clients, both male and female, to the “mother of all climaxes.” His patrons included Errol Flynn, Lana Turner, Paulette Goddard, Joan Crawford, and even Howard himself.

Although it later became fashionable for certain masseurs in New York and California to give massages that involved sexual climaxes, in Nobu’s time no one did that except prostitutes hired for that purpose.

Jack told Robert that Howard took him to be worked over by the “magic hands” of Nobu. Both men lay nude on separate beds in Nobu’s studio while sensual music played. “I got this big erection,” Jack later confided to Robert. “By the time he was finished with me, I was splattering the ceiling. I’ve never seen anything like it. He really knows how to touch the right spots.”

Although Nobu may have been a peak experience in Jack’s life, other masseurs have reported that he always got an erection when being massaged, even by a man. Sinatra’s valet, George Jacobs, wrote in his memoirs, that he gave Jack a massage in Palm Springs when he was the guest of his boss. “By the time I rolled him [meaning Jack] over to do his trunk and thighs, he had an enormous erection.”

From all reports, Howard never got to experience Jack’s erection first hand. Robert speculated that Howard made one attempt and failed to win Jack over. Such an occurrence may have happened during Jack’s final weekend on the West Coast before his departure back East. This time Jack was picked up and delivered to a beach house in Santa Monica which was owned by Marion Davies.

“I knew Jack was looking forward to it,” Robert said. “He thought that Howard, to impress him, would come up with two reigning film queens. How Howard planned to top Marlene and Ingrid I don’t know. But he was an amazing man. I fully anticipated that he’d arranged to have Rita Hayworth, Lana Turner, and Betty Grable there. To Jack’s disappointment, when he got to Santa Monica, he found that he was the only invited guest.”

“I don’t know exactly what happened that weekend because Jack never told me everything,” Robert said. “Howard abruptly changed the subject a week later when I inquired.”

“The following Monday morning, when I was telling Jack good-bye, he told me that he never wanted ‘to see Howard Hughes again—that guy’s too much of a creep for me.’”

Los Angeles 1945-1950

In 1945, Howard once again began his pursuit of Ingrid Bergman, even though she was still married to Petter Lindstrom. In New York to meet with film executives, she renewed her friendship with Cary Grant, which was strictly pla-tonic. Howard wanted in on the action. On several occasions, the three of them were photographed together at a restaurant or a club.

Cary was serving as a chaperone. Actually he was a “beard,” concealing the fact that Ingrid was being slipped at night into Howard’s suite at the Drake Hotel. When a reporter asked Cary what was going on, perhaps a romance between Ingrid and himself, or between Howard and Ingrid, Cary lied, claiming that Howard was considering casting Ingrid in his next film.

Ever the gallant suitor, Howard came to Ingrid’s rescue when she found all flights booked back to Los Angeles. When he learned about her dilemma, he said that he would take care of it. “I’ll be your pilot on the flight back to the coast.”

The next morning Howard sent a limousine to Ingrid's hotel to deliver her to the airport. Once there and once boarded, she found that she had the plane virtually to herself except for a few passengers, notably Cary Grant. She was introduced to Joseph H. Steele, the son of a missionary in Turkey, who had been hired as a publicist by David O. Selznick. In time he would become her most devoted admirer and defender among the Hollywood hierarchy. The producer's former wife, Irene Mayer Selznick, was aboard. She hardly seemed delighted to see Ingrid. Even though she'd divorced David, Irene was still furious at Ingrid for having had an affair with her husband. Also aboard was Alfred Hitchcock. Ingrid had repeatedly turned down the chubby director's sexual advances, similar to the ones he'd make to Grace Kelly in the future.

En route to Los Angeles, Howard dismissed his co-pilot. He asked Ingrid to fly in the cockpit seat beside him. She slept for most of the way. But he woke her up when he diverted the plane to show her the rim of the Grand Canyon.

Before landing in Los Angeles, Howard said he'd like to throw a party for her at the Beachcomber, inviting all her friends and admirers. She turned down the offer. She was not eager to continue an affair with him. Unknown to him, although his spies would later discover it, she was rushing back not to her husband, but to Gregory Peck. The extraordinarily handsome star had launched a torrid romance with her during the filming of *Spellbound*.

In the next few months, Howard made at least eight calls to Ingrid, asking her to slip away with him. Each time she refused.

In her own autobiography, *Ingrid Bergman My Story*, written with Alan Burgess, Ingrid falsely claimed that she was introduced to Howard by Cary Grant in New York. She completely left out that she'd had a rendezvous with Howard years earlier at a villa in Palm Springs. She also claimed that Cary arranged a "foursome date" with Howard as her escort. The other part of the quartet were Irene Mayer Selznick and Cary himself. Ingrid said they went dancing at El Morocco in New York.

There are problems with that memory. Irene Selznick told her friends, especially Kate Hepburn, that she was furious with Ingrid for contributing to the breakup of her marriage to Selznick. Also, at the time, Howard had a marriage proposal "on the table" to Irene. It seems unlikely that he'd want Irene to see him dating her nemesis while still urging marriage upon her.

Even so, Ingrid maintained that while Howard was dancing with her on the floor of El Morocco, he whispered to her, "I'm so lonely. I'm so terribly lonely. You know I have no friends." Cary later dismissed this as a possibility. "First, it wasn't true. Second, it doesn't sound like something Howard would say."

In her memoirs, Ingrid wrote that she laughed at such statements coming from a rich and famous man. She allegedly scolded him. "It must be your own fault, because you don't go out and look for friends. Anyway, I'm having a good time; you're not lonely tonight, are you?"

It was Ingrid herself who started the widely spread rumor that Howard bought up every available ticket on planes flying from New York to Los Angeles. "If we wanted to fly that day, we had to fly with Howard Hughes."

All he had to do was invite her to fly with him. After all, she'd been sleeping with him. It seems highly doubtful that Howard would have to go to such trouble and expense to get her to fly back with him to Los Angeles, considering how intimate they had been in New York.

Privately, Cary told George Cukor back in Hollywood, "That story about buying up all those seats on every plane was just a conceit on Ingrid's part."

Ingrid claimed that on May 30, 1948, Howard called again. As she was sitting on the floor drying her hair, she picked up the phone to hear the Texan's high-pitched voice. "This is Howard Hughes, and I've just bought a film studio for you," he informed her. "It's yours, my present to you. Are you happy?"

If Ingrid is to be believed, she said, "Well, that's very nice. Thank you!"

"Not only have I bought the god damn place, I'm going to make you Queen of RKO, just like Kate and Ginger, at various times, used to be."

"What actress wouldn't have been impressed to hear that?" Ingrid later said. "Today I would have been very impressed indeed and would have jumped at the offer. But in those days I guess I was a little full of myself. 'Show me a great script and a great director,' I told him, 'and then we'll talk.' Perhaps I said goodbye. Perhaps I said a little more. Who can remember? All I know is that I hung up on him. I must have been the only actress in Hollywood foolish enough to hang up on Howard Hughes when he'd just offered to make me Queen of RKO. Even now, on looking back, I can't believe how arrogant I was."

He did not follow up with any scripts, much less directors. She maintained that, "I had practically forgotten about Howard Hughes when the Italian director, Roberto Rossellini, entered my life." She greatly admired and respected the man and was eager to work with him.

It just so happened that Roberto, like all other directors in the world, had a script in need of financing. It was called *Terra di Dio* (Earth of God), and he claimed that producer Samuel Goldwyn had agreed to put up the financing.

Roberto was not known for submitting a finished script. He always said that, "I carry around the idea for a film in my head." When he finally outlined his bleak, morbid idea to Goldwyn, the outspoken director denounced it as "a piece of shit."

Feeling "depressed and abandoned," Roberto was rescued by Ingrid. She said that she knew a producer who might back the film: His name was Howard Hughes.

To reach Howard, Ingrid claimed that she went to the Beverly Hills Hotel where he was living in a bungalow. She alleged that she found Howard living next door to Arthur Miller and Marilyn Monroe. In 1949 it is highly doubtful if Monroe even knew who Arthur Miller was. She wouldn't marry him until 1956, and they wouldn't appear together at the Beverly Hills Hotel until 1959. Nonetheless, Ingrid managed to reach Howard—probably through Johnny Meyer—as Howard at the time was the most difficult person to contact in all of Hollywood. "You could get Harry Truman on the line a hell of a lot easier than Howard Hughes," Samuel Goldwyn once said.

Regardless of how she managed to pull it off, and there were rumors that she'd slept with Howard at the Beverly Hills Hotel, he agreed to come over to her house the following day to discuss Roberto's latest film idea.

She claimed that during the script conference, Howard never once looked at Roberto and had even failed to shake his hand. Howard said he did not want to hear the plot for the script. "I have just two questions. Are you beautiful in it? Are you going to wear wonderful clothes?"

At this point, she laughed, informing him that she was playing a displaced person in some horrible refugee camp with cheap clothes like prisoners wore in Nazi concentration camps.

"Too bad," he said. "In your next film for me I want you to look like the most beautiful woman on the screen. We'll get Edith Head to design your wardrobe. Maybe I'll design a few gowns myself. After all, I designed a bra for Jane Russell in *The Outlaw*."

Before he left her house, Howard agreed to invest a million dollars to make the film, which was unusually high for a post-war Italian film. In addition to that, he'd pay Ingrid her usual salary of \$175,000, plus \$150,000 to Roberto as director.

There was one touching moment during Howard's visit to her house. She kept a framed picture of her mother in the living room. Noticing it, he went over and picked it up. His eyes were misty. "My mother died when I was young." He turned and looked into Ingrid's eyes, still ignoring Roberto. "I have

completely forgotten what she looked like.” He turned and left the living room without a good-bye.

With Howard’s advance money, Roberto left with Ingrid for Italy to film *Terra di Dio*. Within weeks, stories began to reach Howard that his star was having a torrid affair, similar to the one she’d had with Gregory Peck. She’d broken with her *Spellbound* co-star because, as she told Cary Grant, she could no longer tolerate Peck’s “heavy reliance” on alcohol.

Even though the world was yet to know, Ingrid fell madly in love with Roberto during the filming of their movie, which was set on the island of Stromboli, one of the mythologically rich Aeolian Islands off the coast of northern Sicily. Both Ingrid and Roberto were still married to other people at the time. Not only that, but Roberto had been engaged in a hot affair with Anna Magnani, Italy’s leading actress at the time. When he took up with Ingrid, he dropped Magnani.

As if to extract her revenge, the volatile, temptuous Magnani set out to make a rival movie, calling it *Vulcano*. It was released in the United States in 1953 under the title of *Volcano*. Along with Stromboli, Vulcano—known to the ancients as TherMESSA—was another one of the Aeolian Islands off the coast of Sicily.

Magnani announced to the press that audiences would flock to see her and not the Bergman/Rossellini film. She told her friend, Tennessee Williams, “I’ve seen one picture of Bergman’s. That’s all I could stomach. She’s a cow! No emotion whatsoever—a completely blank face. On the other hand, my face can register every known human emotion. That’s why my fans call me the new Eleanora Duse.”

In the Italian press, the Bergman/Magnani rivalry was referred to as “the duel of titanic actresses, hiding behind volcanoes.”

Magnani seemed intent on keeping the feud going, even though Ingrid tried to ignore her. “My Mamma Romma—I play a prostitute—will burn up the screen like an exploding volcano. Besides, William Dieterle, a far greater artist than Rossellini will ever be, is guiding me. Who can forget his *Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. A masterpiece! But we’re making an ever better film than *Hunchback*.”

Roberto’s estranged wife, Marcella de Marchis, was rumored to be dealing with Sicilian gangsters in Palermo and was said to have paid them a thousand dollars to see that “the Swede” did not leave Stromboli alive. And for an insight into future upsets that lay in store for Ingrid, Miss America of 1946, Marilyn Buford, showed up on the island, supposedly to resume her affair with Roberto. If this were true, and it may not have been, Ingrid was perhaps unaware of Buford’s presence on Stromboli.

When the final version of Roberto’s film arrived at Caddo Productions, Howard was horrified. He hated the movie, considering it a dismal failure. He immediately set about cutting it, even though he confided to Dietrich that “it appears hopeless.” To anyone who wanted to listen, he denounced Roberto “as a WOP son-of-a-bitch.” As for Ingrid, he said, “How could any director take one of the world’s most beautiful women and photograph her like a hag?”

Back in Italy, Roberto and Ingrid were strapped for cash. In desperation, Ingrid turned to Joe Steele, who then went over to Caddo with some very private information to report to Howard. He presented the plight of the romantic duo to Howard. For the first time, Howard learned that Ingrid was pregnant with Roberto’s child. Steele urged Howard to hurry up and release the film. An early release might solve their financial difficulties, but there was another reason. Ingrid feared that when news leaked out about her pregnancy, it would lead to a ban on the film in America.

Howard promised Steele that he’d give the matter his immediate attention. He also informed Steele to tell both Ingrid and Roberto that he was not only cutting *Terra di Dio* “to try to save it,” but that he’d retitled it *Stromboli*.

Within the hour, Howard had his old friend Louella Parsons on the phone. He told her that Ingrid was pregnant with Roberto’s child. “Louella pissed her pants when I delivered this scoop to her,” Howard said to Dietrich.

He also told his honcho “that *Stromboli* stunk.” His only hope of saving it was to release news of the scandal, which he felt would lead to thousands of movie-goers flocking to the box office just to get a glimpse of this fallen woman, who no longer was the saintly *Joan of Arc* that she’d portrayed on the screen.

The next morning—thanks to Howard—America learned of Ingrid’s affair with Roberto and her pregnancy.

In Los Angeles, the *Herald Express* screamed in two-inch headlines: REPORT INGRID BERGMAN TO HAVE BABY SHOCKS FILMDOM. Knocked down to second place was an announcement by President Harry Truman that America had invented the hydrogen bomb. The news of “the bastard child” was like the dropping of an H-bomb. The Bergman/Rossellini affair—and the subsequent “out of wedlock pregnancy”—became the talk of the world, outdistancing even the late 1930s publicity generated by the Hughes/Hepburn affair.

The public was shocked to learn that Ingrid, still married to her Swedish doctor, was carrying the child of her married director.

Suddenly, Howard became eager to release *Stromboli* at once to take advantage of such worldwide interest. He personally took over the advertising campaign. He designed movie posters to show an erupting volcano in the background. “Get it?” he asked Johnny Meyer. “The volcano will suggest Rossellini’s erupting WOP dick, spewing hot cum over Ingrid.”

Ingrid was denounced by churches throughout America. In Washington, Senator Edwin C. Johnson rose up on the Senate floor and attacked Ingrid as an “influence of evil.”

The actress was vilified from coast to coast. When Steele revealed to her that it was Howard “who squealed to Louella,” Ingrid vowed never to speak to him again. Roberto shot back that neither he nor Ingrid, or any member of their extended families, would ever fly again on TWA.

Ingrid quickly became an outcast in Hollywood. She’d been transformed, almost overnight, from one of Tinseltown’s brightest stars into a pariah. No further roles were offered to her. With one noteworthy exception, her friends dropped her. Cary Grant wrote: “Ingrid, dearest, it would not be possible in a single cablegram to tell you of all your friends who send you love and affection.” That was a bit of an overstatement. She had no friends left in Hollywood until, in time, she would make a successful comeback.

The worldwide publicity surrounding Rossellini and Bergman in 1949 rivaled that of the faraway scandal that would one day envelop Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton, and *Cleopatra* in 1962. But despite the strenuous efforts of Howard’s public relations staff, *Stromboli* bombed at the box office. *Time* magazine reminded its readers that the crater of Stromboli’s volcano was once known to the ancients as “the gateway to purgatory.”

Ingrid did not become the Queen of RKO, as Howard had promised, and she was never to see him again. In spite of his refusal to fly on TWA, Roberto and Ingrid accepted an invitation from Howard to occupy a suite at the swanky Excelsior Hotel in Rome while she awaited the birth of her child. Ironically, as Anna Magnani’s *Vulcano* was having its Roman premiere, Ingrid in another part of town was giving birth to Renato Roberto Giusto Giuseppe. And in yet another part of Rome, *Stromboli* was being screened to a bored audience, many of whom got up and walked out of the theater before the final scenes.

A quarter of a century would pass before Ingrid would make a discovery about Howard. As she was packing to leave her house “forever” at Choisel in France, she discovered an unopened letter dated February 10, 1950, eight days after she’d given birth to her son. It was from Howard himself.

For the first time, she tore open the letter which somehow had remained concealed all these years. His words to her were kind, as he praised her

“courage, utter simplicity, and lack of guile or subterfuge.” He wrote: “Reality is a matter of intent. It comes from within, not from legislation or legal documents.” He assured her that when her son grew into manhood, the attitude of the world might be “a little truer and broader.” Her son, he told her, would carry no stigma based of the circumstances of his birth. Instead, he claimed, her child would be imbued with the “heritage of a mother who though she may not have been so terribly clever, shrewd, or wise, is one of the most brilliant and courageous women of our generation.”

As she put the letter back into its rotting envelope, she burst into uncontrollable tears.

London, 1972

Ingrid later claimed that she must have stood for an hour looking up at the façade of London’s ultra-deluxe Inn on the Park Hotel. She’d read in the papers that Howard had been taken here, and had secretly entered through the back entrance of the hotel in a hospital stretcher because of his emaciated condition. She was also told that her former lover was being guarded by a phalanx of “fierce aides.”

Finally, after one final gaze up at what she thought was his penthouse suite, she entered the lobby of the hotel. She knew that Howard was not looking down at her. From all reports, the windows of his suite had been taped shut and covered by dark velvet blackout curtains of the type Elvis Presley at the time was also ordering in Las Vegas to keep out the sun.

Announcing herself at the reception desk, Ingrid was immediately recognized. One receptionist, Philip David, remembered that he even asked for her autograph, telling her that *Casablanca* was the best movie he’d ever seen. She requested a piece of hotel stationery. On it, she scribbled a quick note to Howard, requesting a meeting.

Philip assured the star that he’d deliver it to Howard’s suite personally. After ordering afternoon tea for her, he found a secluded part of the lobby and seated her in its most comfortable armchair. He returned shortly thereafter, assuring her that the message had been delivered.

“I sat in the lobby for at least an hour, maybe two hours,” she later said. “I was trapped in my memories of the past, and what might have been if I’d taken Howard’s offer and become the Queen of RKO, instead of running off to Italy with Roberto. As time went by, I began to realize that Howard might not have read my message. Maybe his guards didn’t even give him my note. Then an even more horrible thought occurred to me. Maybe he was in such a bad condition—so heavily drugged—that he no longer remembered who Ingrid Bergman was.”

“The staff was ever so polite to me, but it was so very evident that Howard had not accepted my invitation,” she said. “Nor would he ever accept my invitation for a meeting. I was only guessing, but I felt that at this point in his life, Howard would never agree to a private meeting with anyone. Without announcing myself at the reception desk, I got up from their chair and walked as fast as I could to the entrance. I stepped outside and breathed the air. I felt that I was leaving an important part of my past behind me. If I remember, and I do, a light rain was falling over London.”

Los Angeles, 1941

Howard’s plan to fly to New York to “bag” Gloria Vanderbilt had to be postponed. He would not meet her until a few months before the U.S. entry into World War II. And the setting would be Beverly Hills, not New York.

Increasingly, he was absorbed with designing pioneering aircraft that might be of use to the U.S. Air Force once America entered the war. Even as his chief rival, Charles Lindbergh, urged Americans to stay out of “foreign wars,” Howard was more realistic. “Any week now we’re going to get into the fucking mess,” he told Noah Dietrich. “Maybe not this week, but the following week.”

When he wasn’t at his aircraft factory, Howard spent his nights in the arms of fifteen-year-old Faith Domergue.

Even so, he followed Gloria’s progress through key events in her life in the newspapers. In some ways, she evoked debutante Brenda Frazier, with whom she was often confused in the eyes of the American public. Gloria had far better-developed artistic sensibilities and an even better Social Register pedigree than Brenda, but there were similarities between these two blue-blooded *celebutantes*. Both had porcelain white skin offset by slashes of pomegranate red lipstick that they applied to their succulent mouths. “Gloria Vanderbilt and Brenda Frazier are the two whitest women in America,” wrote social commentator, Lynn Burlington. Both teenagers had midnight black hair—or, to quote Burlington, “the color the sky becomes on Halloween when the moon goes behind a cloud.”

Gloria had first come to Howard’s attention when she was only ten years old. The only child of American railroad heir, Reginald Claypoole Vanderbilt (1880-1925), “the poor little rich girl,” became the victim of the most famous and the most scandalous custody battle in U.S. legal history. The year was 1934. Testimony at the trial depicted the girl’s mother, Gloria Maria Mercedes Morgan (1904-1965), as an unfit parent. At the trial, a Vanderbilt maid testified that the glamorous widow bathed her feet in champagne and gave evidence of a lesbian relationship with a member of the British royal family, Marchioness Milford Haven (Countess Torby), who married a nephew of Queen Mary. Her mother lost the custody battle to Gloria’s stern and old-fashioned aunt, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, who would eventually be portrayed on the TV screen by none other than Howard’s former girlfriend, Bette Davis. The film was called *Little Gloria...Happy at Last*, a misnomer if there ever was one.

Part of the battle had concerned who would control the four million dollar fortune Gloria had inherited from her father.

Howard anticipated that he’d have to fly East to capture this prize. But one August morning, he read in the paper that Gloria was spending a month in Beverly Hills. At the custody battle, the judge had granted her mother visitation rights for one month a year. He decided to storm the Vanderbilt citadel, which he found easy to do because of his wealth and fame. The Vanderbilt family respected money. Little Gloria’s mother, or Gloria Sr. as she was called, had been labeled both a “fortune hunter” and a “gold-digger” in the infamous custody trial.

Howard called Maple Manor, the Beverly Hills villa where the “two Glorias” were staying. He knew that if he wanted to win the heart of this teenager, he would first have to conquer the mother. He’d used the same seduction technique on the mothers of both Ida Lupino and Ginger Rogers.

Speaking to Gloria Sr., he virtually invited himself over for tea at their elegant villa. She eagerly responded, “But, of course, I’d be delighted to meet you, dear Mr. Hughes.”

When he arrived the next afternoon at four o’clock, he encountered Gloria Jr. in the hallway. She was dressed in what became known twenty years later as the “Jackie Kennedy look.” On her way to an A-list reception at the Beverly Hills Hotel, Gloria awkwardly introduced herself to Howard. “His

hat was tilted back on his head, and he was tall—really tall—and his jacket was slung over his shoulder in the most appealing way,” she was later to recall. “He couldn’t think of anything to say, and I couldn’t either.”

After Gloria said good-bye, Howard had tea with her mother. He convinced her that he was seriously considering testing her daughter for the lead in his next movie. That was, of course, a complete fabrication but he managed to convince her that it was true anyway. The mother took it upon herself to arrange a date between Howard and her daughter.

When Noah Dietrich heard of this, he claimed, “That Vanderbilt grande dame is pimping her daughter. Gloria is seventeen years old. Howard is thirty-seven, but in some ways at least twenty years older. He could be her grandfather.”

The evening of their first date began menacingly. All afternoon, rain clouds had threatened the skies over Los Angeles. Thunder split through the unusual heavy darkness of a California late afternoon. Movie crews filming outdoor scenes were forced to shut down. By eight o’clock, when Howard arrived to retrieve his date, it was raining heavily.

Gloria had spent the better part of the afternoon fretting over her wardrobe, wanting to look her best for the producer, who had claimed that he planned to turn her into a glamorous movie star.

When Austria-born Hedy Lamarr had arrived at Hearst’s San Simeon wearing a peasant dress, she’d launched a fad. Gloria had rushed out to buy a similar outfit.



Gloria Vanderbilt and her aunt,
Mrs. Harry Payne (Gertrude) Whitney, 1939

Staring repeatedly at herself in the mirror, she had never looked more radiant. She’d been soaking for an hour in Adena Fluffy Bubble Milk Bath water. Once again, she checked her Austrian skirt and blouse, which made her look like fourteen—not seventeen. To offset the innocent virginal look, she dabbed Schiaparelli Shocking Pink perfume behind her perfectly shaped ears. A black velvet ribbon ran through her ruffled décol-letage.

She might have expected him to arrive in a limousine, but Howard showed up in his battered Chevrolet where the raindrops kept falling on his head. Sloppily dressed, he darted across the driveway and up to her doorstep, carrying a recently purchased, big black umbrella, the kind you carry only to the rainiest of funerals. He rang the doorbell and was ushered in to see Gloria who was waiting for him in the hallway. Her “shining knight,” her “dream lover” was at last standing before her. “Gary Cooper had arrived at my doorstep,” she later recalled.

Even though he had nothing to say to her—nor she to him—he drove her to the then-fashionable Sportsman’s Lodge in the San Fernando Valley. In the reception area, she excused herself to go powder her nose. He awkwardly encountered an arriving George Raft and his date for the night, Howard’s discarded lover, Norma Shearer. The couple only nodded at Howard before passing into the main room.

At dinner, Howard ordered his usual butterfly steak, baked potato, and small green peas. Gloria did likewise and for all her future dates with him, she would always order the same meal that he preferred.

From that night onward, Gloria and Howard began to date seriously. Neither one of them were Noël Coward conversationists, and often they would sit alone for hours at a time. Perhaps they’d lie on the beach at Malibu, watching the turbulent waves roll in from the Pacific. Or else he’d take her to his favorite lookout point high in the Hollywood Hills where he would sit and watch the moon. Sometimes in front of his fireplace at Muirfield, he would hold her in his arms, cradling her like a doting father might his daughter. The sounds of “Moonlight Sonata” drifted in through the open doors of his library.

He’d sail to Catalina Island and have his staff pack a picnic of meatloaf sandwiches—his favorite—along with a baked potato with plenty of catsup. Since it was summer he often had a container of black cherries which both of them would eat, turning their lips blood red and making their mouths sweeter to the taste.

He often flew her in his private plane, and she became familiar with the clouds over the California coast, Las Vegas, and even Arizona. Once he flew her over the Grand Canyon. Sometimes high up in the air, she’d sing to him—“Come, Josephine, in my fly-ing ma-chine”—making her voice very loud for his partially deaf ear.

She wanted to go “higher and higher and faster and faster” into the milky clouds, with her pilot in his masculine leather jacket being the older man to whom she’d given her young heart.

Instead of taking her to the Brown Derby or Ciro’s for supper, he often drove her to Elmo’s Pancakes House for—guess what?—pancakes for dinner. He’d “drown” his pancakes with lots of maple syrup.

When he learned that she had not seen *Hell’s Angels*, he screened it for her. He told her that he’d made a star out of Jean Harlow, and that he’d make

an even bigger one out of her. By that time, Gloria realized that Howard was never going to turn her into a star—but it didn't matter any more. She loved the man, not the star-maker.

“All I wanted was for him to love me,” she'd write in her memoirs. But that wasn't to be.

One night to Gloria's surprise, Howard abruptly stopped the car to pick up a young male hitchhiker. There must have been something about this forlorn young man that appealed to Howard. He saw beneath the vagrant's shabby clothes and three-day growth of beard to someone who was “actually movie star handsome.” He stopped and invited the young man to get into the back seat of his car. He drove the young man, whose name was Terry Dalton, to Bullocks and Robinson's Men Store. There Howard went into the back dressing room with Terry where he demanded that he strip completely naked so that he could be outfitted “for everything,” including underwear. Terry emerged wearing an expensive brown suit, leather shoes, and a white shirt with a green tie. As Howard was paying the bill, the young man asked Gloria who Howard was. “Santa Claus,” she told him.

Unknown to Gloria, Howard had called Johnny Meyer, ordering him to come to the store to pick up Terry and deliver him to Muirfield. After telling Terry good-bye, Howard resumed his date with Gloria.

Meyer later said that Terry Dalton looked somewhat like the future James Dean—“handsome in a trashy sort of way. By the time Howard arrived home from his date with Gloria, I had Terry all freshly bathed, perfumed, and kissable, waiting in Howard's library. He must have liked having sex with the kid, because Terry stayed on for two weeks before Howard got tired of his latest toy. He sent him on his way with five thousand dollars stuffed in his jeans.”

Meyer then made an unusual claim. He said that Howard revealed to him that he and Terry had “done a couple of things together” that he'd never done with any other man.” He never explained what that was, Meyer said. “All I know is that he continued to get real kinky with guys. With women, he was a gentleman, at least most times. But he really indulged himself with male hustlers. He was becoming as big a pervert in Hollywood as his uncle, Rupert, and no one topped *that one*. Rupert, or so I was told, had even installed a basement in his house, and had it specially equipped so that he could carry out his ‘ultimate fantasies.’” Howard found that very amusing when he learned of it. Maybe the sexual streak of weirdness in the Hughes family was genetic.”

For reasons not known, Pat DeCicco began to call Gloria and ask her out on dates. Her mother adored this handsome, charming, and debonair hustler, and urged her daughter to date him, too, perhaps to make Howard jealous.

Although he was on Howard's payroll, Pat was defying him behind his back. By becoming part of a triangle with Howard and Gloria, Pat was repeating a pattern established with bit actress June Knight and his former wife, Thelma Todd.

Even when dating Pat, Gloria often saw pictures of him in the newspapers, perhaps a snapshot taken at the Trocadero where he was photographed with the beautiful starlet, Betty Avery. Sometimes he would take Gloria for Sunday brunches poolside at the home of producer Joseph M. Schenck, one of the famous “five moguls” of Hollywood. Pat called Joe “my uncle.”

Pat used every occasion he could to warn Gloria that “Howard will dump you like all the others.”

Eventually Howard learned of Pat's betrayal. On an ominous note, Howard told Meyer that if Pat “didn't clean up his act, I might start stuffing it up his ass again as punishment. When I used to do that, he squealed like a pig at castration. I might have to show him who's boss.”

Instead of a punishing seduction, as threatened, Howard sent Pat “into exile in Siberia,” meaning that he flew him to Kansas City where he was put in charge of catering for TWA.

When Gloria's Aunt Gertrude learned that her charge was carrying on “with an older man—and rumored pervert—and a cheap gigolo”—she summoned her niece back to the sanctity of her stern chaperonage.

Disappointed, Howard nonetheless arranged for her to fly back on one of his TWA planes, promising to wing his way to New York “very soon” to resume their romance. In the meantime, he shamelessly promised to be faithful to her. The word *faith* ful ironically contained the name of Faith Domergue, with whom he'd been living during the entire course of his romance with Gloria.

To pass the time on the nine-hour flight to New York, Gloria sipped pink lemonade spiked with pink gin. On the same plane flying to New York, she spotted Kate Hepburn sitting alone with an empty seat beside her. Howard had also arranged for her free passage on the same flight—or rather one of his assistants had done that. Later, Howard was furious when he learned that Kate Hepburn and Gloria Vanderbilt were on the same plane, separated only by two rows of seats.

Kate was a sort of role model for young Gloria. When she'd abandoned her original goal of becoming a nun, she'd decided instead that she wanted to be a star like Kate. “How can I compete with someone like Hepburn?” Gloria asked her traveling companion. She had erroneously heard that Kate and Howard were still carrying on an affair. Brazenly, Gloria rose from her seat and sat down next to Kate. Gloria later admitted that she was so paralyzed with fear that she was too intimidated to speak. Kate ignored her. “Finally, I chickened out and went back to my own seat,” Gloria recalled.

Back East with her aunt, Gloria began to receive yellow roses every day from Howard, along with frequent phone calls from him. He lied, claiming that he was “all alone and missing her.” Actually, in addition to Faith, Howard was seeing a string of male hustlers that Henry Willson continued to arrange for him.

Suddenly, Pat was back in New York, his exile in Kansas City having ended. Cold shouldering Gloria at first when he encountered her dancing at El Morocco, he was soon smiling at her again. As she later recorded in her memoirs, she was “confused, panicked, and uncertain.” Against her better judgment, she launched herself into a serious romance with “the Big Bad Wolf,” even though she'd heard that he was a gigolo.

One night at El Morocco, dancing with Pat, Gloria noticed the couple next to her. It was Rita Hayworth and her husband, Edward C. Judson, in town for a publicity junket. Pat whispered in her ear that Howard had a crush on Rita and privately screened her movies for masturbatory purposes. Gloria compared herself unfavorably to the movie goddess, the World War II pinup favorite, along with Betty Grable, of fan magazines. “I just can't be as gorgeous as Rita,” Gloria told Pat.

Pat had two unflattering nicknames for Gloria, calling her either “Stupido” or “Fatsy Roo.” Gloria had long since lost her baby fat.

In a “fit of madness,” Gloria married Pat in 1941, perhaps her main reason being to escape from her Aunt Gertrude. The marriage, up until her divorce in 1945, would be a disaster. Throughout her time with Pat, she suffered mental and physical abuse. He'd often hit her with his fists, but she endured.

Since she would not come into her inheritance until she was twenty-one, she and Pat were often strapped for cash. After his marriage, Pat lost the stipend he'd received from Howard ever since the mid-Thirties. At one point, Pat had to pay off a gambling debt unless he wanted some Brooklyn thugs “to rearrange your face.” He repeatedly urged Gloria to call Howard in California and plead with him to send five thousand dollars in cash—“at once.”

Resisting at first, Gloria finally gave in to his repeated protests. Nervously she dialed Howard at Caddo Productions. “It was very difficult for me, but I finally stammered out the request for the money. I promised that I would pay him back with interest when I was twenty-one.” She was greeted with

stone silence on the other end of the phone.

Finally, in a high-pitched and rather soft voice which she had trouble understanding, he told her, “I thought you called to tell me you were coming back to me.” He slammed down the phone.

After her divorce from Pat, Gloria married conductor Leopold Stokowsky in 1945 and director Sidney Lumet in 1956. She divorced both of them but found happiness with the Mississippi writer, Wyatt Emory Cooper, whom she married in 1964. She had two sons with him, Carter Vanderbilt Cooper born in 1965, and CNN newsman, Anderson Cooper, born in 1967. In “the tragedy of my life,” Carter, only 23 years old, jumped from the terrace of her 14th floor apartment. It was a summer day in 1988.

By the early 80s, the world was wearing “Gloria Vanderbilt designer jeans.” She was never to see Howard Hughes again.

Los Angeles, 1940

Having hired publicist Russell Birdwell, Howard summoned him to spooky Muirfield for a meeting at two o’clock in the morning, standard procedure for Howard, but “bizarre” in Birdwell’s view. From the very beginning of their association, the former publicist for *Gone With the Wind* had understood that he was working for an eccentric millionaire. The pay was good. If his boss had no regard for the time of day, so what?

Surprisingly, at Birdwell’s first meeting with Howard, he urged him to abandon the theme and persona of *Billy the Kid* and pursue a completely different cinematic vision. “If a bomb exploded in the Hollywood Hills, it would blow out ten-thousand unfiled scripts. At least one of them might be good.”

Through Birdwell, Howard painfully learned that Louis B. Mayer had launched production on a film also called *Billy the Kid*. Howard’s sometimes lover, Robert Taylor, had been cast as Billy.

Howard was furious, feeling he’d been betrayed by both Robert and Mayer. He vowed never to speak to Robert again—he would later rescind that—and to threaten the MGM boss with a lawsuit. Birdwell responded by warning Howard about what should have been obvious: The saga of Billy the Kid was in the public domain. He also reminded Howard that MGM had previously cast cowboy star Johnny Mack Brown (another of Howard’s former lovers) as Billy in an earlier film, and the Robert Taylor version was a remake of the studio’s previous picture. Birdwell also pointed out another obvious fact: the character of Billy the Kid was a standard role in dozens of Grade B westerns, called “oaters.”

Growing impatient with Birdwell, Howard stood up. “You don’t understand. My *Billy the Kid* is going to become the first sex western.”
“But, Howard,” Birdwell protested, “in westerns men ride off into the sunset with their horses—not the girl. They don’t even kiss the girl.”
“They’ll do more than kiss in my picture,” Howard predicted. “Billy the Kid will actually fuck Rio.”
“Who’s Rio?”
“The gal. And what a gal! The screen will never have seen anything like her.”
“Who’s the lucky star?” Birdwell asked. “I know them all.”
“Some unknown. There’s only one requirement. She doesn’t even have to know how to act, but she’s got to have the hottest-looking pair of knockers in the history of film. Your job is to launch the search to find her.”

The next day, a sleepy Birdwell wasted no time in launching the search not only for an actress to be cast as Rio, but for some handsome young man to play Billy the Kid. Only hours before, Birdwell had said to his boss, “I understand what you’re looking for in the gal. But what about the actor to play Billy the Kid?”

“I want him to look like he’s carrying around a ten-inch cock between his legs,” Howard said. “And we’re talking soft.”
The moment the campaign was launched, Howard’s office at 7000 Romaine Street was deluged with glossy eight-by-ten photographs of every aspirant young actor or actress in Hollywood. Some were submissions from agents, others came directly from the hopefuls themselves. “Every handsome gas jockey in Los Angeles, every beautiful gal, sent in their photographs,” Birdwell said.
Three weeks later, Howard called Birdwell. “Call off the search for Billy the Kid!” Howard ordered. “I found him last night. Actually, he was sitting alone in the Cock & Bull bar having a drink and looking sad. I came up to him. He knew immediately who I was.”
Howard said that the stranger asked him to have a drink with him, and “I accepted his invitation. When I found out he was an actor, I asked him if he’d submitted his picture for *Billy the Kid*. He told me that he didn’t see himself playing in a western. He has a Brahmin accent. Very New England. I told him that I could hire a diction coach to work on his accent. I also told him that I was signing him to a three-year contract. Yeah, just like that. That’s how I do business. I also told him that I was going to get you, Birdwell, to start the publicity campaign rolling for him. In his case, we’re going to bill him as ‘the handsomest man in Hollywood.’”

“Christ, he must really be good looking,” Birdwell said.
“He’s good looking,” Howard said. “In a town known for its male beauties, he’s maybe not the handsomest man, although he struck me that night in the bar as real pretty-looking. Anyway, we’ll bill him as the handsomest, and the movie-going suckers will fall for it because we said it’s so. They’ll believe that he’s the handsomest. If not, it’ll set off a nation-wide debate over just who is the prettiest dick in Hollywood. Errol Flynn? Robert Taylor? Tyrone Power?”
“And who’s this new guy about to become immortal?” Birdwell asked. “What’s his name? Tell me because I know we’ll have to change it. I bet it’s Prescott Reginald Percy the Third?”
“Nothing like that,” Howard said. “It’s David Bacon. We’ll keep his name. David will suggest Michelangelo’s statue, and Bacon means pork. Not a bad symbol. Haven’t you heard of feeding a gal the pork, as we say in Texas?”

It was September 13, 1943. The wind was blowing in heavily from the Pacific, signaling the end of summer. From that same Pacific came news that the war was going badly. The American soldiers and sailors were meeting a formidable opponent in the Empire of Japan.

Although seemingly a perfect physical specimen, actor David Bacon had used the influence of his politically connected family in Boston to escape the draft.

Back in 1915, he'd been born some 3,000 miles away from Venice, California, in the historic town of Barnstable on Cape Cod. Named Gaspar G. Bacon Jr., he grew up as the son of one of the most prominent and socially connected Brahmin families in all of Massachusetts.

"David's family made Kate Hepburn's family look like white trash," Birdwell later said. David's father, Gaspar G Bacon Sr., sat on the board of Harvard University and would later be elected lieutenant governor of the state. Backed by the support of his close friend, J.P Morgan, Bacon Sr. encouraged talk that he might one day make a run for the governorship—"even the White House," he told his son. He never made it to the Oval David Bacon Office, but he became Secretary of State under Theodore Roosevelt and Ambassador to France under William Howard Taft.



David Bacon

Young David was a disappointment to his father. Instead of becoming an attorney as his father urged, David had "an insane desire" [his father's words] to go to Hollywood and become an actor.

Young David—or Gaspar Jr., as he was called then—managed to irritate his father all the more when he became involved in a homosexual scandal at Harvard that almost got him expelled. David and his roommate were "auditioning" some of the best bodies on the football team when word of this reached the administration. Only through his powerful father's intervention was David allowed to stay on at Harvard and eventually to graduate. His father had promised the board that he would secure psychiatric help for David "to cure my son of certain anti-social tendencies."

In summer, David deserted his family's summer home and appeared on the stage in amateur productions at Woods Hole on the Cape. His first acting role came with the University Players in West Falmouth. He ingratiated himself with two far more talented young actors, James Stewart and Henry Fonda, and "bunked" with the two men for a time. The director, Josh Logan, who knew all three of the actors, once said "when not dating girls, Jimmy, Hank, and David enjoyed the considerable charms of each other." Logan himself was rumored at various times to have had affairs with all three actors.

After Harvard, young Gaspar Jr. became "David Bacon." Fleeing New England, he arrived in New York where he was financially "sponsored" by William Blair, a wealthy Britisher from a prominent family who was spending the war years in New York, fleeing some sort of scandal back in London. According to David, his family had asked William to leave England, promising to support him in "the New World."

Although David's own father had refused to give him even a stipend during his pursuit of a career in the theater, his patron, William, was most generous. The couple were seen at all the New York hot spots together. Although he'd arrived in New York with only two hundred dollars in his wallet, David was soon wearing expensive jewelry and appearing at clubs in bespoke tailored suits.

It is not known exactly what happened to end David's relationship with his sugar daddy. William was a bit corpulent, looking somewhat like a 1940s version of Oscar Wilde. In contrast, David was muscular and handsome, standing six feet tall. On the side, he specialized in equally handsome sailors. Apparently, William returned to his apartment one afternoon to find his pampered Brahmin in bed with one of the more well-endowed members of Uncle Sam's navy.

Within the next two weeks David had taken an overcrowded wartime train to Los Angeles to begin a new life.

A month later, he'd met and married Greta Keller. Glamorous, multi-lingual, blonde, she was Europe's most famous and most celebrated chanteuse and cabaret performer during the 1930s. She had the dubious distinction of being Hitler's favorite singer. It was rumored that she'd had an affair with the Nazi dictator. At the age of eight, she'd studied dancing and acting in Vienna. Some of her greatest concerts were presented to audiences in Vienna, Prague, and Berlin. Rod McKuen originally wrote the lyrics for "If You Go Away" for her, a song that was later more widely commercialized by Frank Sinatra and Jacques Brel.

Her growing familiarity with members of Hitler's inner circle led to increased scrutiny from SS investigators, which led to the "discovery," as transmitted to Joseph Goebbels, that she was part Jewish.

Fleeing for her life in 1937, and without even returning to her apartment to gather up her wardrobe, she discreetly boarded the next plane out of Berlin, which happened to be headed to Amsterdam. The tip that saved her life, and which started the process by which she escaped from Germany, came from the actor Conrad Veidt, known mainly today as one of the stars of *Casablanca*.

Sailing to the port of New York, she encountered Ernest Hemingway on the transatlantic crossing and had an affair with him, although she later claimed that she believed that the macho writer was a homosexual.

In New York she secured a gig singing at the Algonquin Hotel. There Greta met another Greta: Greta Garbo. Retired from moviemaking, Garbo suddenly began appearing at the club every night. Soon Ms. Garbo was dining privately and frequently with Ms. Keller. New York's lesbian circles started referring to them as "the two Gretas."

But when Garbo grew tired of her Austrian six months later, she rather cruelly and dismissively told her confidantes, "She's just another Marlene."

Following her break-up with Garbo and her gig at the Algonquin, and hoping to break into films on the West Coast, Greta Keller migrated to Hollywood. There she began an affair with former screen vamp, Pola Negri, rumored ex-lover of Rudolph Valentino. At a party at Pola's house, Greta encountered "a lost and lonely boy," David himself. "He aroused a latent motherly instinct in me," Greta later said. "Even though I knew he had homosexual tendencies, we began to date. Dating led to a quick marriage. I took him under my wing. It was sort of like Barbara Stanwyck's marriage to Robert Taylor. We were beards for each other, and didn't ask each other a lot of questions about private matters. David was a bisexual. We were very much in love when I was with him."

Greta had starred in the stage play, *Broadway*, in Vienna in 1928. She'd had an affair with a member of the cast, Marlene Dietrich. In many ways, Greta became Marlene's role model. Once, when Greta encountered Marlene at the Berlin airport, Marlene said, "Greta, darling, I'm going to sing in my next picture. I've bought all your records." It was Marlene who took Greta's hit record, "Lili Marleen," and made it an even bigger hit as "Lili Marlene."



David Bacon

After she moved to Hollywood, Marlene would not even return Greta's phone calls. Marlene refused to help her break into the movies. Fortunately, Joan Crawford was more understanding, and helped Greta find a role.

Greta had an "understanding" with David, who allowed her to indulge her taste not only in girlfriends but in other men. Some of her young men were shared on the side with David. "He especially liked military men, and there were plenty of those back in Los Angeles in those days," Greta told the author, while dictating her still unpublished memoirs to him at his home in New York in the 1970s.

"Suddenly, Howard Hughes appeared on my doorstep," Greta recalled, referring to the mansion she'd rented in Santa Monica, containing nine bathrooms, twelve bedrooms, and a swimming pool on the second floor. "Without knowing any of the details, I was told that David had signed a three-year contract with Hughes. In addition to the Santa Monica mansion where he 'officially' lived with me, Howard had rented a bungalow in the Hollywood Hills as a love nest where David spent a lot of his time, always in the company of his new boss."

"Even though I didn't think the role of Billy the Kid was right for David, he went ahead with a screen test anyway," Greta said. "I saw the test. It was laughable. David should have been cast in bedroom farces and drawing room comedies like those made in Edwardian England. I could have played the merciless William Bonnie better than dear, sweet David. Even though Howard had a powerful crush on my husband, even Mr. Texas Oil had to admit that there was no way in hell that David could be convincing as Billy the Kid."

David's romance with Howard came to an abrupt end when Howard "fell big, and I mean big, for Jack Buetel," Greta said. "As you and everybody else knows, Jack was eventually signed to play Billy the Kid instead of David. Who wouldn't fall for Jack Buetel? I would have divorced David in a minute to get at him. He was the single sexiest man I'd ever met."

Although he was still under contract to Howard, David was offered no parts after his failed screen test.

In time, Howard would become infamous for luring actors (or actresses) into ironclad, "exclusive" long-term contracts and then, to their enormous frustration, letting them "stew" in their semi-enslavement, never offering them a role. That, in fact, became his specialty. Eventually, David did get some parts, playing a good-looking college kid in *Ten Gentlemen from West Point* in 1942. In 1943, he appeared in *Crash Dive* (uncredited), *Gals, Inc.*, and the lackluster *Someone to Remember*.

David's first big break came when he was cast as one of the leads in the serial, *The Masked Marvel*, being shot over at Republic. The film is sometimes shown as *Sakima and the Masked Marvel*. Accurately perceiving the degree to which his career had collapsed, and resentful of having to work for a "Poverty Row" studio, David grew increasingly furious at Howard and denounced him frequently.

In 1943, he began to write the story of his affair with Howard, knowing that no publisher at the time would touch the material.

"I urged David not to do it," Greta claimed. "But he sat at a typewriter and pounded out almost ten pages a day. I saw some of it. It was very pornographic. There was one very explicit scene where David described in graphic detail just how far Howard would go with him orally."

“My husband never actually planned to offer his manuscript to a publisher,” Greta said. “Instead he wanted to show a typewritten copy to Howard Hughes. He said that he was going to demand that his former lover part with forty thousand dollars, which would give Hughes the rights to the manuscript. Of course, Hughes would then burn it.”

Through Noah Dietrich, whom David knew, he had what was tantamount to a blackmail threat being delivered directly to Howard. A meeting was arranged between Howard and David.

“I warned David that he was playing with dynamite, making threats to a man as powerful as Howard Hughes,” Greta claimed. “But my husband was very stubborn and wouldn’t listen. Three days later, he walked out of our house in a white bathing suit and claimed that he was going swimming at Santa Monica beach. I often knew he met his boyfriends there, but nothing was said between us. I knew that he was getting something outside the home that I couldn’t give him. He didn’t say for certain, but I believed he was meeting Hughes.”

Four hours later, a maroon-colored British-made sports car—a gift to David from Howard—was seen moving along Washington Boulevard in Venice. It was a Sunday. The driver was manning the wheel like he’d had two bottles of whiskey. Fortunately, there were no other cars on the road or else he would surely have crashed in a head-on collision.

Suddenly, the driver slammed on the brakes of the small car and rolled to a stop, jumping the curb. Sheila Belkstein was walking her German shepherd that day and later reported what she’d seen to the police. “I was walking my dog near a field of cabbage. At the sound of brakes, I spun around. My dog barked hysterically. From the car emerged a man wearing only a pair of white bathing trunks which showed blood stains. Across the street was a gas station. The attendant there must have seen the man. He called the police, I learned later. I was a little afraid at first, and I was having a hard time restraining my dog. I moved toward the man. I’ll always remember the sunken look of despair on his face. ‘Help me!’ he said in a very plaintive voice. ‘Oh, God, please help me. Please help me!’ that was all he managed to say. His eyes rolled back in his head, which seemed to loll to the side like it was separating from his body. Then he fell to the ground. A stiletto was lodged in his back.”

A coroner later confirmed that the stiletto had pierced his lung, and that David had bled to death. A thorough examination of his body revealed no bruises, no signs of struggle. Police surmised that David had known his assailant, and that he had driven the car in a position hunched over the steering wheel.

For weeks to come, his death was the talk of Hollywood. Several years later, the youngest-ever editor of *The Saturday Evening Post*, Cleveland Amory, listed the David Bacon murder among the Top Ten Unsolved Murders of the 20th Century.

Police discovered a leather wallet, soaked with blood, in the pocket of David’s bathing trunks. The wallet contained one hundred and fifty dollars, which was remarkable for the time, as few men carried around so much money, especially on a trip to the beach. In the sports car, the police discovered a camera containing a roll of film. The roll was developed by the police. Only one picture had been taken. It depicted David standing happily on a beach completely nude, his white bathing trunks not shown anywhere within the frame. From this, police concluded that David knew the mystery man who stabbed him, and that he posed for his murderer. (The police reports used the word “man” when referring to the unknown murderer. Of course, his murderer could have been a woman, but no one raised that as a possibility.)

After the investigation, the nude photograph and the still blood-stained wallet were returned to Greta Keller, although the case was never officially closed. Today, the wallet and the photograph are the property of the author of this biography.

After David’s death, Greta evolved into an internationally celebrated cabaret singer with a sophisticated coterie of devoted fans on both sides of the Atlantic. Movie audiences last heard her singing the song “Married,” (*Heirat*) in the 1972 movie, *Cabaret*, which won eight Oscars that year but not for best picture.

Greta Keller died in Vienna in 1977, symbolizing a nostalgic, esoteric, and glamorous figure from a faded golden age. Even until the end of her life, she maintained to anyone interested that she knew who stabbed her husband. “I can’t prove it, but Howard Hughes murdered my David.”

Los Angeles, 1940

In the late autumn of 1940, insider Hollywood knew that David Bacon was no longer slated to play Billy the Kid, having lost the role to Jack Buetel, a devilishly handsome, lean but muscular, “walking streak of sex” with a slight leer and a cocky gait.

“He was a homosexual’s wet dream,” said his agent, Henry Willson, when this darkly good-looking stud was dressed in tight-fitting jeans and buckskins revealing his ample assets. “With that trim waist and those broad shoulders, he was what you wanted Santa Claus to bring you for Christmas. Regrettably, Jack was hopelessly straight. But not so straight he wouldn’t drop his jeans for the right producer or agent. That was the limit of it, though. No fucking. And no reciprocation.”

There have been many stories spread about how Jack Buetel was cast as Billy the Kid. Director Howard Hawks, who was never one to tell the truth about anything, later claimed that he spotted Jack’s picture in a stack of glossy photographs submitted by unknowns or their agents.

Of all the tales spread, Henry Willson, Howard’s new pimp, told the most convincing story in later life. Temporarily selling insurance in Hollywood to make ends meet, Jack had been picked up one night at a bar on Hollywood Boulevard by Willson, who promised that he’d help “this physically perfect young man” break into films.

That night Willson learned many things about Jack. “I just assumed he wanted to be an actor. Didn’t every handsome young man in Hollywood in those days?” The Dallas-born young man had very limited acting experience, having appeared in only three amateur stage productions. That didn’t matter to Willson. “I didn’t encounter many male John Barrymores in all my career in the business.”

“If getting a blow-job from a guy, something I find a little bit repulsive, is the way to break into movies, then why not play the game?” the already street-smart Jack told Willson. “A guy who looks like me and bums around Hollywood Boulevard for several months either learns the ropes or is a fool.”

When Willson eventually extracted his reward from between Jack’s legs, he offered to sign him with his talent agency, presided over by Gummo Marx. Jack readily agreed, but he eventually rebelled at the idea of having to travel to Willson’s apartment four or five nights a week. Jack privately held Willson in contempt, telling a friend that “the fat queer is insatiable—like a hog slurping at the trough.”

In years to come, Willson’s future discovery, Rock Hudson, would also endure assaults on his body until he became such a big star that he no longer had to give in to Willson’s (or anyone else’s) sexual demands.



Jack Buetel

In the early 1940s, Howard was extremely pleased with the stream of young men Willson supplied to him. He was also grateful that the agent had introduced him to Faith Domergue with whom he was settling into a years-long relationship—romantic but deeply troubled.

Originally, Willson had another young man—more muscular, “more the weightlifter type”—in mind for the role of Billy the Kid. That good-looking aspirant actor was Phil Medina, who grew up on the streets of Trenton, New Jersey, before hitchhiking across the country to the streets of Hollywood. To earn money, he stood on Hollywood Boulevard at night, allowing men, often married, to pick him up for an evening’s pleasure, for which he charged ten dollars, even though the going rate on the street at the time was only five dollars.

Willson installed Phil in a sleazy walk-up apartment on Gower Street in Hollywood. The room had two double beds, with rotting, urine-stained mattresses, a gas stove in the corner, a “forever dripping” sink filled with dirty dishes, and a decrepit shower stall and a rusting toilet in the dank hallway. The floor of the small flat was covered with 1920s linoleum, and there was always a bag of garbage infested with roaches in the corner. Willson then moved Jack into this same apartment, for which the agent paid a monthly rent of thirty-five dollars.

Eventually Willson crowded four of his “tricks” into this apartment, two men sharing each of the double beds. “They always slept naked,” Willson said. “I brought their breakfast over nearly every morning. The one who woke up with the biggest piss hard-on got an early morning workover from me.”

None of the young men was known for his housekeeping, and the bed linens were rarely changed unless Willson sent over his Mexican maid when the joint became uninhabitable.

All of the aspirant actors had been promised movie contracts by Willson, but they were not forthcoming. Along with Jack and Phil, the other two residents of the apartment included Johnny Pearson, a former farm boy from Modesto, California, who was only eighteen, and Charles Reed, twenty-one, an extremely handsome young man from Idaho who drifted back to his native state after only eight months in the Hollywood sleaze factory. “I’d rather plant potatoes for the rest of my life,” Charles told Willson, “than do what I’ve been asked to do in Shittown. What creeps!”

Jack, Johnny, and Phil were more cooperative. When not sleeping with the agent himself, these young men went out on “dates” arranged with producers and directors. “We were the most select choice of Grade A prime in Willson’s meat market,” Phil later said. “Partly because of us, Willson learned how to be a successful agent. He peddled male flesh to producers and directors like Hughes. By doing so, he eventually went bigtime in the ‘50s when he launched all those Rocks, Tabs, and Troys. Once, he even named an actor Adonis. Just Adonis. Willson said that with a name like Adonis, you didn’t need a last name.”

After a weekend at some desert retreat with Phil Medina, Howard agreed with Willson that he’d would be perfect for the role of Billy the Kid. “I hadn’t immediately thought of Jack for the role because he had such a baby face,” Willson said. “Even though his body was muscular, it was rather slim. I thought Howard wanted a more rugged, beefy look for Billy the Kid. Not some beautiful kid like Jack, who with the right kind of clothes and makeup could be convincing as a fifteen-year-old in some prep school.”

Phil thought he had the role in *The Outlaw* all but locked up until late one Sunday afternoon when Howard drove him back to the apartment on Gower Street. “Howard was aware that I lived there with three other guys,” Phil said. “I told him we never had enough beer. That Saturday he bought us three cases. Since I couldn’t carry all those suds up the stairs in one trip, he helped me. I thought the boys were out. But as we came into the apartment, Jack was sprawled buck-assed naked on one of the double beds. Howard got an eyeful! When I saw him devouring Jack’s body with his eyes, I knew it was curtains for me. Out with Phil Medina and in with the new kid on the block: Jack Buetel.”

Howard was reluctant to make his wishes known directly to Jack. But he was delighted to learn that the young Texan was under contract to Willson. The agent told Jack what was needed and wanted, dangling the star-making role of Billy the Kid in front of him if he caved in to Howard’s sexual demands. Within a week, Jack had become Howard’s new protégé, the equivalent of Faith Domergue on the female side. He signed Jack to an eight-year contract at \$75 a week, \$25 more per week than he’d later pay Jane Russell. “He kept a lid on Jack’s salary all during the years he had him under contract,” Willson later said. “It was a form of holding that dear boy under sexual bondage to him.”

“When Jack put his name on that contract with Howard, it was like selling himself as a sexual slave to some Caliph of Baghdad centuries ago,” Willson said. “Of course, Jack could have broken with Howard, especially when Howard did nothing for his career after *The Outlaw*, but he remained

in bondage and did Howard's bidding until the very end of their relationship."

The lowest point came when Howard Hawks was looking for a young actor to play opposite John Wayne in the 1948 *Red River*. Hawks remembered Jack from *The Outlaw* and offered him the part. Although he had no upcoming movie work for his contract player, Howard refused. It would have been easy for Howard to let him go, and it would have represented one of the biggest breaks of Jack's career. But when Jack wasn't available, the part went instead to a handsome young Montgomery Clift. Upon the film's release, his name became a household word. "Jack was crushed beyond belief," Willson said, "and went into a morbid depression."

As if to punish Jack, Howard kept him off the screen between 1940 and 1951, a full eleven years. Jack's "comeback" involved playing Bob Younger in the mediocre 1951 western, *Best of the Badmen*. Then he appeared in *Rose of Cimarron* and *The Half Breed*, both in 1952, and later (1954) as Frank James in *Jesse James' Women*. His final film was the 1959 *Mustang!* He got his greatest exposure playing Jeff Taggart in the 1956 TV series, *Judge Roy Bean*. "But it was a career that never happened, in spite of his initial fame," Willson said.



Jack Buetel

Yet, in Willson's view, Jack provided Howard with his greatest oral gratification. After a weekend spent at some hideaway with Howard, Jack would be "drained," as he said, and would need two days of sleep just to recover. "Hughes can't get enough of me," Jack told Willson. "It's like he's sucking my life's blood from me."

In a bizarre twist, Howard confessed to Jack one night that he believed by drinking his semen it was rejuvenating him. In an even more bizarre twist, Howard began to prescribe a carefully controlled diet for Jack "to make your semen rejuvenate my dying cells." For some reason not known, Howard focused on the pomegranate as his source of rejuvenation. Instead of eating pomegranates himself, he forced Jack to consume six a day, feeling that this fruit would make the young man's semen more enriched and ultimately more beneficial to Howard. He even selected the exact pomegranates that Jack was to eat. "Here he was," Jack told Willson, "the busiest man on the planet spending time selecting just the ripest and juiciest of pomegranates for me to eat. I hate pomegranates! I would have preferred an apple a day."

For all his life, Jack remained friends with his co-star, Jane Russell, until he died on June 27, 1989 having drifted north to Portland, Oregon. Apparently, he never confided in her what was going on behind the scenes.

He was always concerned that she not find out the exact nature of his relationship with Howard. "She stood up to Howard and demanded her rights, and made something of herself in spite of her contract with Howard," Jack said. "He was a much stronger man than me, and I gave in to him. What did it get me? Money? Never! The bastard was as stingy as hell with me. Fame! Maybe. I guess my name will live forever for that one stinking part. But, even in that, I was a joke. *The Outlaw* made a joke of both Jane and me. She overcame hers. I didn't. I'll always remember that night in San Francisco at the premiere. That god damn audience laughed at some of my most dramatic scenes. The press still doesn't even how to spell my name. Ninety-nine percent of the time, even in *The New York Times*, it's spelled BEUTEL. I should have kept my real name, Warren Higgins. Willson thought that sounded like some hayseed farmer and insisted I change it."

Finally, Jack was asked about the rumored nude version of *The Outlaw*.

"That's too sick for words," he said. "My God! I have no comment to make about that. If the true story of that ever gets out, the world will know just how sick Howard Hughes really was."

While most other stars of 1940, except the big names like Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant, are relatively forgotten, Jack Buetel still has a few dwindling fan clubs left. Mostly his admirers today are composed of an aging homosexual coterie who fell in love with his image in the 1940s and still keep the memory of his appearance as Billy the Kid alive. Even though the group is dying off and memory grows dim, every year "a few old souls" show up at the Portland Memorial Cemetery in Oregon to deliver wreaths of flowers to the baby boy born on one hot summer morning on September 5 back in 1915.

Of the hundreds of photographs on Howard's desk, submitted by hopeful actresses or else their agents, one stood out. A picture of a five-foot-seven aspiring actress with a thirty-eight-inch bust. With her dark hair and clear complexion, she was about to become the possessor of the world's most famous bust with the exception of Venus de Milo. The picture depicted a very beautiful brunette with a pouty mouth posed in a tight-fitting sweater, which revealed that this teenager was already aware of her chief asset: A large bosom.

"I'm going to turn this gal into a sex symbol," Howard told Birdwell, thus inventing an expression not yet in vogue.

The girl's name was Ernestine Jane Geraldine Russell, and she'd been born in Bemidji, Minnesota on June 21, 1921, the daughter of Roy William Russell and a stage-struck mother, Geraldine Jacobi Russell. A great beauty herself, Geraldine gave elocution lessons and dreamed of seeing her

daughter—billed as Jane Russell—in marquee lights.

Jane had moved to Los Angeles in 1932 where she finished high school and took a job as a receptionist in the office of a chiropodist, earning a salary of \$27.50 a week. To supplement her income, she occasionally modeled ski clothes, coats, and dresses for a young photographer, Tom Kelley. She'd been reluctant to work for him until he assured her that he did not "do nude calendars." Ironically, and in contrast to what Kelley said, he would one day photograph Jane's future rival, Marilyn Monroe, in the nude, those pictures appearing on history's most famous "girlie calendar."

Like her future co-star, Jack Buetel, Jane had very little theatrical experience when she was ordered to appear at 7000 Romaine Street for a screen test. She'd worked briefly with The Max Reinhardt Theatrical Workshop, but that had been the extent of her training.

Instead of attending classes, Jane remembered that she and a girlfriend, Betty Groblie, skipped the workshop whenever they could and went bowling at an alley on Sunset Boulevard. Instead of becoming stars, Betty and Jane dreamed of dating "handsome hunks," Victor Mature and John Payne, respectively. In Jane's case, her dream would come true.

As a lark, Jane decided to try out for auditions for *Earl Carroll's Most Beautiful Girls in the World Revue*. To her surprise, she was among those chosen. But since she was then being pursued by the rugged football star, Robert Waterfield, whom she'd eventually marry, she turned Carroll down. Besides, she'd decided that she didn't want to be a "cheap showgirl."

At the time she was being considered for the part of Rio, Jane was living with her widowed mother in a ranch-style house in Van Nuys. Every Friday night she had a "gig" playing piano in a band that consisted of her four protective brothers.

Somehow Jane had managed to acquire an agent, Lewis Green, who had submitted her photograph to both Howard and Hawks. Called "The Silver Fox," Green was also the agent for one of Howard's many girlfriends, the ill-fated Susan Peters.

Even though Howard at first thought Jane looked right for the part, he experienced "four o'clock in the morning" doubts as he wandered the lonely halls of Muirfield. In spite of her knockers, he ordered screen tests for four other hopefuls, despite continuing to tell Hawks that Jane had all of them beat in the knockers department.



Jane Russell & Jack Buetel in *The Outlaw*

Unknown to Hawks, Howard had already settled on Jack for the role of Billy the Kid. Jack had passed his auditions—and then some. But "for cosmetic reasons," Howard didn't want Hawks to know about his involvement with the handsome young actor, who had already become Howard's reluctant boyfriend.

Howard informed Hawks that he would personally audition each of the actresses in his bedroom at Muirfield before deeming them worthy of a screen test. Perhaps by instinct, he knew that Jane herself would not submit to such an audition. He'd make a play for her but not until after *The Outlaw* was wrapped.

In spite of her sexy, come-hither look, Jane was actually a highly moral teenager, reared on Christian beliefs, as Howard was about to find out. She was different from the other sex objects he'd pursued, each of whom seemed only too willing to fall into his bed on the first date.

From the first moment she met Howard, Jane was determined not to become one of his "stable of fillies." She wanted to keep their relationship strictly professional.

On the day of her screen test, a nervous and inexperienced Jane appeared at Howard's studio. There, she discovered four other brunettes who had come to test for the role of Rio. For the first time, she spotted Jack, determining at once that there was "no contest" in the looks department when he was stacked against the other cowboy hopefuls.

The scene called for her to be thrown down in hay in a *faux* barn scene after she'd tried to kill Billy the Kid. Jane's test was with one of the other "cowboys," not with Jack. Wearing a voluptuous and revealing peasant-style blouse, she tried to look like the half-Irish, half-Mexican Rio she was supposed to play.

After the test, and hearing nothing for weeks from her agent, she "sweated blood" waiting for the results. She feared she didn't have a chance, although she was almost certain that Jack Buetel would be playing Billy the Kid. When called back to 7000 Romaine Street, she didn't know what to expect. Entering the office of Howard Hawks, she found herself "the only brunette this time."

Jack Buetel was sitting on the sofa with what Hawks later called "a shit-eating grin." When Jane saw the expression on the young actor's face, she knew he was Billy the Kid.

Within minutes, Hawks had told her that after watching all the tests, Howard Hughes himself had selected her to play the lead over all the other unknowns. She burst into tears of gratitude, and thanked cameraman Lucien Ballard for "bringing out something in me." Jack and she would receive standard stock contracts. If *The Outlaw* were a hit, the contracts could be renegotiated at higher salaries. Elated, Jack and she headed out the office door.

In her memoirs, Jane claimed that she spotted Howard for the first time as Jack and she left the director's office. She wrote: "A little way down the

hall Jack punched me and we stopped.”

“I think that’s him,” Jack told her.

“Who?” she asked.

“Howard Hughes!” he told her.

She turned and spotted “a tall, lanky man leaning on the wall with his hat on the back of his head, a white shirt open at the neck, and dark trousers.”

“Hi,” Jack said to Howard with a smile. Jane remembered that the actor even ventured “a little wave” at the strange figure.

Jack had been giving Howard more than “a little wave” at night. Neither Howard nor Jack wanted Jane to learn that each of them “knew each other as David had known Bathsheba,” to quote Cubby Broccoli, who had been hired by Hawks as assistant director on *The Outlaw*.

In her role as Rio, Jane before the camera was “busting” out all over. “My boobs were bolting out of my peasant blouse every time I was ordered to bend down and pick up those milk pails,” Jane once said. She immediately came to realize that she wasn’t being required to act as much as she was putting on a burlesque show. When she complained to Hawks, he told her, “You’re a big girl now and you can say a loud ‘No!’ if you want to.” When she took her complaints to Howard, he told her, “That’s how we’re selling this picture. Sex sells.”

In the first week of filming, Hawks went to Howard. “Jane and Jack are nice kids,” he told his producer, “but neither one of them can act.” “Don’t worry about it,” Howard assured him. “The horses will do the acting. Besides, if you want acting, I’ve hired two of the best pros in the business, Thomas Mitchell and Walter Huston.”

Watching the rushes, Howard complained to his ace cameraman, cine-matographer Gregg Toland, who had filmed *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Citizen Kane*: “We’re not getting enough production out of Jane’s breasts. I want her knockers to be the real star of the picture.”

He was particularly displeased at the way one scene was shot. In this scene, Jane had been tied by leather straps between two trees. The character of Billy the Kid wanted to punish her for putting sand in his water canteens. In the film, he wetted the leather, knowing that as it dried the straps would shrink. With Jane’s character of Rio tied up, and supposedly with the leather drying, she’d be like the victim on a torture rack. As she writhed in agony, retake after retake still did not please the boss man.

“Her breasts just kept shooting out in all directions,” Howard protested to Toland. “I don’t like the way her bosom shifts—it’s unnatural and the outline of her bra shows through that flimsy blouse.”

Finally, Howard decided that he wanted her “breasts cantilevered like those flying buttresses on the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris.”

In a memo to Hawks, dated November 18, 1940, Howard wrote:

I know that you are making every effort to showcase Miss Russell’s breasts. But I am just saying that they seem artificial or padded, which I know they are not. I want to see the tops of her breasts as she moves, not be held in place as if they were supported by concrete. This is an engineering problem, and I will handle it personally.

That night Howard personally designed a brassière for his star. Almost immediately, it became the world’s most legendary and celebrated brassière. “It was Howard’s version of a medieval chastity belt,” Cubby Broccoli later said jokingly. “Except instead of covering Jane’s vagina, it held her tits.”

“Actually, Howard invented the seamless bra,” Jane later recalled. “But since I found it too uncomfortable, I decided to use my regular bra instead. I put tissue over it to conceal the seams. Howard was never the wiser.” Filming proceeded, and Howard pronounced to his cameraman Toland that he was pleased by “the movement and rhythm of Jane’s large breasts.”

“Howard was smart enough to design airplanes,” Jane recalled, “but the famous billionaire did not know Victoria’s Secret. Believe me, Mr. Playtex he wasn’t.”

Most of the lists of Howard’s lovers, both male and female, includes Jane Russell. If we are to believe this devoted Christian herself, “who found and accepted Jesus at the age of six”—and we do—that was not the case. Howard did try to seduce her—but failed.

Jane remembered that his attempt at seduction followed an all-night party with Faye Emerson, Elliott Roosevelt, Johnny Meyer, Ava Gardner, and a “Brazilian zillionaire,” George Guinle. Since it was getting late when the party broke, Howard invited Jane to sleep over in a bedroom next to his. He excused himself to drive a drunken Ava home. Meyer remained at Muirfield.

Jane said that she’d dressed for bed and had fallen into a deep sleep when suddenly she woke up. Meyer had entered her room in what appeared to be an attempt to rape her. He chased her around the bedroom as she ran screaming from his clutches. In the middle of this boudoir farce, Howard in his robe rushed into the bedroom. He immediately ordered the drunken Meyer out of the room. Howard invited Jane into the comfort of his master bedroom where “you’ll be safe.” Howard told her that she wouldn’t be disturbed for the rest of the evening. But an hour later, she woke up again to find him hovering over her. She claimed he said, “I’m freezing. I must have caught cold driving Ava home. Can I get in with you?”

She agreed but warned him, “No funny business. Remember, Howard, I’m married. I’m sleepy, and I’ve already been disturbed twice.”

As she settled down once again for the night, with him curled up beside her, she’d fallen asleep when she was rudely awakened by his hand sliding around her waist. “All right, Howard, that’s it. Get out!” He protested, promising that “I’ll be a good boy if you let me stay.” She finally relented and fell asleep, not to be molested again. When she woke up at ten o’clock the following morning, her boss was gone.

Hollywood, 1953

Looking back years later, Jane recalled that “Howard and Birdwell tried to sell me like a can of tomatoes.” At the time, the world viewed her as a big-time star, one of the sexy bombshells to emerge from the war years. In reality, her life was quite different. She claimed that she had a hard time living and making her auto payments on the fifty dollars a week she was pulling in from Caddo.

She grew increasingly uncomfortable at Howard’s ongoing battles with the censors, much of the controversy centering on her bosom. When Howard finally relented and let her see *The Outlaw*, she was disappointed, finding it a “ghastly picture.” She also felt that she came across like a “wooden dummy.” Many critics agreed with her assessment.

Still under contract to Howard, a link that would last for thirty-five years, Jane moved forward into a famous—perhaps infamous—career. But it wasn’t until the filming of *The French Line* in 1953 that her bosom would once again get Howard into “deep do-do,” as she called it, with the censors. Jane had been cast in the role of a Texas oil heiress.

Her bosom became the subject of a nationwide scandal even before *The French Line* was released. One solo musical number by Jane was called “Lookin’ for Trouble,” a four-minute bump-and-grind number. Howard had ordered his costume designer, Michael Woulfe, to create the briefest of bikinis for Jane. At the time no major star had appeared in such a scanty outfit for a top studio. “It was years before actresses started showing everything on camera,” said veteran director Lloyd Bacon.

When Jane put on the silver-beaded bikini and appeared on set, she claimed that she felt naked. “In those days no woman in America dressed like that. Bikinis were something a few naughty girls wore in the south of France on a Riviera beach.”

This sometimes Sunday school teacher hurried back to her dressing room and took off the costume, returning it to Michael. She told him to tell Howard that she wouldn’t appear in it. Eventually, after many angry exchanges, a compromise was reached. Michael would design a revealing one-piece costume with holes above and below the waist. In such an outfit, Jane performed her torrid number, which was choreographed by Billy Daniel, with Hal Schaefer laying out the music.

Even so, when the preview audience at the 5,000-seat Fox Theatre in St. Louis on December 29 in 1953 saw *The French Line*, it caused a nationwide scandal. The Roman Catholic Archdiocese labeled it “a mortal sin” and demanded that the police confiscate all copies.

Ads for *The French Line* were as provocative as they’d been for *The Outlaw*. Billboards proclaimed, JANE RUSSELL IN 3-DIMENSION—AND WHAT DIMENSIONS! Another ad shouted: IT’LL KNOCK BOTH YOUR EYES OUT! As if the audience didn’t get the point—or “points” as the case may be—the word both was underlined.

Once again, Howard was denied a Seal of Approval for the film. Eventually he lost the battle and cut the controversial number.

In 1955, as Jane’s contract was up for renewal, Howard was in the process of winding down his motion picture production at RKO. He didn’t have any more film work for the aging star, whom he’d exploited for fifteen years. “I can’t let her go like I did Harlow,” he said. He offered her, and she accepted, a contract, granting her a thousand dollars a week until 1975.

In the future, her check arrived faithfully. As previously negotiated, payments stopped in 1975, only a year before Howard’s death. Despite the ongoing ordeal of long periods without job offers, she once told Dietrich, “I’d still do a picture for Howard—and for nothing.”



Jane Russell in *The Outlaw*

Rambling down a dust-covered memory lane, Jane, in her final conclusion about Howard, said, “Ours was truly a platonic love affair.”

Los Angeles, 1940-43

With the lead roles finally cast, director Howard Hawks transported the crew of *The Outlaw* to a remote location eighty miles east of Falstaff, Arizona. He wanted to be far from Hollywood and the interference of Howard. His eccentric boss had given him *carte blanche* during the filming of *Scarface* nearly a decade before, and Hawks was hoping for the same with *The Outlaw*.

“I’ve got planes to build,” Howard told Hawks. “Send me back the undeveloped film. Listen, and listen good, I want to see a great picture up there on the screen.” He ordered Hawks to bring in the low-budget western for \$250,000. *The Outlaw* would end up costing \$3,400,000, a mammoth expense for a film in those days.

Hawks knew from the beginning that the plot for *The Outlaw* had nothing to do with the real life story of Billy the Kid. The script was based on a wild folktale about Billy running off to Mexico, assuming a new identity, and living happily ever after.

Originally Howard had hired Ben Hecht to write the screenplay, considering him the best in the business and having worked with him before. But he found Hecht’s script disappointing and hired Jules Furthman instead.

Furthman came up with a sexy script that pleased Howard. His credentials included the screenplay for the Oscar-nominated *Mutiny on the Bounty* that had starred Clark Gable and Charles Laughton. Furthman would later write such scripts as *To Have and Have Not*. Into Lauren Bacall’s mouth, he would put her legendary lines to Bogie: “You know how to whistle, don’t you, Steve? You just put your lips together... and blow!”

In the desert, Cubby Broccoli, working directly under Hawks, had assembled some 250 actors and technicians, including Jack and Jane. Even though

one of Howard's best friends, Cubby had not directly asked him for the job of assistant director. He'd appealed to Hawks directly and had been hired. Howard, in fact, was surprised to find Cubby among the crew. But since he trusted Cubby, he was pleased with the choice. For transport of the cast, crew, and the props needed to stage a western in the desert, Cubby had reserved a specially commissioned eight-car train to haul them out from Los Angeles.

Glenn Odekirk flew to Arizona every few days to retrieve the undeveloped footage, and to fly it back to 7000 Romaine Street in Los Angeles. When the film was developed, Howard, with a very skeptical eye, viewed the rushes.

To the art director, Perry Ferguson, in Arizona, Howard sent this handwritten memo: "More skin, less dust."

At 2:30am one morning in Los Angeles, he summoned a sleepy Birdwell to his screening room. There he showed the publicist the rushes. At first Birdwell praised the performances and Hawk's direction. "What?" Howard asked in astonishment. "You didn't notice? No clouds! Without clouds, the picture looks as naked as a jaybird." It was already part of Hollywood legend that Howard had delayed the production of *Hell's Angels* for weeks and weeks in his search for clouds in the bright California skies.

Fearing the same delay, Birdwell told Howard that the acting and direction alone could carry the picture, even without the clouds.

At seven o'clock the following morning, Howard telephoned Hawks in Arizona. Howard promised Hawks to raise the budget to one million dollars. "But I've got to have clouds. No clouds, no picture!" On that ominous note, he slammed down the phone. Expecting praise and getting this rebuff, Hawks was furious. Even though there were still no clouds in the sky, and with an eye to his budget, he continued his filming anyway, in defiance of Howard's obsession with clouds.

When he saw the next batch of rushes, Howard's temper exploded. He ordered Hawks to stop shooting at once until the clouds rolled into Arizona. Hawks not only refused, he quit. "Direct the god damn picture yourself." This time it was Hawks who slammed down the phone.

Warner Brothers had just contacted Hawks to direct Gary Cooper in *Sergeant York*. Hawks was eager to accept this prestigious assignment, which would eventually win an Oscar for Cooper, Howard's former lover.

As Hawks told Cubby, "I'm not going to sit around for weeks waiting for some cloud to appear in the sky. I'm also not going to turn this stupid western into some million-dollar extravaganza. Let's face it: *The Outlaw* is a Grade B western. I make Grade A films."

Facing the prospect of a film without a director, Howard called Cubby and ordered him to haul the cast and crew back to Los Angeles, where Howard would assume the director's job. Cubby told him that because the rail line stretching out into the desert had been built without a loop for many miles in either direction, it wouldn't be practical to turn the special eight-car train around.

"Then back the fucking thing into Los Angeles," Howard ordered him.

Back in Hollywood, interior shooting began on *The Outlaw*, but only at night because Howard was never available during the day. Arriving unshaven and without sleep, Howard often slurred his words and appeared drowsy while directing *The Outlaw* at the old Samuel Goldwyn Studios.

By the time Howard arrived on the set every evening, the film's pair of crusty old cowboys, Thomas Mitchell and Walter Huston, were often already drunk. (Huston played Doc Halliday, and hot-tempered veteran actor Mitchell was cast as the sheriff.) For one of the scenes that Howard directed, he ordered a mind-numbing 128 takes. Mitchell, who'd already won an Oscar for his performance in *Stagecoach* as the whiskey-soaked Doc Boone, finally exploded, walking out on "this bastard of a flick." But not before throwing his ten-gallon hat on the floor and stomping on it "like an Apache war dancer," in Cubby's words. In front of the entire cast, with Howard standing in the background, Mitchell shouted, "The cocksucker knows nothing about how to direct a film." He stormed off the set. After a night of boozing with Huston, his old friend persuaded Mitchell to resume shooting the following night.

The endless delays didn't bother Jack and Jane as much. Since neither of these inexperienced actors had ever appeared in a film before, each of them just assumed that this was how movies were made.

During the making of *The Outlaw*, the film was inspiring lots of gossip in Hollywood. The most outrageous tale concerned the allegation that Howard was making a conventional film for presentation to the world at large, but that he was also shooting a version filled with nude scenes for his own private consumption. The inspiration for this gossip derived from a scene that was never included in the final cut of *The Outlaw*. Howard had mysteriously ordered a closed set, consisting of as few members of the crew as possible. Those members included Cubby and cameraman Gregg Toland.

The kind of scene that Howard contemplated now appears frequently in movies. But when Howard conceived his scene, it was both innovative and radical. As a filmmaker, he was a movie pioneer.

In the secret scene, he wanted Jack to pull his pants down as he prepares to hump a Mexican harlot. The camera would focus on Jack's bare buttocks as his pants are lowered. There would be no revelatory frontal view. Even Howard didn't plan to go that far.

Howard himself had laid out the details of the scenario that Cubby had defined as a possibly superfluous "detour" that wasn't essential to the plot of *The Outlaw*. In the scene, Jack would arrive at a saloon of a gambling house. At the bar, he would pick up a Mexican harlot, who would take him to one of the upstairs bedrooms, where the whore earned extra money by seducing horny cowboys who rode in off the plains.

Howard and Jack fought for days over the scene, and at first the actor refused to do it. But, like all his future battles with Jack, Howard prevailed in the end. "Jack was a sweet and loving man," Cubby said. "But Howard was just too powerful. Even though he would resist, Jack would ultimately end up doing Howard's bidding. Howard was truly the boss man, Jack his obedient slave."

Cubby witnessed Howard shooting the scene. Jack had been ordered to wear no underwear. For the girl, whose face was never seen, Howard had secured "a hot Mexican enchilada from a whorehouse in Phoenix," Cubby said. She looked like that Mexican spitfire, Lupe Velez, who'd brought so much pleasure and so many problems to Gary Cooper and, later, to that Tarzan boy."

"Howard hovered over Jack as filming began," Cubby said. "Somewhat embarrassed, Jack lowered his pants. All of his naked ass was revealed, and that boy had some buttocks on him. No wonder Howard was hot for him. Jack had been told to simulate orgasm, and the Mexican spitfire had been told to get an erection out of Jack. Soon, when his big cock was rubbing up against her vagina, the inevitable happened. Jack was young and horny. Howard got what he wanted. Jack penetrated the Mexican whore and rode her to his complete satisfaction. Caught in the throes of orgasm, Jack's moans could be heard across the set. On that shot, Howard asked for only one take."

Within weeks, word got out in Hollywood about this so-called nude version of *The Outlaw*. Instead of the Mexican whore, the gossip mongers had Jack actually penetrating Jane Russell on camera. "Believe me, I was there," Cubby said. "Nothing like that happened."

It was said that Howard "endlessly watched" Jack's scene of seduction with the Mexican prostitute. Howard's frustration, according to Cubby, was that Howard desired Jack's ass. "But the actor would only submit to oral sex regardless of how Howard tried to bribe him," Cubby said.

"I know it sounds far-fetched, but I think Howard punished Jack by sabotaging his career," Cubby claimed. "It was Howard's payback to Jack for not surrendering that beautiful, humpy ass to his boss man."

All this publicity did not escape the attention of Joseph Breen, who worked directly under the Hays Office, which was assigned the role of censoring films and recommending Seals of Approval—or not. In a warning of trouble to come, Breen wrote Howard: “I see ‘by the papers,’ as Mr. Dooley used to say, that you have begun shooting your picture. It occurs to me that you ought to let us have a copy of your shooting script, with a view toward examining it, against the possibility that there may be some details in it, which will have to be deleted or changed in the finished picture.”

Early in the game, Breen had thrown down the gauntlet, judging the film before it was even made.

He read the script, and, as predicted, Breen objected to page after page of dialogue, finding it “racy” and requesting rewrites. He wrote to Howard that “care must be taken to avoid sexual suggestiveness. Since Howard was making the most sexually suggestive western of all time, Breen’s comments might have either angered him or amused him with their silliness. Howard called Breen and agreed to adhere to his demands.

After hanging up on his censor, Howard ordered Hawks, still his director at the time, to go: “Full speed ahead! Fuck Joseph Breen! Fuck the Hays Office! We’ll defy them!” Diplomatically, Hawks urged caution but Howard said he wouldn’t back down.

When Breen viewed the final version of *The Outlaw*, he exploded in rage. To his bosses at the Hays Office, he wrote: “In more than ten years of critical examination of motion pictures, I have never seen anything quite so unacceptable as the shots of the breasts of the character of Rio. Throughout almost half the picture, the girl’s breasts, which are large and prominent, are shockingly uncovered.”

The Hays Office demanded 108 cuts which would virtually have narrowed the film down to a running time of 20 minutes. It would have made no sense and would, in fact, make it a mere trailer to some other featured film.

Howard had done all the cutting, scoring, and editing himself, butchering an astonishing “eighty-five miles” of film down to two miles.

He announced to the press that, “I believe filmmakers shouldn’t fear the censors, but should fight them.” A showdown meeting was called between Howard’s representative, including his lawyer, Neil McCarthy, and the Hays Office.

Howard did not attend the meeting but sent Birdwell to supervise what Howard called “a mammalry wall-to-wall display.”

When the “blue noses” walked into the meeting to debate *The Outlaw*, they were astonished to see that Birdwell had plastered the walls with large blow-ups of Hollywood goddesses in all their plunging *décolletage*. On the walls hung revealing pictures of Rita Hayworth, Marlene Dietrich, Irene Dunne, Claudette Colbert, Betty Grable, Norma Shearer, Madeleine Carroll, and Loretta Young. There were eight blow-ups alone of Howard’s discovery, Jean Harlow, who was never known for keeping her bosom hidden on camera.

With him, Birdwell had brought along Walter S. Slater, one of California’s leading mathematicians. In front of the astonished censors, Slater measured the bosoms of the film goddesses with calipers. The conclusion of his “mathematical case” revealed that Jane Russell showed proportionately less bosom than did these leading ladies of the cinema. Slater asserted that each of Harlow’s pictures had won the Seal of Approval, in each case with her showing more bosom than Jane.

Later Birdwell said jokingly, “Of course, the point was that there was a great deal more of Jane to photograph than Harlow had. Harlow had modest tits. Jane had ‘Hello, officer’ kind of tits! The point the censors didn’t get is this: ten percent of a hundred is larger than ten percent of one.”

Howard went to court and managed to have the 108 objections to *The Outlaw* lowered to three. After seeing the film himself, the presiding judge later said that the breasts of Jane Russell “hung like a thunderstorm over a summer landscape.”

Howard had won the first round in his battle with the censors. Birdwell was the first to learn the good news. “It’s a victory for us,” he gleefully told Howard.

“Like hell!” he countered. “I’ll not cut the three scenes. I’ll release the god damn picture without a seal.”

Birdwell could not believe his ears. It was as if Howard wanted more trouble. The publicist had even managed to get the Legion of Decency to back down, granting the picture a B rating, which meant “morally objectionable in part.”

After costly battles, Howard was granted a Seal of Approval on March 23, 1941, providing he would agree to several cuts and changes. Even so, the advertising campaign for *The Outlaw* would bring him into more battles with the censors.

For reasons of his own—Noah Dietrich called it “a rich man’s whim”—Howard locked away all copies of *The Outlaw* for two years. Birdwell urged him to release the film at once.

Howard refused. “During the next two years, we’ll publicize the hell out of it. Hysteria will mount. Just wait and see!”

San Francisco, 1943

Since Jane Russell was still under contract to Howard, he wanted to keep her working although he had no more pictures for her. Through Birdwell, he arranged for her to be photographed from one o’clock in the afternoon until around eight in the evening. “Shoot her sitting, standing, rolling around, dancing, smiling, singing, laughing, crying,” he told Birdwell. “Shoot! Shoot! From all these photographs, I’ll come up with just the right picture to showcase her assets.”

Birdwell immediately hired George Hurrell to photograph Jane. He was the leading photographer of Beverly Hills. He was famous for having said: “I can turn any fat, old, ugly producer’s wife from the slurping pig she is into Betty Grable.”

The photographer came up with a brilliant idea. He ordered five bales of hay for the first shoot. Jane was dressed in a short skirt and peasant blouse and given a six-shooter to hold. Naturally, the blouse would plunge and the skirt would roll high up to her thighs. The picture of Jane rolling in the hay became world famous. Even in the middle of its coverage of World War II, *Life* magazine thought it worthy of a cover. A legend was in the making. Even though the American movie-going public had yet to see Jane in a film, she had become one of the most widely recognized stars of World War II, ranking up there with Rita Hayworth and Lana Turner.

Life was among the first of literally hundreds of magazines and newspapers that would run Hurrell’s pictures of Jane. She had become the second most famous pinup of the war, rivaled only by the photograph of Betty Grable wearing a one-piece bathing suit and shot from the rear. (A frontal shot wasn’t feasible for Grable at the time because she was pregnant.)

Birdwell had never generated so much publicity before, even during his search for an actress to play Scarlett O’Hara. His “Cleavage-in-a-Haystack” photographs were the biggest publicity triumphs of his career. “Every GI. in America became familiar with both of them,” Birdwell said, referring to

Jane's most obvious assets.

After the haystack photographs receded from the public eye, Birdwell conceived another brilliant idea. He found a lonely soldier in San Diego and had him photographed looking wistfully at a large shot of Jane's haystack picture. In an era where women throughout America were knitting sweaters for husbands or lovers, the soldier was photographed knitting a sweater for Jane to cover her ample bosom. Few magazines or newspapers in America resisted running that amusing picture.

During the darkest days of World War II, Howard finally announced that the premiere of *The Outlaw* would be celebrated on February 5, 1943 in the relatively liberal venue of San Francisco. At the offices of Caddo, nearly 1,200 fan letters a week were arriving for Jane, even more than for other beautiful movie stars who had actually made movies being shown in theaters. Before the San Francisco opening, Birdwell launched a sensational ad campaign, beginning with the slogan: SEX HAS NOT BEEN RATIONED.

Other posters proclaimed in large letters: THE OUTLAW—THE PICTURE THAT COULDN'T BE STOPPED. Yet another billboard, showing a large blowup of Jane's haystack portrait, provocatively asked: HOW'D YOU LIKE TO TUSSLE WITH RUSSELL?

With Howard as the pilot, some fifty reporters and columnists, along with their spouses, boyfriends, or girlfriends, were flown from Los Angeles to San Francisco at Howard's expense. Jane and Jack, dressed in Billy the Kid and Rio drag from the film, were to make a personal appearance, acting out a scene that never made it to the final cut. It was a night of humiliation for the young actors. The curtain became stuck. All the audience could see were their feet, booted in Jack's case. Howard's invited guests roared with laughter, an ominous sign. Laughter continued when the film was shown.

Even though mocking Howard's movie, the freeloaders accepted an invitation to his celebration party at Bal Tabarin, a San Francisco nightclub. Jack, Jane, and Howard retired to his hotel suite for a private celebration party. En route to the club, Chad Jamison, a reporter, told Birdwell: "In all my forty years of going to theater and movies, this is the worst piece of shit I've ever witnessed. You've got a disaster on your hands!"

In spite of its earlier stand, the Catholic Legion of Decency announced a ban. *Variety* announced that it was going to be kind and not review the film. The newspaper later rescinded itself and reviewed *The Outlaw*, denouncing it as "almost a burlesque of screen westerns." *Time* defined it as "a strong candidate for the flopperoo of all time," giving the acting honors to Red, the movie's horse. Infuriated at the comment, Howard called his attorney to sue *Time*, but Neil McCarthy prevailed on his client to withdraw such a hopeless court action. Although *The Outlaw* is tepid by today's standards, United Artists informed Howard that it would not distribute the film.

Goaded by Howard, Birdwell launched a daring campaign in San Francisco. He hired fifty people, mostly secretaries, to call to stir up protests. These impostors phoned newspapers and magazines, even police stations, ordering them to shut down the showing of *The Outlaw* in San Francisco. Disguising his voice, Birdwell placed some of the more outrageous calls himself.

Birdwell's hired protesters concentrated on churches, women's clubs, and parent-teacher associations. When Birdwell's protesters actually stormed the Geary Theatre, the police moved in and arrested the manager of the movie house for exhibiting "a lewd film." Soon after, for his role in the crafting of the film's allegedly lewd publicity campaigns, Birdwell learned that a warrant had also been issued for his own arrest. Fleeing town without even returning to his hotel to retrieve his luggage, he rushed onto the next plane out of San Francisco. Traveling under the pseudonym "George Hurkos," he safely hid out in Seattle until the heat was off.

The legal battle continued in the courts of San Francisco, where Howard brought in a "top gun legal hawk," Neil McCarthy. Into the scenario, McCarthy introduced a statue of Venus de Milo. "A three-dimensional display of the world's perfect bosom won out over a two-dimensional display of another," a reporter claimed. Few judges in the world wanted to issue a ban on the Venus de Milo. Such an argument about a classical statue didn't make a lot of sense, but it won the day, at least in terms of publicity and censorship, for Howard and *The Outlaw*.

Then, Howard took his campaign to the skies: Five times a day Howard's pilots flew above the skies of San Francisco skywriting "*The Outlaw*." The film's name was followed by two giant circles, each dotted in the center. Attention still focused on Jane Russell's breasts, although *Newsweek* called the cheap publicity stunt "a new high in vulgarity." Birdwell commissioned a series of new posters, showing a hot stud of a cowboy dragging Rio with ripped clothes into a barn, with the obvious intent of raping her. Smaller type proclaimed TRIGGER-FAST ACTION!

In the ensuing ten weeks, and in spite of its lackluster opening, *The Outlaw* played to packed houses. The film also opened at select theaters throughout America. Disastrous reviews did not keep audiences from flocking to see the film. Most critics attacked it, one "poison pen" denouncing it as a "shabby, contrived, cornball western, but a marvelous curiosity." No one faulted Birdwell's marketing, however, one of the most brilliant publicity triumphs in the history of cinema.

Howard was disappointed with Jane. He'd raised her salary from \$50 to \$75 a week. But, tired of promoting *The Outlaw*, she skipped town, marrying her high school sweetheart, football star Robert Waterfield, in April of 1943.

Howard suspended her, a banishment that would last for two years. When she returned to Hollywood after her husband's release from the Army, Howard reinstated his errant star. He lent her to producer Hunt Stromberg so that she could co-star with Louis Hayward in *Young Widow*, a film that was released in 1946. It had been a full six years since Jane, at the height of her beauty and an internationally recognized sex symbol, had appeared before a camera.

After its initial opening in 1943, Howard once again withdrew *The Outlaw* from circulation. Prints of the film would languish in airtight vaults for three more years. In 1946, he decided to reissue the film. In a historical first, the Motion Picture Association of America abruptly withdrew its original seal. Howard immediately sued and lost. He was able to show his controversial film only in theaters that defied the Seal of Approval. He finally made peace with the MPAA and was granted his seal after certain "scenes too vulgar" were cut.

In the reissue of the film, ads asked the question: WHAT ARE THE TWO GREAT REASONS FOR JANE RUSSELL'S RISE TO STARDOM?

Time has been kinder to Howard's attempts to get *The Outlaw* released. In his book, *The Face on the Cutting Room Floor*, Murray Schumach wrote: "Regardless of Hughes's motives, he brought some refreshing honesty to Hollywood's approach to sex. He made the American public laugh a little at its own prudery about the female breasts. If ever a cinematic Rabelais emerges from Hollywood, he will be indebted to this unusual industrialist. Hughes lacked artistry. But he is not afraid to show, on a movie screen, that sex, even without a license, can be fun."

In the 1970s, too weak and too sick to move from his bed, Howard still screened *The Outlaw* at least once a month. Months before he died, it was partially screened for him a final time. A Mormon lackey later reported that his boss did not seem familiar with the film, but vaguely recalled that he might have seen it before. It was apparent that he no longer remembered Jane Russell or even Jack Buetel, his Billy the Kid to whom he'd virtually subjected to bondage during the cream of his youth.

"Jane Russell did all right for herself in spite of Howard," Cubby Broccoli later recalled. "I hear she's going around with some group singing Christian hymns today. But Poor Jack. His life was ruined by Howard. Even so, he came out better than the young man originally slated to be Billy the Kid. Better a ruined career like Jack's than a stiletto in your back like David Bacon."



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Los Angeles 1939-41

In 1939, when Hitler's invasion of Poland triggered the beginning of World War II, Howard knew that America's military involvement in the conflict would occur, in his words, "in just a matter of months." In defiant opposition to his pacifist rival, Charles Lindbergh, Howard accurately predicted that what would ultimately win the war would be bombs raining down from airplanes. He even wrote Lindbergh a brief but angry note, attacking him "as a Nazi sympathizer."

Howard also realized, as did many well-placed members of the U.S. military, that America was woefully underequipped with suitable aircraft. Shortly thereafter, Howard announced to his aides and staff that he planned to become the biggest supplier of aircraft to the U.S. government during the war effort.

To achieve his dream, he'd have to design and construct a major industrial compound, create a viable series of assembly lines, and hire and train an army of staff. It was Glenn Odekirk who discovered a tract of about 1,300 acres, bordering the Pacific Ocean at a point near Culver City, site of MGM studios. The land ran perpendicular to the Pacific Coast and paralleled a bluff on which stood the campus of Loyola University.

Howard commanded Dietrich to buy the property. He then began the construction of hangars, a central office building, and a 9,500-foot runway, which, when completed, held the record as the longest privately owned runway in America. Since Toolco was making more money than any other private business in America at the time, Howard probably felt that he could afford these inaugural expenses.

Assembling a qualified staff was more difficult, because "all the good men" were already involved in the war effort. "Form a posse and round 'em up," Howard instructed Dietrich. His chief officer set to work at once, assembling a crew of skilled laborers that consisted, in part, of men deemed unfit for military service because of some disability. Dietrich also scoured the campuses of local colleges and universities, usually hiring students, math and science professors, draftsmen, and engineers—both male and female—right on the spot. It was rumored that Howard himself stood outside the gates of Boeing every evening at closing time, luring workers into his factory at Culver City with promises of bonuses and fatter paychecks.

In spite of the daunting challenges caused by the labor shortage, Howard, through Dietrich and Odekirk, hired five hundred engineers, scientists, draftsmen, and airplane designers. Hughes Aircraft Company was officially launched, but acquiring government contracts would be long and arduous, partly because of Howard's own secrecy and the ill will he'd created in the past by snubbing top Army brass. As it turned out, some of the men who bore the biggest grudges against him would be in positions of power, ruling on his future requests.

Howard's goal involved building the ultimate reconnaissance aircraft. He called it the D-2, short for "Design Number Two." He had originally budgeted two million dollars to develop a prototype. To Dietrich's horror, another four million dollars would eventually get poured into the aircraft's development. Some two million dollars had already been spent building the compound itself.

"Howard was the only one who was convinced that he'd easily win government contracts," Odekirk later said. "He held to that position despite his lack of success in getting the U.S. Army to give him the time of day, much less a contract."

Even though the United States Air Force was not impressed with Howard's vision, Japan and Nazi Germany were. Before the outbreak of war, Japan had ordered their America-based spies to research the technical details of Howard's H-1 and H-2 planes. The Air Force of Japan then used many of Howard's innovations when creating their own highly successful Zero.

Likewise, the Luftwaffe, by means known only to Hitler's Air Force, had successfully employed Howard's Sperry gyroscope, which he had pioneered during his around-the-world flight, during their aerial bombardment of Britain. Even when Howard's innovative designs were pointed out to the U.S. Air Corps, military officials were not moved. Instead they chastised Howard for not maintaining better security at his plant and for allowing valuable technology to fall into the hands of the enemy.

Taking those warnings to heart, Howard ordered strict secrecy and a 24-hour guard to shield the development of his reconnaissance plane, the D-2. It would be piloted by a five-man crew. A twin-engine fighter, with twin fuselages (also known as twin booms), it would carry its crew within a big-windowed oval-shaped pod positioned below the wing, midway between the twin fuselages.

The secret of the plane would be a material called Duramold, developed by Howard's friends at the Fairchild Corporation. Revolutionary and recently patented, it used a system of composite laminate bonding that placed thin veneers of wood, under heat and high pressure, between layers of specially formulated glues. The result might be labeled today as "hi-tech plywood." It was relatively lightweight and stronger, when assembled, than the sum of its individual components. Adaptable into a wide variety of shapes and sizes, it could also be laminated into shapes and surfaces that were curved. Howard's friend, Sherman Fairchild, had convinced him of the merits of Duramold in airplane construction. Steel was in short ration so that the use of wood would remove a major hurdle in the D-2s eventual wartime production.

Although Howard was spending as much as thirty-six hours at a time at his aircraft plant, he still managed to find time to produce *The Outlaw* and carry on various affairs. Johnny Meyer said he didn't know if Howard ever slept.

When Dietrich informed him that the Internal Revenue Service was going to tax him as a California resident because of his ownership of Muirfield, he ordered his honcho to sell the property, even at a loss. Dietrich sold the estate, and Howard moved into a bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel, the scene of so many of his future romances. "I've become a nomad," he told Cary Grant.

For his jailbait mistress, Faith Domergue, he leased an eighteen-room mansion at 619 Sarbonne Road in the exclusive Bel Air section of Los Angeles. He installed not just Faith but her parents in this French Regency style house set on beautifully landscaped grounds. It was luxury unknown to the Domergues before. Since both her father and her grandfather worked for Howard, their teenage offspring had become their bread ticket. All her family was eager to see her romance with Howard flourish. Once or twice she ran away, but her father always tracked her down and delivered her back to Howard. In almost every case, Mr. Domergue pleaded with Howard to forgive his errant daughter. "Faith will come around," the father said. "Just you wait and see."

She called Howard her "father lover." Her assessment was accurate. Photographs from the early 1940s reveal that he'd lost his movie star handsome looks of the 1920s and early 1930s. His hearing had deteriorated to a point where he missed most of what people said to him. He'd briefly considered joining the Air Force, but he was not physically fit for military service because of his hearing disability. Mainly because of sleepless nights, dark circles—"sometimes tinged with an almost grayish green," in the words of Faith—formed under his eyes. "They were the saddest eyes in the world," she said, "like he could never be happy again." His shoulders had begun to droop into a slouch, a condition that would remain for the rest of his life.

He called her his "perfect lover." She was a virgin when she met him, and he'd trained her to perform sexually as he commanded. "She hasn't been

polluted by other men who taught her bad habits,” Howard told Dietrich.

“As Howard began a slow withering on the vine,” Henry Willson once said, “my former client, Miss Domergue, began to blossom into a hell of a sexy woman. She wasn’t Jane Russell, but she was no longer the tender little virgin she was the day I first introduced her to Howard.”

It was on the morning of April 8, 1941, that Howard arose from the bed he shared with Faith in their rented home. She was still asleep when he got out of bed and walked nude to the bathroom. He was heading for Hughes Aircraft, where he’d work until eight in the evening before continuing with his endless and obsessive editing of *The Outlaw*.

As he was soaping his hands, he noticed pus-like blisters on his hands which had seemed to develop overnight. At first he thought this might have been caused by the chemicals used in developing film for his picture. He immediately summoned the ever-faithful Dr. Verne Mason who came at once.

He found Howard sitting entirely nude in his library, demanding a complete body inspection like those his mother used to give him during his childhood in Houston. After a thorough examination, Dr. Mason stood up and faced his nude patient. “It’s syphilis! Your old case has come back or else it’s a new outbreak.”

At first Howard went into a screaming rage. Dr. Mason managed to quiet him down and personally drove him to his medical offices. There Howard was injected with a revolutionary new antibiotic, penicillin. Dr. Mason warned him not to have sex for two months and to not shake hands, fearing that the broken blisters on his hand could also spread syphilis. Not trusting the new miracle drug, Howard also demanded injections of colloidal silver and arsphenamine, an old-fashioned remedy which had been used to treat the disease ever since Howard Hughes Sr. had contacted it during a dalliance with some prostitutes in his private railway car.

For the next two weeks, Howard could barely function. Dr. Mason warned him that “your temperature will reach the moon.” Howard also suffered stomach cramps “worse than a woman giving birth to a nineteen-pound baby.” With splitting headaches, he was unable to sleep. At times, he became disoriented. At one point Faith grew fearful that he was losing his mind. He sometimes called his factory demanding changes in the design of his D-2 without consulting either his management or his engineering teams. Adding to the confusion was his penchant for issuing orders for complicated design changes through low-ranking mechanics, a trait that usually inaugurated a barrage of heated phone dialogues between virtually everyone involved with the project. At one point he ordered Odekirk to take the D-2 and “push it into the Pacific.” His chief pilot sensed that Howard was demented and didn’t obey his demand.

When he learned he had syphilis, Howard called Cary Grant and told him. Since he’d had sex with Cary only recently, he feared that the actor might also have contracted the disease. Although Cary had no obvious symptoms, he heeded his friend’s warning and went to Dr. Mason for his injections anyway. Without informing her of the reason for the antibiotic being injected into her, Faith too was delivered in a limousine to Dr. Mason for the same treatment.

The first weekend of his cure, Howard demanded the destruction, by fire, of all the bed sheets and all his clothing. He bought the strongest of lye soap, evocative of the type his mother used to scrub him with, and demanded that the house be cleansed with it. Dietrich was asked to send a truck to pick up all the linen and clothing. When he arrived, he supervised the loading but instead of burning the items, he directed the truck to a local branch of the Salvation Army, which was pleased to accept them as a donation. .

Fearing that his cars were also contaminated, Howard ordered Dietrich to destroy his fleet, some of which dated from the 1920s. Instead of demolishing them, Dietrich sold the armada of Packards, Duesenbergs, and Rolls Royces at a hefty profit and pocketed the money. Howard was left with only a 1938 Chevrolet which was in poor condition, the windshield having been cracked in an accident and never repaired. For some odd reason, he believed that his Chevy was not contaminated.

Then, Howard went to Sears & Roebuck and purchased a small and rather modest wardrobe for himself. The only thing left in his original wardrobe was his faithful fedora.

As the weeks went by in his newly sanitized rental home, Howard resumed sexual relations with Faith, never informing her that he’d been suffering the aftermaths of syphilis and its cure. Apparently, she never contracted the disease. The venereal disease left Howard more afraid of germs than ever.

He was at home on the morning of December 7, 1941, when word came over the radio. The Air Force of the Empire of Japan had attacked Pearl Harbor, crippling U.S. naval operations in the Pacific.

“Howard became a madman for the rest of the day,” Faith later claimed. “He’d been morose for days. Suddenly, he was goaded into action. I didn’t know what he was talking about most of the time. He was using very technical language about all the breakthroughs he was going to make in aviation.”

All of this wasn’t fantasy. In 1939 he’d perfected power-booster radio receivers and transmitters in airplanes. Between 1941 and 1943 a young engineer in Howard’s employ, Claude Slate, would design ammunition feed chutes for fifty-caliber machine guns. This breakthrough doubled the rate of fire that could be used against an enemy. By the end of the war, ninety percent of all American bombardment aircraft carried machine-gun feed chutes manufactured by one of Howard’s companies. “We’ve become a killing machine,” Howard told Odekirk at his office at 7000 Romaine Street, which had been converted into a wartime factory. Toolco also won lucrative contracts to manufacture weapons. From the Buffalo Bayou region of Houston, Toolco’s Dickson Gun Plant manufactured centrifugally cast gun barrels in various calibers for several branches of the U.S. military, as well as parts used in the manufacture of the B-25 and B-26 bomber.

Before nightfall on December 7, Howard had convinced himself, if not Faith, that he—and he alone—could design planes that could win the war for the United States. “The Japs have made a terrible mistake,” he told her. “In attacking Pearl Harbor, they hadn’t reckoned with Howard Hughes.”

“In spite of all that big talk,” Faith said, “Howard didn’t go to the aircraft factory that day, as I was sure he would. Instead he drove over to 7000 Romaine Street where he locked himself away for the next few days. He didn’t design aircraft, but spent the hours following Roosevelt’s call to arms editing scenes from *The Outlaw*. He’d become obsessed with that film and Jane Russell’s bosom.”

Mojave Desert, 1943

In April of 1943, Lockheed notified Howard that the first Constellation had come off the assembly line and was ready to be tested. If it performed well, Howard had plans to make “Connie,” his nickname for the craft, the commercial flagship of his emerging Trans World Airlines. After acquiring the airline, he had paid scant attention to it because of other commitments, not only the Spruce Goose, the D-2, but especially *The Outlaw*. Even so, TWA was no longer “Lucky Lindy’s Airline.” It had become “Howard’s Airline.”

Over strenuous protests from Lockheed, Howard demanded designation as test pilot for the first Constellation’s inaugural flight. Lockheed acquiesced, but insisted that his co-pilot be one of the most skilled aviators in California, Milo Burcham. Kelly Johnson, Lockheed’s chief engineer and an experienced test pilot, was also assigned to fly aboard the inaugural flight. Burcham had wanted to be the pilot for the test run but reluctantly gave in to Howard’s demands, since he was, in fact, the project’s chief investor. Lockheed, however, forced Howard to agree to relinquish control of the vessel at any time during the flight if Burcham decided that he was not piloting it properly.

“Howard resented such “school marm intrusion,” but finally gave in to Lockheed’s demands. The Mojave Desert was designated as the site of Connie’s inaugural flight.

Seated beside Howard, Burcham was armed with the same controls as Howard. At any time he could commandeer the Constellation if he didn’t like the way Howard was flying.

Once airborne, and only fifteen minutes into the flight, Howard shouted to Kelly. “What does it take to stall this thing? That’s something our pilots must know.”

Taking over the controls, Burcham maneuvered the wing flaps slightly, stalling Connie. The aircraft just seemed “to be suspended in midair,” but only for a second or so, before its engines started again and the plane continued flying on course.

The suspenseful moment ended, Howard was obviously disappointed. “Fuck, that’s not a god damn stall!” he shouted at Burcham. “Howard’s face was lit up like a Christmas tree,” Burcham later reported back to his bosses at Lockheed. “That was one determined Texan. I felt he was completely unreasonable in his demands—maybe just a bit mad.”

The mammoth craft was going at a speed of 230 miles per hour when Howard, to Burcham’s horror, lowered the flaps to their fullest extent. “The Connie shuddered like it was about to break apart on its first flight,” Burcham wrote in his report filed with Lockheed. “It was going at zero speed. I couldn’t believe it. In all my years of flying, I’d never seen anything like it.”

“God damn you, you fool!” Burcham shouted at Howard. “You’ll kill us!” “Fuck off!” Howard shouted back. “I know what I’m doing.”

“Raise the flaps, you idiot!” Burcham shouted into Howard’s unreliable ears. Burcham noted a “fierce, almost demonic” look in Howard’s eyes. He would later recall that for one moment he felt Howard was committing suicide and taking the Lockheed crew with him. Finally, realizing the danger he’d placed Connie in, he raised the flaps and coaxed the engines back to life, barely in time to prevent a crash landing.

Against his better judgment, Burcham did not commandeer the plane after that recklessness on the part of Howard. As if to restore his image in front of Burcham, Howard went on for a series of four takeoff and landing tests, all successful.

On the fifth pass, he let Connie drift precariously to the left. “It was like a bird flying with one of its wings wounded,” Johnson later graphically recalled. “Watch out!” Burcham yelled, having to shout at Howard again for his renewed recklessness. “Steady the fucker, for Christ’s sake!”

Determined to retain control of the aircraft, Howard did not listen to these protests shouted from his right. The plane was flying low, and he let it drift so dangerously close that it narrowly missed the desert control tower. “Another twenty-five yards to the left, and we would have crashed into it,” Johnson said in his report to Lockheed. Some of the windows in the control tower rattled, and at least two dozen panes went flying into the desert. “The traffic controllers trapped inside were screaming,” chief engineer Johnson claimed. “We found this out later. There were several threatened lawsuits against Hughes. Maybe he put up money to settle. We never knew.”

“By this time, I had come to realize that Hughes was a crazy fuck,” Burcham later told Johnson. In his more formal report to Lockheed, he changed “crazy fuck” to “out-of-control daredevil of the air. His pilot’s license should be revoked. He is not fit to pilot a skyliner such as Lockheed’s Constellation.”

The only problem with that point was that Howard was the aircraft’s owner. Despite Howard’s piloting, the Constellation was pronounced a success. It would soon be flying passengers between Los Angeles and New York, sometimes with Howard at the controls, carrying “a bevy of movie stars.”

“Howard hauled their spoiled asses for free,” Dietrich said. “He got loads of publicity. Pictures of movie stars like Paulette Goddard or Linda Darnell getting off Connie in New York were published in newspapers across the nation.”

From his headquarters at Lockheed, Burcham read this publicity with a raised eyebrow. “I think Howard Hughes has an insane streak in him. If that insane streak takes over while he’s at the controls of a Constellation, the fool might suddenly decide to nose-dive into the heart of Chicago. If so, Hollywood will have a few less stars in its Heaven.”

Los Angeles, 1943

Howard pushed forward with plans to develop the D-2, despite the fact that no one from the Army Air Corps had seen plans for the reconnaissance plane or had been invited to inspect it during its initial construction.

To win government contracts, Howard knew he first had to convince “the boys at Wright Field,” outside of Dayton, Ohio, of the merits of his new design. A sprawling compound of runways, airplane hangars, office buildings, and laboratories maintained by the U.S. Air Corps, later called the Air Force, it was charged with the development, testing, and approval of any new aircraft utilized by the U.S. military. The brass at Wright Field awarded Boeing contracts to build the B-17; Lockheed the P-38, and Douglas the A-20. Howard wanted to be a player with his D-2 reconnaissance plane, if only he could get its prototype de-bugged and constructed. Determined, he pressed on with work on the D-2, even though Wright Field had already rejected plans for an earlier prototype, the H-1. He told Dietrich that another name for Wright Field was “The Hate Howard Hughes Club.”

Never willing to provide full disclosure, Howard wrote Wright Field hinting that he had a mystery plane under production that “will turn the tide of battle for the Allies.” Obviously that was a tantalizing bit of information to “The Boys of Wright Field,” launched into a war that they were losing. Typically, Howard provided sparse details about his revolutionary new craft.

On a visit to the West Coast for an inspection of the region’s aircraft factories, a tall, gray-haired commander of the Air Force, General H.H. (Hap) Arnold, decided to pay an unannounced visit to Hughes Aircraft Company. Acting under pre-established orders, Howard’s security force refused to admit Hap or any of the Air Force brass into the factory. Howard had not been informed in advance of this visit. Hap was furious at Howard’s guards. In

a temper outburst, he threatened to shoot his way inside. “A war’s on, you stupid fuckers! I can go inside any factory in America if I want to.” His senior aide finally prevailed upon Hap to leave the entrance, but it was a snub he’d never forget. “For Howard, it was a public relations blunder from which we never recovered,” Odekirk claimed.

Finally, Howard was forced to let the government have the plans for the D-2. “Otherwise, how in hell do you expect to win a contract from the Air Corps?” Dietrich asked, pointing out what should have been obvious. Without government interest, Howard had not been able to secure heavily rationed materials, including the right type of resins, woods, and glues needed in the new Duramold process. The Air Corps controlled all such strategic materials, allocating it to companies such as Vultee, which had become the leading aircraft contractor.

Dietrich and eight of Howard’s engineers flew for a meeting with Major General Oliver P. Echols, the chief procurement officer for the Air Corps. Like Hap, Echols too had once been snubbed by Howard. In the late 30s, Howard had tried to interest Echols and other Army brass in his *Winged Bullet*. Howard had personally told President Roosevelt that the Army Air Force should manufacture the plane en masse, since, in his view, it would make an idyllic military pursuit plane. Major General Echols and two other Army officials were waiting at Wright Field for Howard to show up in his *Winged Bullet*, as had been arranged.

For reasons known only to himself, and never fully explained, Howard flew over Wright Field, completely snubbing the brass waiting for him below on the tarmac, before finally landing his aircraft at another (unknown) airport. Echols and his staff, on the runway waiting to greet him, were left angered and fuming at Howard. It was a breach of manners which the major general would never forget. Howard had humiliated him.

Now Howard’s representatives, led by Dietrich, had come to call on him. Cold and distant with Dietrich and his engineers, Echols informed him that he’d have members of the Air Force in California inspect the D-2. “That is,” Echols said with barely concealed hostility, “if your crazy boss will let them in.”

Within days after an inspection, Howard had his answer. Echols—perhaps with a certain degree of malice—wrote Howard that the D-2, according to the Army engineers who’d inspected it, was “too heavy for use as a military weapon.” In his letter, he attacked the plane’s landing gear as being too weak. More importantly, he objected to the use of Duramold. Before signing off, Echols also noted that the D-2 lacked a bullet-resistant windshield and armor plate.

When Dietrich called to protest the decision, Echols shouted into the phone, “Tell that son of a bitch he’ll never get a nickel out of this office—not so long as I’m breathing and still in charge.”

Echols went a step farther. He sent an internal memo to officials at Wright Field, claiming that Hughes Aircraft was “a waste of time,” and advised that the Air Corps should “discontinue any further aircraft projects with this organization.” It was a puzzling memo since there were no aircraft projects to stop.

Learning of the memo and faced with such “stonewalling rejection,” Howard told Odekirk, “In Texas, as we say, there are other ways to skin a cat. We’ll find a way.”

Howard still believed in wood as a material for the construction of his airplanes, even though some of his engineers feared that it would develop cracks, absorb moisture, and shatter under fire.

One U.S. Senator called Howard’s D-2 “the playboy’s latest fantasy.” Angrily, Howard pressed forward with his experimental plane. After spending two million dollars of his own funds, Howard authorized Dietrich to pour yet another four million dollars of corporate funds into the ill-fated plane. He was still determined to build the ultimate reconnaissance aircraft.

Eventually and in spite of the lack of efficiency at Hughes Aircraft, the employees came up with a prototype of the D-2 that was ready for a trial run. Howard told his staff that he himself would be the plane’s first test pilot.

On June 20, 1943, Howard had flown to a secret location at Harper Dry Lake in the Mojave Desert, 100 miles north of Culver City, California. He took off in the D-2 on its first run and was airborne for about twenty minutes before he headed back to earth where he made a smooth landing. He later told Stan Bell, one of his chief engineers, that the plane “nibbles,” thus coining a word.

His engineers had already been ordered back to the drawing board when Howard, the next day, dictated a twenty-eight page memo outlining what he perceived as design flaws in the aircraft.

“We tried and we tried,” Ray Kirkpatrick, a flight engineer, said, “but I think Howard just never liked the D-2. We simply couldn’t build the plane that he envisioned.”

In spite of his disappointment in the D-2 on its test flight, Howard began to lobby aggressively for it when he learned that the second son of the president, Elliott Roosevelt, was flying to the West Coast. His mission was to find a reconnaissance plane that performed better than the superior German craft in use by the Luftwaffe at the time.

A handsome, dashing playboy type, somewhat like Howard himself, Elliott had been head of the Mediterranean Allied Photo Reconnaissance Command where he’d learned firsthand how inferior American competitive craft was. Called back to Washington by General Hap Arnold, Elliott was assigned the task of locating a better plane by touring the factories of the West Coast.

“There’s no need for him to haul ass over to Boeing,” Howard said, “Have I got a plane for him!” Odekirk didn’t comment, but he knew that Howard had no such plane ready, only a working model that had earned Howard’s own condemnation.

As a means of entertaining Elliott, the Air Force, and the Army brass, Howard called in Johnny Meyer. The visiting dignitaries from Washington were to be housed elegantly at Howard’s expense. Starlets were to be hired at \$100 to \$400 a night to entertain them. Howard warned Meyer, “Those \$400-a-night broads had better be really good. For that price, we should be able to get Hedy Lamarr herself.”

In an impulsive move, Howard ordered Dietrich to deduct the fees paid to each of the call girl bills from his income tax. “It’s a legitimate entertainment cost,” Howard told Dietrich, who did not agree.

Although planning to arrange “entertainment of a sexual nature” for their men, Howard didn’t overlook the wives left back home. He managed to secure beautiful Parisian handbags and black market nylon stockings as gifts to take home to the neglected wives.

On August 8, 1943, in anticipation of Elliott’s arrival with his top brass, Meyer appeared at the airport with a flotilla of eight limousines. “We have to get to Elliott before Lockheed does,” Howard instructed Meyer, who had mapped out an entertainment agenda for the men that would “bring a blush to the cheeks of Nero.” Through spies, Howard had learned that Elliott was a “devotee of pussy.” As Howard told Meyer, “If there’s one thing that’s not rationed—nor in short supply in Los Angeles—it’s pussy. Get him all he wants. I’m paying.”

Howard took over much of the wooing of Elliott personally, flying him to the D-2 test ground site at Lake Harper, piloting him on his yacht to Catalina Island, and personally escorting him around the Hughes Aircraft plant where he spent hours reviewing plans for his D-2 and touting its “unlimited possibilities” in reconnaissance.

“I think we’ve got Elliott in our pocket,” Howard confided to Odekirk after the first week of entertainment. The deal was cinched not by Howard but by a tawny blonde.

When Meyer arranged a special luncheon for the President’s son at the Warner Brother’s commissary in Hollywood, he was introduced to a five-foot, four-inch beauty from Louisiana, Faye Emerson, a rising young contract player at Warner Brothers. Each day Meyer arranged “a boob buffet” for Elliott at one of the studios, at which he’d be introduced to some bosomy stars.

At the studio making *Destination Tokyo*, Cary Grant had been asked to join the party. Howard knew that his lover’s smooth manners and charm would impress the impressionable Elliott who had a “movie star fixation.”

Meyer had pre-tested Faye, relaying to Howard that she “was the fellatio queen of Hollywood.” In response, Faye told Howard that “Johnny’s figure was less than Greek.” Since Howard was an aficionado of the oral arts, he called Faye and asked her to come to his office at 7000 Romaine Street for a demonstration. Kneeling in front of Howard at his desk, the “fiercely ambitious” young woman serviced Howard. Later he told Meyer that, “Faye is the second best cocksucker in Hollywood—only Tyrone Power has a better technique.”

Recalling the luncheon at Warners, Meyer later said that “Faye practically fell all over Elliott. She used every excuse she could to touch him.” She even got him to order her favorite dish, Brunswick stew, inspired by a recipe she’d picked up in Georgia and had given to the studio chefs to prepare for them.

By nightfall of the same day, she was occupying Elliott’s expensive suite that Howard was paying for at the Beverly Hills Hotel. “My boss ordered me to deliver the champagne and caviar personally,” Meyer said.

Although Howard would squander millions, he could also threaten to fire an employee for ordering an eighty-five cent subscription to a magazine he deemed unnecessary. But he was delighted with Meyer for linking Faye Emerson with Elliott. “My chief pimp is going to find a five thousand dollar bonus in his next paycheck,” he told Meyer.

When he wasn’t with Faye, Elliott had his time monopolized by Howard. He boasted to the President’s son that his D-2 would be able to fly 433 miles per hour. Commander D.W. Stevenson, who was also being “wined, dined, and fucked,” as Odekirk put it, as part of Howard’s sales campaign, also praised the D-2. “I have never seen anything more magnificent that could do a better job,” Stevenson proclaimed.

Howard’s wooing of Elliott continued even after Elliott left California for the East Coast. Within a few days, Howard arranged for Faye to join Elliott in Washington and New York. Soon the actress and the president’s son were spotted at El Morocco and the Stork Club in New York. Howard picked up all their bills, as he did their hotel tab at the Waldorf-Astoria.

On August 6, 1944, Elliott and Faye, much to the surprise of Johnny Meyer, got married. Faye immediately became the First Daughter-In-Law. Howard paid for their lavish wedding and their expensive honeymoon. Faye would remain married to Elliott until her divorce from him in 1950. Poised, sophisticated, articulate, and beautiful, she was hardly a bimbo like Meyer’s usual starlets. She went on to become the first queen of talk show TV when *The Faye Emerson Show* premiered in October of 1949. One wit claimed that Faye Emerson put the “V” in “TV” because of her designer gowns and plunging necklines. Even the Emmy Awards, according to some reports, were named for her. (Actually, their name derived from “Immy,” a term commonly used for the early orthicon camera tube. The name was later changed to “Emmy,” which somehow sounded more appropriate.)

By August 20, Elliott had filed his report with a horrified Hap Arnold. Elliott recommended that plane-building contracts go to Hughes Aircraft and not Lockheed. To overcome the Air Force’s objections to wood as a major component in their aircraft, Elliott informed Hap that Howard had agreed to make the planes out of steel.

“Hughes is a nutbag,” Hap shouted at Elliott. “You’ve been taken in by this piece of Texas shit. I’ve heard about what went on out there in Los Angeles. And I just got off the phone with J. Edgar Hoover. Hughes is a homosexual. And his brain is half eaten up with syphilis. Hoover looked at his medical records.”

In spite of these warnings, Elliott was not deterred from his recommendation. In his report, he called for mass production on the D-2. Elliott said that Howard had given him his “solemn promise” that delivery of the planes could begin within five months.

Ultimately Elliott prevailed over Hap. It was suspected that Jesse Jones, the Secretary of Commerce, personally got the green light from FDR himself. The end result was that Howard was awarded a \$43 million contract for 100 D-2s to be delivered in less than a year. The contract specifically called for nine prototypes and 97 production models.

When they heard the news, the brass at Wright Field was horrified and lobbied to have the contract cancelled. They knew that Hughes Aircraft Company was much too small and too disorganized to build 100 planes, especially on such a tight schedule.

Key figures, including Major General Echols, sided with Hap against Elliott. “There’s gonna be an awful smell in Washington,” Echols accurately predicted, “when word leaks out about how this contract was won by Hughes. I don’t trust the man—I never did.”

With great reluctance and a “heavy heart,” Hap issued an order on September 1, granting Howard the government’s go-ahead for his reconnaissance planes. “Faye’s cocksucking really paid off,” a gleeful Meyer told Howard.

Even though he’d buckled under pressure from the White House, Hap Arnold still denounced Howard’s plane, constantly referring to it as “a piece of shit.” He personally flew to Canada where the British were perfecting the Mosquito. “Compared to the Mosquito, Hughes’s D-2 sucks,” Hap later said. He claimed that the British craft, a twin-engine photo reconnaissance plane, was superior in every way to the D-2 and could fly longer distances and a greater speed.

On the night of November 11, 1943, the fate of the D-2 was decided. The hangar housing the craft caught on fire, and the D-2 proved very flammable indeed. Both the hangar and the D-2 were burned, the prototype remaining only as an ugly skeleton of what might have been.

Lightning was blamed for starting the fire. But there was speculation that Howard deliberately started the blaze himself. “Nothing was ever proven either way,” said Howard’s chief engineer, Stan Bell. “Maybe it was an act of God—maybe not. Maybe god is Howard Hughes. I’ve always believed that he was.”

A natural disaster or not, Howard had successfully gotten rid of his mistake in the fire, which gave him a new opportunity to design a better reconnaissance plane, the D-5, as a means of fulfilling the government’s still-valid contract for 100 airplanes. For his new design, Howard ordered two Pratt and Whitney Wasp Major engines to be installed, in spite of the wartime shortages. This was the most powerful engine on the market. “I want to build a plane that’s got the speed of a fighter but the long range of a bomber—we’ll give ‘em hell. Wait till the Krauts have to deal with my motherfucker.”

Hap Arnold’s hostility toward the D-2 spilled over onto the new D-5. “It’s just a reworked D-2 with a little change here, a little change there,” Hap wrote in a report to Wright Field. “The D-2 performed like shit in the Mojave Desert, according to a confidential report I’ve secured. Hughes tried to cover up that little fact. What an asshole!” Hap didn’t edit his memos but wrote them like he spoke.

In spite of Hap's objections, and the protests of the brass at Wright Field, Howard plunged ahead with the D-5, which the Air Force had designated as the XF-11.

His production department—"too many chiefs, too few Indians," Dietrich said—immediately began to lag behind in production of the XF-11s. Several times Hap sent threatening memos to Howard, warning him that the government might cancel its contract for the 100 planes. Other airline officials in California jokingly referred to Hughes Aircraft Company as the "Howard Hughes' Country Club."

Hoping to save the day, Howard lured "the boy wonder of the aircraft industry," Charles W. Perelle, from Howard's rival, Vultee. Howard raised his salary to \$75,000. At the time, in all of California, no other aircraft officer made that kind of money. To sweeten the deal, Howard threw in an option for Perelle to purchase 10,000 shares of TWA from company reserves at market price, a deal he was making with no one else at the time. At Vultee, Perelle had been in charge of production and was turning out airplanes faster than any other factory on the West Coast.

But even a hotshot like Perelle found Howard impossible to work with. During his seventeen month tenure, Perelle did what Dietrich called the impossible. He brought the XF-11 and Howard's "wild dream" of the Spruce Goose close to completion. But even he could not tolerate Howard's indecision, his sudden disappearances, and his boss's constant rescinding of his orders. Having been promised "complete and unrestricted" control at Hughes Aircraft Company, Perelle got neither. He was forced to resign.

As it happened, during World War II, Hughes Aircraft never evolved into a major-league airplane manufacturer. With the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan in 1945, World War II came to an end. The Allies won without benefit of Howard's XF-11s, which were never delivered.

Dietrich, ironically, without too much personal meddling from Howard, had been far more successful in helping the Hughes Empire evolve into a supplier of spare parts. Instead of airplanes, Toolco and Hughes Aircraft had supplied such war matériel as 14,766 landing gear struts, 18,733 aircraft seats, 5,576 aircraft wings, 6,370 fuselages, 939,320 artillery shells, and 16,958 cannon barrels. As Dietrich later said, "Howard was intent in becoming to America what the Krupp family was in munitions to Nazi Germany."

Howard seemed almost disappointed at the victory celebrations. "We've missed the god damn war," Howard told Odekirk. But he was among the first to recognize the immediate threat of the Soviet Union, and the commercial potential of that threat, during the Post-War Era. "More and more," Howard accurately predicted, "the United States is going to need reconnaissance planes to fly over Soviet territory to see what the fucking Communists are up to."

Lake Mead, 1943

Howard's S-43, his Sikorsky, had been resting in mothballs until the Air Corps requisitioned it for the war effort. The Army Corps of Engineers, in dire need of amphibian craft, wanted the plane for use in Iceland.

He could have turned over the plane to them as it was, but he impulsively decided that he needed to prove that it was "still air worthy" to the government.

On May 16, 1943, Army Air Corps engineers agreed to fly to Lake Mead, Nevada, to put the Sikorsky through a series of tests, with Howard as the pilot. Before flying here, Howard, in spite of other more pressing problems, diverted some of his top engineers to get the Sikorsky in running condition.

The Civil Aeronautics Administration had assigned a fellow Texan, Charles W. Von Rosenberg, to fly with Howard during the test. Accompanying Howard and Von Rosenberg were Gene Blandford, Howard's own flight test engineer; Richard Felt, one of Howard's mechanics, and William M. Cline, known as "Ceco," another CAA inspector.

Odekirk was assigned the duty of filming the landing of the Sikorsky on water. "I urged Howard not to go up," he later said. "Any test pilot could have done it. With millions riding on Howard's back—all those war contracts—it was just too risky."

Howard took off over the 1.9 million acre lake. After flying without incident, he steered the craft toward a murky section of the lake known as the "Vegas Gulch." He brought the Sikorsky in for a perfect landing on tranquil waters. Even though Von Rosenberg had been slightly apprehensive when the Sikorsky pitched forward, Howard as pilot managed to straighten it out.

Plowing into the lake at eighty miles an hour, the plane made a perfect touchdown, as the Sikorsky's pontoons stirred up churns of water shooting up from the lake, a perfect photo opportunity for Odekirk.

All of a sudden, the airplane lunged forward, its nose tilting down as it careened sharply to the right. "As if acrobatic, the craft plunged into the water and began playing skip rope sideways on Lake Mead," Von Rosenberg later recalled. "I thought it was curtains for all of us. I even remember my exact words, 'Oh, shit!' I yelled."

His eyes darting back and forth, like a man facing a beheading, Howard clung desperately to the controls, but his Sikorsky would no longer obey him. It was as if the plane had taken over its own command.

The impact of hitting the lake cracked the propeller which became detached from the plane. Like a dangerous slicer, it flew through the air, hitting the main body of the Sikorsky, slicing a mammoth hole.

Howard had lost control often tons of metal that had assumed a life of its own as it slammed against the water "with the power of a hurricane." Pieces of the wing broke loose and flew through the air like deadly missiles. The tail was ripped off, "sounding like a million screeching seagulls," Von Rosenberg said. "The doomed plane finally came to a halt like a marathon racer having a heart attack at the finish line."

Perhaps, and this is only speculation, Howard had forgotten to tell his ground mechanics to place weighty ballast in the tail, which would be needed for any safe water landing.

"The pain in my back was unbearable," Von Rosenberg recalled. "I'd never known so much pain. I wanted to die." As he was to learn later that day, two of his vertebrae had been crushed. "Doctors later informed me that all the muscles in my back had been ripped loose."

Water was rapidly pouring into the cockpit. In his agony Von Rosenberg looked at Howard slumped over the wheel. Blood was rushing from a deep gash in his forehead. "I shook him," Von Rosenberg said. "There was no movement. I knew that he was dead. At that point I felt I'd die either of pain or else I'd drown. Suddenly, I noticed movement in Howard's body. He was coming to."

In an almost impossible feat of human endurance, considering his injuries, Von Rosenberg managed to open the pilot's window on Howard's left and pushed him through. "Thank God he was slender or he'd never have made it," Von Rosenberg said. He opened the escape hatch in the cockpit and crawled out himself. Mercifully, one of the other crew members had inflated a life raft. With Blandford's help, Von Rosenberg was able to get both

Howard and himself aboard the life-saving raft.

Blandford was hardly injured. He was initially knocked out but he revived when water began to flood into the plane through its gaping hole. He was the one who'd set up the life raft. He shouted at Von Rosenberg that Ceco had been sucked from the plane. Upon impact, he'd gone flying through the air, seat and all, plunging into the murky depths of Lake Mead, which would never give up his body to the divers sent to search for it.

Von Rosenberg saw Blandford lower Richard Felt into the raft. "It looked like his head had met an ax murderer," Von Rosenberg said. "He was still alive but I had little hope for him."

Von Rosenberg looked back as the Sikorsky sank into the deep lake. "Hughes was coming in and out of consciousness," Von Rosenberg said. "He was mumbling something about his having to get to Faith. I thought a woman was the last thing he needed at a time like this."

Suddenly, Howard sat up. Even though bleeding profusely, he seemed very alert. As Von Rosenberg was to discover later, Howard was looking for landmarks on shore so that he would be able to pinpoint the spot where the Sikorsky went down.

By the time the crew reached land, Odekirk had already summoned an ambulance to rush the men to the Boulder City (Nevada) Hospital. Even before the wounded men arrived, Dr. Lawrence Chaffin was already airborne, flying to Boulder City from Los Angeles to attend to Howard's wounds personally. When Dr. Chaffin arrived, he closed Howard's head wound with skin clips.

Howard had been in the emergency room for two hours, being checked and observed, before Odekirk came in to inform him that Felt had died. He'd arrived alive at the hospital but had died twenty minutes after admittance.

Amazingly, Howard spent only one night in the hospital. Since all his clothes were blood soaked, he had Odekirk drive him to the nearest J.C. Penney's in Boulder City. There, he horrified customers by walking in bloody clothes through the store. He purchased a new wardrobe for himself. "I remember he bought a pair of baby blue pants that were at least six inches too short in the leg," Odekirk said." The world's richest man wore those damn pants for the next three years, much to the horror of future girlfriends such as Ava Gardner."

The crashing of the Sikorsky had caused Howard's seventh major head injury, garnered during either plane crashes or car accidents. Yet he'd refused to allow doctors at the hospital to take an X-ray. He didn't trust X-ray machines. The head injury on Lake Mead, it is believed, had major implications for his mental state in the years to come.

The following morning the empty seat that had held Ceco was found floating bodiless on the surface of the lake.

Since the CAA was involved, an investigation was launched. At first, pilot error was blamed. It was later learned that the craft had been improperly loaded. "Its center of gravity had been dangerously altered, unknown to us," Von Rosenberg said. "When it hit the water at a high speed, the Sikorsky was thrown off balance."

When Howard was able to fly again, Odekirk piloted his boss over Lake Mead to the site where he pinpointed that his craft had gone down. To Odekirk's horror, Howard ordered him to dredge up the plane from the lake's depth. "Haul its ass back to Glendale!" Howard shouted at him. "That motherfucker will fly again with me steering it. It won't kill me!"

After landing the small craft, Odekirk suggested that Howard pay a final visit to Von Rosenberg's hospital bed before flying back to Los Angeles. "Like hell I will!" Howard told him.

Von Rosenberg spent the rest of his life in agonizing pain. When reporters tried to interview him, he told them, "I never want to hear the name Howard Hughes ever again."

Back at Lake Mead, Odekirk faced a daunting challenge in raising the Sikorsky. Through an ingenious method, he used a metal detector with a special phone cable rigged to it. After arduous days, he managed to locate the plane at the bottom of the lake right at the spot where Howard had told him he could find it. An ordinary doorbell had been attached to the metal detector. When the downed plane was located, the doorbell rang.

From the lake's floor at two-hundred feet below sea level, the plane was dredged up. Photographers were waiting on shore to take pictures. Muddy and mutilated, it was then loaded onto a flatbed truck for delivery back to Glendale.

Howard paid \$100,000 to have the Sikorsky dredged up. It would cost him another \$600,000 for the craft to be put back in mint condition. "Want to fly with me and take her up again?" Odekirk asked Howard, showing off the restored Sikorsky which looked shiny new within a few weeks. "Not now," Howard said. "Leave her in the hangar. When I take off with her again, it'll be a mystery flight. No one will know where I'm going."

Washington, 1942

When Noah Dietrich first heard of Howard's involvement with a mammoth flying ship—the size of the *Queen Mary*—he called it “a colossal boondoggle that would never fly.” He was almost right. Dietrich's appraisal referred to what became the notorious “Spruce Goose.” The aircraft's original name was the Hercules, orHK-1 (Hughes-Kaiser One).

But the derogatory nickname, Spruce Goose, ultimately prevailed over earlier and also derisive names for the flying boat. It was first called “The Flying Lumberyard” and later “The Jesus Christ.”

The nickname Spruce Goose spread across the country because this massive aircraft's “skin” and its structural parts were composed of thin sheets of spruce plywood, the layers held together by waterproof glues.

Howard had to be talked into the idea of the flying boat, although the percentage of the world that's familiar with the Spruce Goose still thinks it was the aviator's dream and creation. The idea had originated as the “half-baked dream”—Dietrich's words—of Henry J. Kaiser, the multi-millionaire tycoon, one of the world's richest men.

In 1942, Kaiser was a man to be reckoned with, even by President Roosevelt himself, because of his past achievements. A great builder, he would eventually own an astonishing 105 companies, including Kaiser Aluminum and Kaiser-Frazer Automobiles. His name was a household word throughout America. He'd built the San Francisco-Oakland Bridge, as well as the Grand Coulee, Bonneville, and Hoover Dams.

But mainly he was known for his revolutionary Liberty Ships. In Kaiser's view, he was “single-handedly winning the war for the Allies.” His Liberty Ships rolled off assembly lines faster than any heretofore known production schedule. Thanks to prefabricated parts and highly motivated assembly crews, a ten thousand ton ship could be built in 48 days instead of the usual 355.

Regrettably, though, there was trouble over the North Atlantic. The Liberty Ships were falling victim to Nazi submarine attacks. German subs were sinking Liberty Ships at an alarming rate, some of the attacks occurring only an hour or so after a vessel had disembarked from an East Coast port. In

March of 1942, sixty Liberty Ships had been sunk, each carrying desperately needed cargos to a beleaguered Britain. It was estimated that in July of that same year, more than 100,000 tons of supplies ended up, like the *Titanic*, at the bottom of the ocean.

Kaiser's grandiose plan involved the construction of a flying boat so massive that it could transport hundreds of men and tons of equipment to war-torn Europe. "Such a craft would simply fly over Hitler's subs and get the material to where it's needed," Kaiser claimed. Had such a wild proposal originated from Howard, it would surely have been dismissed as a "crackpot scheme." But coming from a man with Kaiser's past achievements in wartime production, the idea, as preposterous as it was, had to be seriously considered. Kaiser had not inspired confidence within the War Department by announcing to the press that his proposed flying ship "would go beyond anything Jules Verne might conjure up."

Even before Kaiser flew to Washington to promote his plan, newspapers throughout America endorsed the idea. In one case, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* heaped praise on his fleet of flying boats even before the first prototype had made it to the drawing board. Unlike Howard, who was called "the most secretive man in California," when Kaiser had an idea, he didn't want to keep quiet about it.

Arriving in Washington "like Diamond Jim Brady and Billy Sunday," as one reporter noted, Kaiser was filled with Messianic fervor. At one point he claimed "divine inspiration" for his idea of the flying cargo boat.

Donald Marr Nelson, a pipe-smoking, professorial type in a tweed jacket, had agreed to hear Kaiser's plan. Nelson was the chief honcho for the War Production Board. Novel ideas such as the flying boat had to clear him before moving on to higher authorities for ultimate approval. At first, Kaiser had been contemptuous of Nelson. Before joining the war effort, Nelson had been head of Sears & Roebuck Co. "I've got to go in and toss my idea at a man whose main concern heretofore was seeing that he ordered enough long johns to keep redneck America from freezing its crusty ass off."

Nelson lent Kaiser an attentive ear and "was mesmerized" at the prospect of the flying boat. After four hours of talks, Kaiser left Nelson's office with a tentative green-light for his project. Of course, more powerful authorities in the War Department, and eventually President Roosevelt himself, would have to okay such a massive undertaking in the middle of a war.

Elated, Kaiser flew back across America. By the time he was flying over the Rocky Mountain states, reality dawned. All the major aircraft companies in California, such as Lockheed or Boeing, were far too busy to undertake such a massive project, even assuming they would consider it. Before going to Washington, he had tentatively approached the head of both aircraft companies, only to be told that Hercules "was impossible to build—much less fly."

Kaiser needed a visionary in aviation. To him, there seemed only one man who met that criterion.

Howard Hughes.

"Nowhere else could Kaiser find such a daring fool—and with money to make up for the inevitable deficit as well," Dietrich later recalled with a certain bitterness.

Los Angeles, 1943-45

Back in Los Angeles, Kaiser found that locating Howard Hughes was a daunting challenge.

Howard's absence and refusal to return phone calls angered Kaiser. "I can get FDR on the phone any time I want him. Even Adolf Hitler, I am certain, will return my calls. But not the grand and almighty Howard Hughes."

Since Kaiser had as much money and even more influence than Howard, he merely called J. Edgar Hoover at the FBI. Perhaps Kaiser was aware that Hoover's G-men had already been trailing Howard.

Within forty-eight hours after launching his search for Howard, the FBI notified Kaiser that he was checked into a suite at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco. He'd been recently released from a hospital in the Bay Area, where he'd been registered under the name of Frank Lamorose. In the hospital, he'd been treated for a life-threatening case of pneumonia. The accumulated strains on his body had led to his collapse.

In spite of this, and even though some of his staff warned Kaiser that Howard "was a time bomb waiting to go off," he turned a deaf ear to their protests.

Finally contacted, Howard agreed to a meeting with Kaiser, as he admired his production of those Liberty Ships. Flying from Los Angeles to San Francisco, Kaiser studied the FBI's report more closely. There was a tantalizing bit of information at the end. Checked into an adjoining suite with Howard was an underage teenage actress, Faith Domergue. Howard was risking arrest, according to the report, by having sexual intercourse with this actress. Should she turn on him, Howard could be brought up on statutory rape charges like his sometimes lover, Errol Flynn, had been.

The coming together of the great Henry J. Kaiser and the potentially great Howard Hughes was a case of strange bedfellows from the very beginning.

When the sixty-year-old Kaiser barged into Howard's suite at the Fairmont, after finally setting up a meeting, he found him lying on a sofa. He was slumped over, his only suit, in funeral black, covered "in some sort of pink fuzz," as Kaiser recalled.

It was later revealed that Howard had just received his first blow-job in six weeks from his sixteen-year-old so-called fiancée, Faith Domergue. Both she and Howard had remained partially dressed for the act. She even kept her pink angora sweater on. After the act of fellatio, Howard took her in his arms and deeply kissed her, as she lay flat against his body. By so doing, he got pink angora all over his undertaker's suit. Since Kaiser had heard that Howard was an eccentric, he later told his aides, "I thought it was some kind of new fabric, all black but with tufts of pink angora—some awful style of men's clothing created by some faggot back in Los Angeles."

Not knowing that Howard was recovering from both a bout of pneumonia and fellatio, Kaiser, in his booming voice, shouted at him. "Get off your arse, my good man. There's a war to win. With your help, we'll win it together."

As a grand schemer himself, Howard might have been susceptible to Kaiser's *grandioso* scheme. To Howard's astonishment, Kaiser informed him that he'd promised the War Department that he'd deliver the first flying cargo ship in ten months. "That's too ambitious," Howard wisely cautioned the enthusiastic Kaiser. "It just can't be done."

One might have thought that Howard would be the dreamer, and that the producer of the Liberty Ships would be the more practical of the two men, but that was not the case. At one point, Howard bluntly told Kaiser, "You're a lunatic. Forgive me, but I don't know how to say that like a diplomat."

Perhaps Howard was simply too weak to resist that day. In spite of his better judgment, he began to warm to Kaiser's scheme. The tycoon's case was bolstered by a call from Odekirk at Hughes Aircraft Company in Culver City. Kaiser had left his plans for Hercules with Odekirk and Howard's chief engineers. "I'm all for it!" Odekirk shouted into Howard's semi-deaf ears. "You and Kaiser were destined to meet. The two of you will make aviation

history.”

That last line must have appealed to Howard. More than anything, he wanted to be immortalized in the history of aviation. Before nightfall fell over wartime San Francisco, Howard agreed to design and build the Hercules’ first prototype.

The next day, Howard’s publicist, Russell Birdwell, made the astonishing announcement to the press that “500 flying boats will be launched, the most ambitious project ever undertaken in the history of aviation.”

Dietrich was skeptical. “We’d have to take over a whole county in California just to build hangars,” he said. “Then we’d have to cut down every tree in Canada.”

Regrettably, the 500 Hercules flying boats winging supplies and personnel to Europe were but dreams to be dreamed.

When he returned with Faith to Los Angeles, he was driven immediately to Hughes Aircraft Company. There in his offices, meeting with Odekirk and his engineers, he confronted the reality of what he had agreed to. When faced with the plans for Hercules, Howard almost had a nervous breakdown, according to Dietrich. Seeing the designs for Hercules for the first time made him realize that there was no way he’d ever be able to have the prototype ready in only ten months. Recalling the event years later, Faith maintained that at one point, Howard was seriously contemplating suicide.

“Why he ever signed a deal with Kaiser, and later with the War Department, to produce Hercules, I will never know,” Dietrich said. “Up until he put ink to paper, I warned him that he was making the biggest mistake of his career—something that would tarnish his reputation forever.”

Hercules would weigh 200 tons, making it three times heavier than “anything that had ever flown through the air, including a flotilla of flying dinosaurs.” It would be capable of transporting 400,000 pounds of cargo as well as 700 fighting men and their equipment. Measuring 200 feet long, its wingspan would be longer than a football field. Its hull alone would be taller than a three-story building. This gigantic seaplane would be fitted with eight 3,000 horsepower engines. Since steel and aluminum were in short supply, Howard planned to make the controversial Hercules from the also controversial Duramold, as he had his D-2 prototype.

Howard was forced to build a mammoth hangar north of his existing plant to accommodate this flying ship. It towered 100 feet high, measuring 250 feet wide and 800 feet long, the largest wooden structure ever built. Dietrich was ordered to provide \$1,750,000 of Toolco monies to pay for the construction cost.

Almost from the first week, Howard and Kaiser clashed over the design of Hercules. It quickly reached a point where neither man was speaking to the other, but exchanging messages through their assistants. Howard appointed Odekirk as his emissary to “The Kaiser’s Henchmen,” as he called them.

In Dietrich’s words, in “a move bordering on insanity,” Howard named his attorney, Neil McCarthy, as Hercules’ Project Chief. “If you murdered someone, you called Neil,” Dietrich said. “You didn’t put him in charge of building the most preposterous aircraft ever conceived.” Hoover’s spies never found out that the project’s chief executive had a fear of flying.

McCarthy spent far more time at the race track than he did at project headquarters in Culver City. Privately, he told Odekirk that the “Spruce Goose will fly when pigs have wings.”

Both Odekirk and McCarthy were careful not to refer to the Hercules as the Spruce Goose. When one of his engineers did that in front of Howard, he fired him on the spot.

In his new post, McCarthy’s chief value was to work out an agreement between Howard and Kaiser. Under the terms, Howard would have total authority over the design of the Hercules without interference from Kaiser. Once the prototype had been finalized and tested, Kaiser would be charged with production of the 500 flying boats.

In Washington, J. Edgar Hoover, through information gained from his spies within Hughes Aircraft, kept Donald Nelson and the War Department informed of the ongoing chaos in Culver City. In a call to Nelson, Hoover claimed that the Hercules had run into serious trouble even before it got off the ground.

Coming to Howard’s defense was Jesse Jones, head of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. As a former close friend of Howard Sr., he had forgiven Howard Jr. for upsets he’d caused during his acquisition of the Constellation Stratoliners. In the middle of the war, he had more important matters to deal with—namely, overseeing the spending of government money on defense. Hearing of the difficulty Howard was experiencing from Kaiser, Jones fired off a warning note: “Hughes is a genius,” he wrote the tycoon. “Let him alone to do his work. Would you stand over the shoulder of Leonardo da Vinci telling him how to paint the *Mona Lisa*?”

On November 16, 1942, a check for \$18 million arrived at Hughes Aircraft. Under the government’s final dictate, three different prototypes of Hercules—not just one—were ordered, each for delivery within ten months.

In retrospect, it is amazing that the War Department would believe that such a commitment could ever be carried out. “Boeing, Lockheed, and Hughes with combined forces couldn’t have supplied that god damn order,” Odekirk said. “It made me feel that those folks at the War Department were so stupid they would lose the war for us.”

The day the contract arrived, instead of ordering that production be speeded up, Howard retreated, as he did in time of emergencies, to 7000 Romaine Street. There in the privacy of his locked offices, he continued to edit *The Outlaw*, never quite satisfied with his work of the day before.

At Hughes Aircraft, the ten month deadline for the delivery of three Hercules prototypes was rapidly approaching. Howard didn’t even have one prototype of the vessel. Six million dollars of the allocated \$9.8 million budget for the first prototype had already been spent, but the Spruce Goose was only a skeleton.

“I told Howard that we should count our blessings if we got the god damn Hercules delivered by Christmas of 1946, not 1944,” Odekirk said. “He looked at me with glassy eyes. He didn’t address our dilemma but informed me that he had a date that night with Ava Gardner. ‘She’s still getting the short stick from that runt, Mickey Rooney, even though they’re divorced,’ Howard told me. ‘About time that bitch learns how a plowboy from Texas fucks. Down dirty and deep like my oil drill.’”

As months went by and it appeared obvious that Hughes Aircraft was incapable of even manufacturing one prototype of Hercules, serious lobbying against Howard was going on in Washington. Pressure was being put on Donald Nelson, among others in the War Department, to cancel the contract granted to Kaiser and Howard.

According to his agreement with the War Department, Howard was “not to make one cent” from the Hercules until his design went into mass production.

The pressure from Wright Field in Ohio, and others, finally grew so intense that Howard’s enemies in Washington prevailed. On February 16, 1944, H. Robert Edwards, the Defense Plant Corporation’s resident engineer at Culver City, received an urgent message from the War Department. “All work as of five o’clock today, on Project Hercules, is to stop at once.” Howard wasn’t even notified. Neither was Kaiser.

When he heard the news, Howard immediately flew to Washington to lobby for Hercules. “Those assholes are making one shitty mistake—a big pile

of it,” he told Odekirk, who flew with him.

Arriving at the Washington airport, Howard was driven to the Carlton Hotel where he checked into the best suite. Instead of assigning assistants to save the Hercules, he planned to do the lobbying himself. First, he wanted to find someone to bribe. Neil McCarthy had come up with the name of Bennett E. Meyers. He was a balding, cigar-smoking executive in the Hollywood tradition of Darryl F. Zanuck. But as a major general, he had been placed as second in command of the War Department’s Matériel Command Center.

“Meyers is your guy,” McCarthy told Howard. “He’s not against gratuities.”

Over dinner at Meyers’s apartment, the major general outlined a plan of attack whereby Howard could save Hercules. Only later did Howard learn that Meyers was one of the major figures who had initially blocked the government’s purchase of his reconnaissance planes, which were also seriously behind in their production deadlines at Hughes Aircraft Company.

Before dinner ended with brandy, Meyers told Hughes that “this war ain’t gonna last forever.” There was a slight suggestion that at war’s end, he would “not object to being made head of Hughes Aircraft.” Raising an eyebrow, Meyers added, “If the price is right, of course.”

Meyers intervened with Jesse Jones, who once again went to President Roosevelt to save Hercules. FDR didn’t think that Hercules would be completed in time to be of use in winning the war. After all, he personally knew that Eisenhower was going to launch D-Day “at any minute” on the beaches of Normandy. Nevertheless, he thought that such a heavy craft might be of use in post-war America. He ordered Jones to see to it that the project was not canceled.

Meyers’s intervention via Jones had saved the day. In 1945, as the war was ending, Meyers contacted Hughes for his reward. He wanted a three-year contract at \$100,000 annually to run Hughes Aircraft. Howard turned him down. But he didn’t want to make an enemy out of Meyers, who still had enough influence to harm him. He instructed McCarthy to fly to Washington “to smooth things over with Meyers.”

The meeting between McCarthy and Meyers was a disaster. In lieu of a job, Meyers wanted to borrow \$2 million at no interest to purchase Liberty Bonds on a margin—“and maybe make millions.” When Howard turned that counter offer down as absurd, Meyers lowered his request for a loan to just \$200,000. Howard also turned that down.

Meyers was furious and threatened to expose Howard in a Senate investigation that he could personally launch, or so he claimed. Indeed, such an investigation would occur in a matter of months.

Howard blamed McCarthy “for fucking up the deal.” Having worked against impossible odds in Washington and facing Howard’s refusals at every attempt at compromise, McCarthy was deeply disappointed when Howard abruptly fired him. Howard blamed him for turning Meyers against him.

After “keeping Howard out of jail countless times,” McCarthy was forced to submit his resignation on August 12, 1944. Meyers himself eventually ended up in prison for five years. He was charged with evading \$61,000 in income taxes during the war and in enticing an employee to lie to a Senate Committee about Meyers’s own involvement in defense contracts.

With the war coming to an end, Howard had spent all \$18 million of the government’s money, plus an additional \$13 million out of his own pocket. Hercules was only half completed, and there was no guarantee that even when finished it could fly. Nonetheless, Howard ordered “full steam ahead on Hercules.”

An investigation later revealed that Howard’s project manager had been fired. Howard hadn’t even bothered to replace him. Without a boss to supervise them, twenty-three of his engineers resigned, seeking more lucrative posts. Their quitting was a vote of “no confidence” for the much ridiculed Spruce Goose.

Finally, Howard hired a competent general manager, Edward G. Bern, who looked like a Presbyterian deacon about to attend the hanging of a witch. He’d been a former vice president of American Airlines and was all business. From the first, he was shocked at the lax management at Hughes Aircraft. He immediately set about to “right all wrongs.”

Within weeks he had the plant operating more efficiently. Even so, behind Howard’s back, he fired off a letter to Donald Nelson in Washington. In it, he claimed that the engineers and mechanics at Hughes Aircraft were “like a bunch of school kids doing business.” He gave it to Nelson straight. “In my opinion, the Spruce Goose is doomed.”

Learning of the letter, Howard bitterly denounced Bern. On the day of Bern’s resignation, he told Howard, “Might as well use the Spruce Goose for firewood.”

Los Angeles, 1942-43

On tobacco road in Brogden, North Carolina, the future “Barefoot Contessa,” Ava Gardner, had walked the lonely red dirt paths of the poverty-laden South, watching out for rattlesnakes. Even at fourteen, her breasts had fully developed. She was ashamed of them and tried to conceal them behind a loose-fitting feedsack dress.

Soon those breasts would be partially responsible for launching her into a famous marriage with the puckish MGM star, Mickey Rooney, and into an infamous relationship with Howard Hughes that would sprawl messily across two decades.

But, first, she had to be discovered.

Her career was launched by an eight-by-ten glossy taken by her brother-in-law and placed in the window of a Fifth Avenue portrait studio in Manhattan. That photograph attracted hundreds of admirers, including a talent scout for MGM, who sent Ava and her sister, Beatrice (“Bappie”) to Hollywood for a screen test.

In Hollywood, Ava’s Tarheel drawl was so pronounced that her screen test was silent. Upon seeing it, Louis B. Mayer accurately summed up the starlet. “She can’t act. She can’t talk. She’s terrific!”

The studio’s reigning star, pint-sized Mickey Rooney, soon took notice of her and was impressed. When she first met him on a sound stage, she mistook him for Carmen Miranda, a natural mistake as he was in drag impersonating the flamboyant star from Brazil “where the nuts come from.”

Four inches shorter than Ava, Mickey married her on January 10, 1942 when he discovered that he couldn’t get into her pants by any other means. Later, he boasted that he was the man who took Ava’s virginity. Early in their dysfunctional marriage, she revealed a violent streak. When Rooney would stay out drinking at night with his cronies—perhaps womanizing—Ava might be home slashing the furniture or draperies with a knife. In months to come, Howard himself would become a victim of her violence. When Rooney suggested raising a family, she told him, “If you get me pregnant, so

help me God I'll kill you."

When not dreaming of aerial conquests, Howard still looked over the latest glossies of Hollywood starlets, an endless supply of pictures provided by Johnny Meyer. He stopped when he came across a sexy picture of Ava. This green-eyed beauty of feline grace and passionate intensity was not the love goddess that she was to become, but he saw something in her face and figure. She was fresh, an original.

Hollywood's leading "breast man," Howard himself, had been captivated by what he called her big tits. "Her knockers are right up there with the best of them," he told Meyer, "but not, of course, in the same league as Jane Russell's."

Ava's breasts had already been praised by Rooney himself, who proclaimed, "She has big brown nipples, which, when aroused, stand out like double-long, golden California raisins."

In addition to being an aficionado of 15-year-old virgins, Howard had an appreciation of "wet decks," his so often expressed appraisal of recently divorced women. In Ava's case, he didn't bother to wait for her divorce from Rooney to come through. With Linda Darnell, Gene Tierney, Lana Turner, and countless others already within his orbit, he didn't need another starlet in his harem. But no one could ever convince Howard of that.

Getting to Ava was easy. After firing Neil McCarthy, Howard had hired the handsome, dashing, and very masculine Greg Bautzer to replace him. At the time, Greg was the most brilliant and fast-rising lawyer in Hollywood. But he was known more for his action in the bedroom than in the courtroom. Joan Crawford, with whom he had the longest and most enduring relationship, remembered his "flashing smile that showed perfect teeth." A world-class connoisseur of men, Noël Coward, disagreed with her, claiming that Greg had too many teeth. Sultry Rita Hayworth claimed that Greg gave her "the most exciting sexual experience of my life." Merle Oberon, stealing a line from gay actor Billy Haines, said that Greg was a "combination of bull and butler," the latter a reference to how solicitous he was around women. Ginger Rogers found him "the perfect gentleman—and, unlike Howard, sane and logical when you're in legal trouble, but wild and passionate when the lights go out."

Greg lives today in Hollywood legend as the man who "deflowered" seventeen-year-old Lana Turner. She confessed, "I didn't enjoy it at all." She would later learn to enjoy it...again and again. Of Lana, Greg later told Howard, "I was breaking her in for you."

The attorney's latest conquest was Ava herself. When Howard expressed an interest in the starlet, Greg said he believed "in sharing the wealth." Those monthly paychecks from Howard meant he couldn't easily afford to say no to his boss. He arranged a meeting. In her memoirs, Ava claimed that a woman friend set up her first date with Howard. But that was not the case. It was her boyfriend, Greg. Ava wanted to be revelatory, but only to a point.

From the ruins of her marriage to Mickey, Ava had acquired \$25,000 and a car. Meyer later said that that was the most money she'd ever had in her life, and "she felt rich as an heiress when I came to call on her."

At first Ava didn't understand why Howard himself hadn't shown up for their date. "I opened the door to find this ugly little toad, Johnny Meyer," she recalled. Meyer told her that Howard had to work late, but wanted her to have the flowers and candies he had resting in the back seat of his car. "Did you bring any booze, honey chile?" she asked.

As Tallulah Bankhead called everybody "dah-ling," Ava called everybody "chile."

Although he was not attractive, she found Meyer charming, and they "drank the night away," laughing and talking. She had no idea that Meyer's mission was to appraise her like a cow on the auction block. Faye Emerson had allowed her sexual techniques to be tested by Meyer, and by Howard himself, before her introduction to Elliott Roosevelt. That was not the case with Ava. "From the moment I first met her, I knew that sex was out of the question with her," Meyer said.

"That runt, Rooney, could never satisfy a statuesque beauty like Ava," Howard told Meyer the next day. "She'll be easy pickings."

How wrong he was. Ava would share her charms with countless actors and matadors, "but Howard Hughes never got my honeypot, chile" she once said.

The following night, Howard himself showed up. He was sloppily dressed, as was his custom. In contrast, Ava had both the makeup and wardrobe department at MGM prepare her for the evening. She looked more glamorous than she'd ever looked in a black strapless party dress that clung to her shapely figure. She wore a mink wrap, a gift from Rooney, and "just cuddled" into that fur when she went out with Howard.

At the time, she was the most minor of stars. Rooney had helped her get bit parts in films, but up to then she'd mostly been a decorative screen presence, getting mauled by the East Side Kids or ogled by Bela Lugosi. At MGM, she lived in the long shadows cast by Lana Turner, Hedy Lamarr, and Greer Garson.

Howard was immediately captivated by Ava's beauty, although she was years away from being voted "The Most Beautiful Woman in the World."

He found her voice "smoky and soothing but with a tongue so tart she sounds like a drunken sailor." He also didn't like that she'd obviously had several drinks before opening the door to him. Even so, he decided that to win a prize like Ava he could put up with a potty mouth and a potential alcoholic.

Over dinner on their first date, Ava thought that Howard was actually Howard Hawks, the director. Throughout half the dinner she referred to Howard as "Mr. Hawks."

Finally, he corrected her. "I'm Howard Hughes, not Howard Hawks."

She'd never heard of him. He told her that, like Hawks, he was a film director, too, and had directed *Hell's Angels*.



Ava Gardner

She claimed that she'd heard of the film but had never seen it. He invited her to 7000 Romaine Street the following evening where he said he'd screen it for her.

Since Howard was a director, she asked him if he'd cast her as the lead in one of his pictures. He promised her that he would. What he didn't tell her was that nearly a decade would go by before he'd cast her in the 1951 *My Forbidden Past* with Robert Mitchum.

As Ava launched herself into what evolved into virtually a platonic relationship with Howard, she knew from the beginning that he was bisexual. Perhaps Mickey Rooney had told her. He knew every Hollywood secret worth knowing. If not Rooney, then the handsome MGM actor, Peter Lawford, told her. While Rooney had been out with other starlets during the course of their marriage, Lawford had been secretly dating Ava. He once told her that Howard had made a pass at him but had been turned down.

In the days and weeks ahead, and much to the annoyance of Rooney and Faith Domergue, Howard and Ava were seen everywhere together. They showed up at formal dinners at the homes of producers such as Darryl F. Zanuck and Samuel Goldwyn. He drove her to a rented villa in Palm Springs; he took her on a shopping expedition to Mexico; he invited her dancing at Hollywood's Mocambo, and he flew her to the Plaza Hotel in Manhattan where they checked into separate suites. "After all that, and still no nooky," Howard told Meyer. "She does let me fondle her breasts while I jerk off, though."

Howard wanted to go everywhere with Ava. It was later revealed that she and her sister, Bappie, had been staying with him at the Desert Inn in Las Vegas the day he crashed his Sikorsky on Lake Mead. But most Hollywood gossips were unaware of that, having assumed that Howard hadn't met Ava until a year later.

Howard had little in common with Ava and nothing to talk about. "Neither one of them was what you'd call an intellectual," Dietrich said. "Ava had big boobies, and my boss was obsessed with big boobies. To my surprise, and I heard this from Howard himself, he never penetrated Ava. She wouldn't allow it. Why, I don't know. She let half the matadors in Spain stick their swords into her, and maybe a hundred actors in Hollywood. But not Howard."

Ava claimed that she was never sexually attracted to Howard, and that he "reminded me of my father." She found him a "no bull Texan. I was dating other guys on the side like Peter Lawford who was sexy, handsome, and debonair. In time, I took up with that Argentine Latin lover, Fernando Lamas. He was very well endowed. For a roll in the hay, honey chile, I preferred men like Lamas or Lawford—not skinny Howard."

She admitted that she was impressed with Howard's power "and he could get things done." When she and her sister, Bappie, wanted to fly to North Carolina to attend the funeral of their mother, Howard bumped two four-star generals off a TWA plane to make room for them. Before that, he'd obtained the services of the best cancer specialist in America to help her bed-ridden mother.

If Ava wanted to fly down to Mexico, a plane was put at her disposal. If she wanted a hotel suite, it miraculously appeared. If she wanted to go somewhere, a limousine was waiting at her door.

"Everyone in Hollywood just assumed that Howard was fucking Ava," Meyer said. "But Howard was getting it elsewhere."

Ava later revealed that after their tenth date, Howard had given her a light peck on the cheek. "He proposed marriage, but I told him I wasn't interested," she said. "He even told me he loved me. I told him I didn't love him. He said that he was a patient man and would wait for me to fall in love with him. He said it was inevitable that I would fall for him. I must say, Howard Hughes was one persistent man."

Howard's dating of Ava brought on an inevitable conflict with Faith. One morning as she was passing by his half-opened bedroom door, she heard him talking to someone on the phone. He was calling the other party, "Little Baby," a name Faith thought was reserved for her and her alone.

Over breakfast she confronted him. At first he was furious to learn she'd been eavesdropping on his private conversations. He lied, telling her that he'd been talking on the phone with Errol Flynn, advising him about legal and financial problems.

"Do you call Flynn, Little Baby?" she asked, bursting into tears. Blinded with rage, she ran from the room and into the rose garden out back.

Like Joan Crawford in another part of town, she attacked the rose garden with a vengeance. Instead of shears, she tore into the thorny bushes with her bare hands. In moments, her hands were bleeding profusely. Rushing out the back door, he found her in the garden, bleeding and screaming hysterically. "There's no one but you," he assured her as he wiped the blood off her hands with the long tails of his white shirt.

That night Howard excused himself to go work in the offices of 7000 Romaine Street, or so he said. Actually, he was escorting Ava to the night club opening of singer Frances Langford at the Cocoanut Grove. An hour later a call came into Muirfield for Faith. The name of the gossipy person who called her is not known.

Faith was told where Howard was and that he was escorting Ava. After having calmed down, she rose from her bed blazing with anger all over again. She raced for the garage. With bandaged hands, she got behind the wheel of an emerald green Cadillac that belonged to Toolco and drove all the way to the Cocoanut Grove Club. She waited across the street until the end of the Langford performance.

About fifteen minutes after the show, Howard emerged with Ava on his arm. A valet brought around his battered Chevy.

Faith trailed Howard's car as he drove away. By the time he'd reached Fairfax Avenue, he seemed to be aware that someone was following. Ava later revealed that he thought "it must be Hoover's men." Hoping to shake them, he speeded up. Seeing that, Faith floored the gas pedal and stayed only

feet from his car. When he stopped abruptly for a red light, she piled into the back of his Chevy.

She heard Ava scream. Putting the Cadillac in reverse, Faith backed up ten feet, then floored the gas pedal again, ramming into Howard’s vehicle again. At that point, he jumped out of the car and ran toward the driver. Reaching into the car, he opened the door with one hand and yanked her from the vehicle with the other. Now she was the one screaming, as he slapped her violently and repeatedly, bloodying her nose.

At that moment, Sherman Fairchild, Howard’s old friend, appeared in a Cadillac of his own. It was later learned that he was also following Howard. Fairchild and his date were going to join Ava and Howard for a late night of dancing at a club in Santa Monica.

Fairchild slammed on the brakes and jumped out of his car. Rushing up to Howard, he exchanged some words heard neither by Ava nor Faith. Fairchild quickly raced over to the Chevy’s right side and door and rescued Ava. Shielding her, he put her into the back seat of his own vehicle and drove away into the night.

Holding a white handkerchief to Faith’s nose to stop the bleeding, Howard then managed to get her inside the green Cadillac. She was sobbing hysterically. The hood of the car had been battered, but the sturdy vehicle was still in working order.

On the way home, Howard lied again, claiming that Ava meant nothing to him. “I’m going to cast her in a movie—that’s all.”

Still in love with Howard, Faith wanted to forgive him. Her career and the welfare of her family depended on that.

Her forgiveness would come at a price.

Later that night, after Howard had bathed the teenager and put her to bed, she sat up after he’d kissed her on the forehead.

“Go to bed,” he cautioned her. “You’ve had enough excitement for one day.

As he headed out of her bedroom, she called to him. “I’m tired of all this shit talk about what a big star you’re going to make out of me. Like buying me a studio and making me its queen—all that crap!” She sat up even higher in the bed. “I want to be a star. Now! Now! Now! Do you hear me? *Now!*”

Through Johnny Meyer, Howard had hired spies to keep tabs on his lovers, both male and female. But in matters associated with Ava, the security became so tight that his coterie of men became known as the “Howard Hughes Secret Police.”

Frank Angell, a private dick like the type Humphrey Bogart used to play in 1940s movies, and an expert at photo surveillance and electronic bugging, was made personally responsible for checking on the whereabouts and activities of Ava. “No one gets fucked in this town but what Frank knows about it,” Meyer said in recommending Angell to Howard.

Howard secured a house on Nicholas Canyon for Ava and her sister, Bappie Before they moved in, Meyer and Angell bugged the house. Howard ordered 24-hour security guards to stake out the property once Ava was in residence.

Even during the months of their stormy relationship when they were apart or angrily separated, Howard still wanted to know “who Ava is fucking.” Over the years his spies delivered a long list of men, including such diverse personalities as Howard Duff, bullfighter Luis Miguel Dominguin, producer Robert Evans, David Niven, Porfirio Rubirosa, Omar Sharif, Robert Taylor, Robert Walker, Richard Burton, Clark Gable, Farley Granger, and Turkish actor Turhan Bey. Howard continued to have her trailed during her ill-fated marriages to bandleader Artie Shaw and especially to Frank Sinatra, whom Howard loathed. The feeling was reciprocal.

Slipping out the back door of her house one night disguised as a maid, Ava later changed into slinky night club clothing. She danced the night away at the Mocambo with a twenty-eight-year-old Mexican bullfighter, Lopez Rubio. “Lopez shared something in common with the bull,” Ava later told her girlfriend, Lana Turner.

Tipped off by Angell, Howard arrived unexpectedly at Ava’s house. He barged upstairs to find Rubio humping his prize, a pleasure that had been denied Howard himself. Fully erect, the bullfighter jumped from the bed. Having caught them, Howard was not prepared to take on such a muscular and impetuous young man.

He hurried down the steps to summon help from Angell and his men. Later, when they tried to enter Ava’s bedroom, it was bolted. The matador had fled nude through Ava’s backyard and onto a neighbor’s grounds. “I’m sure the way that bull looked, he found another hot bed that night and proceeded to do what we were trying to do,” Ava said. “After that incident, Howard went a week without calling. That suited me just fine. He still had me staked out, though. Sometimes I’d put on my nightgown and walk out in the middle of the night to confront Angell’s boys. I’d make outrageous requests, like a demand to bring me a tub of orange ice cream. Do you know how hard it was to get orange ice cream in wartime Los Angeles? Angell’s boys always delivered. They were good boys. It was just a job to them. They didn’t like spying on me.”

Home on Army leave, Rooney found Howard’s battered old Chevrolet parked in front of Ava’s newly rented house. As she later remembered it,” a very tall and very lanky Howard exchanged fisticuffs that night with a very short Mickey jealously defending my honor. I forgot who pulled them apart. Somebody in the household. I would have let them fight and the best man win.”

Ever since that night, Howard referred to Rooney as “a pygmy.”

When Rooney later returned from military service, he secretly resumed dating Ava again, even though their divorce had been finalized. She went to great lengths to avoid Howard finding that out. It was Angell who discovered that Rooney was slipping in and out of Ava’s back window, eluding detection by Howard’s bodyguards.

One night she received a call from Meyer, informing her that Howard was arriving at the airport and wanted both of them to meet him. She told Meyer, “I’m busy!” She slammed down the phone. Actually she had a date with Rooney that night. Both had early calls the following morning at their studios. After dinner, each of them kissed at the restaurant and went back to their respective residences.

As she remembered it, it was about three or four o’clock in the morning when she woke up to find Howard towering over her bed. She flipped on a bedside lamp and “stared into the angriest face I’d ever seen on a beau.” He’d let himself in with his passkey.

He was not only angry, but “insanely jealous.” Perhaps a little disappointed. He fully expected to catch her in the bed with Rooney making mad, passionate love. She ordered him from her bedroom, and told him she’d meet him downstairs when she was dressed.

About five minutes later, she discovered him sitting in an armchair looking like “he’d contracted a severe form of leprosy.”

As she went to pour herself a drink, he grabbed her and spun her around, pushing her down onto a hard wooden chair.

Like an out-of-control police sergeant drilling a murder suspect, he grabbed one of her wrists and held it down. With his right hand, he slapped her face, each blow growing harder and harder. She later said that it was “like he was trying to destroy my beauty.” The blows continued to rain down on her, as she struggled to free herself. He held her in a tight grip. “I saw stars,” she recalled. Her face was already swelling. She claimed that “my right

eye felt permanently closed.”

Although she would be beaten up by future lovers, such as George C. Scott, Ava at that point in her young life had never been attacked by a man. Finally, the blows from Howard stopped, as he seemed to get a grip on himself.

He walked away from her, heading for the door. Springing to her feet and “blind with rage,” she picked up a mammoth, heavy bronze bell, an 18th-century antique imported from England. With all the power and fury a victim can sometimes summon, she hurled the bell at him.

He turned around just in time to feel the full impact of the bronze missile. It struck his face, digging a wound that spurting blood. The bell cut a zigzag slash from his right forehead to his lower lip, splintering his jaw. He stumbled backward and fell over an armchair before hitting the floor on his back. Prone, and in a helpless position, he was moaning from his wound like some beaten hound.

Even though she saw that she had inflicted what might have been a life-threatening injury, she was still not satisfied. She grabbed the wooden chair in which she’d been held during the beating. Picking it up with a strength she didn’t know she had left in her, she moved menacingly toward him.

“Like Howard during his beating of me,” she recalled, “I too lost self-control. In fact, I was fucking insane! In all my life, I’ve never been this mad, even during my marriage to Frank, and we had some knock-out fights. As I approached Howard, I planned to kill him. I wanted him not injured, but dead. A demonic side, one I didn’t know I had in me, took over. I couldn’t help myself. The Devil in me was driving me to murder. Tomorrow’s headlines flashed before me: AVA GARDNER KILLS HOWARD HUGHES. What a field day that would be for the Hollywood jackals.”

Just as she was ready to beat his bleeding, semi-conscious head into pulp, Bappie, her lover Charlie Guest, and her black maid, Sadie, ran into the room. Each of them had been awakened from their beds by the noise.

Sadie reached Ava first. “Ava! Ava! Ava! Drop it!”

“I was taken aback,” Ava later said. “I know it seems absolutely ridiculous now. I was about to murder a man. But I suddenly developed a new anger directed not at Howard—but Sadie. She’d never called me Ava before. It was always Miss Gardner, or Miss Gardner ma’am. This momentary pause over this show of disrespect from Sadie was all the time that hefty gal needed to grab the chair from my arms.”

“All I can remember at that point is looking down at the bastard writhing on the floor in all his pain,” she said. “The white carpet around his head was covered in blood. I remember hearing Bappie in the hallway calling for an ambulance and Dr. Verne Mason. ‘Howard Hughes is dying!’ I heard her shout.

“Fuck you, bastard!” I said, looking down for one final time at Howard. His eyes were shut, and he wasn’t moving. I thought he was dead. If he was dead, it wouldn’t hurt him. With my one black eye and my bruised face, I kicked the fucker in the balls with a pair of my high heels. Then I turned and stormed from the room. Just as I was leaving, I turned and confronted Sadie. ‘Don’t you dare call me Ava again!’”

“Yes, ma’am,” she said.

“With that grand exit,” Ava claimed, “I left the woman-beater dead on the floor and headed upstairs to my bedroom. There I would spend the rest of the night inspecting my face. After all, it was my meal ticket, and Howard had tried to ruin it for me. When the ambulance came for him, it was determined that he was still alive. Bappie came to tell me the news. I didn’t much care at that point.”

The story never made the press. Howard told his “Little Baby,” Faith Domergue, that he’d been in another car accident. She didn’t believe him. “Get me that starring role in that god damn film, and get it now!” she shouted at him on the day of his release from the hospital.

He was not as concerned with her movie debut as he was with the partial dentures he’d have to wear for the rest of his life.

At the hospital where the ambulance had taken Howard, Dr. Mason had come to his rescue once again, sewing up his face. But he was growing increasingly disturbed about his famous patient. “Howard’s going to get himself killed,” he told “Dietrich. “I’m not a psychiatrist, but I’d say Howard is an addict.”

“Is he on drugs?” a concerned Dietrich asked.

“No, he’s addicted to psycho-drama,” the doctor said. That was a new word to Dietrich’s ears.

“He likes to tempt fate,” Dr. Mason said. “Put himself in harm’s way. Just how many times has he come almost close to dying? This is a strange thing for a doctor to say, but even a cat has only nine lives.”

The violence ended Ava’s relationship with Howard only temporarily. She fully expected to be dropped by him after she put him in the hospital. “I felt no remorse,” she said.

Two months later, after his wounds had healed, he called her. She was shocked to be talking to him. “He asked me out on a date. I said, ‘Didn’t you get enough last time?’”

“Up to that night, I always thought of myself as a bit of a sadist like my Uncle Rupert,” he said. “But you convinced me that around women I’m a masochist. Let’s try it again—what fun!”

“After that, Howard and I became the longest running serial in town,” she said.

In a few weeks, as if nothing had happened, Ava was dating Howard again, although “still not putting out,” as he confided to Meyer.

To make amends for his fight with her, he flew Ava and Bappie in a private plane to Mexico for a holiday. At times he impulsively arranged to have the entire contents of a Beverly Hills florist shop delivered to her doorstep. Sometimes, he’d take her to a beach restaurant in Santa Monica, having hired a band and reserving every table for the night so they would have the dining room to themselves.

If she decided she wanted to go to Palm Springs, always bringing Bappie along, he arranged for a limousine to pick them up, drive them around the resort, and deposit them back at their doorstep in Los Angeles when they were ready to come home.

On more than one occasion, he reserved an entire TWA Constellation for her. When Ava landed in New York, a limousine was waiting to take her to an expensive suite at the Waldorf-Astoria. He opened charge accounts for her at all the leading department stores along Fifth Avenue, including one at Tiffany’s.

When Bappie inquired about the propriety of all this, especially in lieu of her continuing refusal to sleep with him, Ava said: “He can afford it, honey chile. He owns all those oilfields in Texas that keep pumping, pumping.”

After their brutal fight, Howard showed up one night with \$250,000 in cash concealed in a shoe box from Sears & Roebuck. He offered her the money if she’d marry him. “You can’t buy me, you bastard!” she shouted at him. She grabbed the shoebox from his hands and tossed the hundred-dollar bills around the living room. Angered, he stormed out. But she noticed that before she got out of the bed the next morning, he had sent Johnny Meyer over

to retrieve the cash loot.

She later confessed, “I was never in love with Howard. Nor did I fancy him sexually. Not my cup of tea, honey chile. I knew about all those other girlfriends. It didn’t bother me at all. Howard had to get it from somebody. He sure wasn’t getting it from me.”

She claimed that at the time Howard was dating her, he was keeping at least five other starlets stashed away in the Hollywood Hills. “Often Howard didn’t even visit these lonely damsels,” she said. “Most of his so-called romances took place in his mind. His sexual ambitions were always greater than his prowess.”

Meyer was too busy to arrange housing for all these starlets. Howard hired the soft-spoken Charlie Guest as his “conciERGE.” Guest immediately took a liking to Ava, but in the wake of his recent divorce, he fell in love with Bappie. Soon he was living with Ava and Bappie.

Ava later recalled him as a “sweet-natured alcoholic.” Sometimes the two of them, much to the annoyance of Bappie, would go on drinking binges together. It was during one of those confessional drinking bouts that Guest revealed to Ava the story of what he called “Howard’s stashes.”

Unlike most of Howard’s bimbo girlfriends, Ava was no longer “the cute little bitch who fell off the turnip truck from North Carolina.” She knew that Meyer haunted Union Station during the day looking for the prettiest girl who got off the train, arriving in Hollywood and dreaming of stardom. Ava estimated that at any given time Howard had “five beauties stashed away in a house Guest rented.” But, she noted, “many of those starlets never got movie contracts or Howard’s dick. He fancied himself Casanova or the Sultan of Zanzibar, but he was far from that.”

Guest might have told Ava that there were five beauties, but Dietrich disputed that. “At any given time Howard had at least ten starlets stashed away. I should know, because I was paying the rent for all of them. At Howard’s peak capacity, he had twelve starlets on the leash. Of course, getting around to bed all these gals was another matter. No woman ever called Howard a good cocks-man.”

“Ava was a prick teaser,” Meyer later claimed. “She kept accepting things from Howard like free rent and free airline tickets, but she continued not to put out. Howard was determined to change that. He had to go to San Francisco to meet Henry Kaiser about the Spruce Goose, and he planned to take Ava with him. Up in San Francisco, he planned to force her to marry him, although he didn’t tell me how he’d do that. I remember his exact words, ‘I want a taste of that Tarheel pussy, and I’m gonna get it.’”

Ava accepted his invitation and departed with Howard aboard the *Santa Fe*. For some reason, he chose to take a train instead of flying.

Ava later admitted she had no idea what Howard was up to. Before boarding the train, Bappie had suspected that Howard was going to ask Ava for her hand in marriage. Bappie’s parting words to Ava were, “Marry him, honey. He’s the richest man in the world. He’ll give us anything.” Ava noted that her sister said “us” and not “you.”

On the *Santa Fe*, he’d booked two adjacent cabins. When he tried Ava’s door, and couldn’t get in, he complained, “I’m a Southern gentleman. You don’t have to lock me out.”

She agreed to meet him in the bar where iced French champagne, a great luxury for a nation at war, arrived unexpectedly in an ugly wrapper. Ava believed she’d never looked more glamorous. “Irene,” the doyenne of couture at Metro, had “turned me into a vision of loveliness.” Her smartly tailored navy suit was trimmed in black mink. She even wore embroidered black hosiery, almost unavailable because of wartime shortages.

“Suddenly, Howard appeared in the bar of the rail car, and I almost died,” she claimed.

He was dressed in an ice cream suit, evocative of one of those Princeton boys depicted in the literature of F. Scott Fitzgerald in the early 1920s. She called his outfit “frat boy pants,” held up by a paisley tie in eight shades of pink and red.

To her continuing embarrassment, he pirouetted around the center of the bar in front of everybody “like a god damn mannequin,” she recalled. “The passengers must have thought he was a homosexual beanpole. I had to finish off the rest of that champagne to brace myself for that ordeal. I’d heard stories about Howard and the boys. Now I saw in front of my eyes that he had a side to him I’d never seen before. He was a fucking dancing faggot.”

What she didn’t know at the time was that her suitor was beginning to show serious signs of a major nervous breakdown, as his hearing waned and “dark clouds (as Dietrich claimed) hovered in his brain.”

Too drunk to care any more about Howard’s dress or gay antics on the train, Ava arrived in San Francisco where she found that Howard had booked them in the most lavish suite in town. She’d been assigned the master bedroom, and he had a small maid’s room across the hall. “I felt like the queen of Nob Hill,” she said.

Later that afternoon he took her on a shopping binge, delivering her to the city’s most elegant store with instructions “to buy it out if you want to. I’ll be back later to settle the bill.”

She remembered being tempted by a sable coat and especially by some expensive jade, a gem she adored, but she decided not to take advantage of him.

Waiting outside the store for an hour, she spotted him walking toward her with an ugly cardboard box wrapped in a red ribbon.

Back in the hotel suite, he left the box sitting in the living room as he went and dressed in his one dark suit for dinner at an elegant restaurant. She wore a dress that had originally been tailored for Lana Turner at MGM. At the restaurant, he ordered his typical butterfly steak, Ava preferring Southern fried chicken. Later he “bear hugged” her across the dance floor before inviting her to attend a transvestite show where he often took Cary Grant when they descended together on San Francisco.

She had never seen men dressed in drag before. She was mesmerized, but not as much as Howard. He was as addicted to drag shows back then as he would be to morphine later in life.

At the gay club, the star of the show was an attractive young blonde who called himself (herself?) “Pussy-Katt.” Recognizing her famous guests, she came over at the end of her performance. Right in front of Ava, she plopped down on germ-obsessed Howard’s lap and gave him a “sloppy wet kiss on his mouth,” Ava claimed. “Later on I hung out with half the gay men in the world, but back then I was still a little girl from Tobacco Road. I was somewhat taken aback. When Howard first took me into the club—it was called Finocchio’s—I at first thought all the beautiful performers were real women.”

At some point Howard went backstage, where Ava assumed he exchanged contact numbers with Pussy-Katt. “The drag bitch was prettier than me,” Ava said, “and I was the beauty of MGM.”

Back at the Fairmont, it was four o’clock in the morning, and the staff had delivered the Sunday papers to their suite. News of the war didn’t interest Ava. She picked up the funnies instead and began to read on the sofa.

He wanted to lure her with champagne and romance, but she preferred to find out what Brenda Starr was doing. Suddenly, he ripped the funnies from her hands, stomping on them.

“You fucking asshole!” she shouted at him. Fearing another fight and more violence, she ran to the master bedroom and bolted the door. He did not try to break it down. Ominously, there was no sound coming from the living room of the suite at all.

It was about ten o'clock Sunday morning when she heard a loud pounding on her door. Thinking at first it was Howard trying to get in, she heard Bappie calling to her. It turned out that Howard, in anger, had flown back to Los Angeles and had put Bappie on a plane to San Francisco to retrieve her. She urged Ava to get dressed, claiming that he had a private plane waiting to take them back to Los Angeles.

Once dressed, Ava came into the living room to find Bappie opening the mysterious cardboard box. "You were a fool," Bappie told her. "Howard went to Tiffany's. There is exactly one-million dollars worth of jewelry in this box. He was going to give you this stupendous gift and ask you to marry him last night before you acted up."

"I want to be in love," Ava shouted at Bappie. "I can't be bought for a box of jewelry."

Bappie held up gem after gem with awe. Rubies, diamonds, emeralds. One diamond-studded gold bracelet that she dangled before Ava "weighed a ton" in her sister's words. Instead of accepting the box, Ava left the gems in the hotel safe marked HOWARD HUGHES.

She penned a quick note to Howard. "You can take your gems and shove them where the sun don't shine!"

In London, years later, Ava recalled that "my young, stubborn Tarheel temper came out. I was a fool. There was a king's ransom Howard was offering me. That jewelry could have kept me for the rest of my life."

Without the gift, and with no money left from her Hollywood earnings, Ava would, much later in her life, be forced to accept at least a million dollars in charity from Frank Sinatra, her former husband.

"Marriage to Howard would never have worked," she recalled. "The sight of all those pretty boys at Finocchio's in San Francisco got to him like no mere woman ever could. He wanted the mock—not the real thing. He told me that Pussy-Katt, the star of the show, looked good enough to fuck. I assume a pussycat lay in Howard's future. That's *lay*, honey chile."

Mexico City, 1940

From Mexico City, Tyrone Power called Howard and invited him to fly down to join him for a few days during his remake of the bullfight melodrama, *Blood and Sand*, by Blasco Ibáñez, that had brought such fame to Rudolph Valentino as a silent film star.

In spite of his wartime aviation production, Howard dropped everything and flew to meet with Tyrone, who was in Mexico City with his wife, the French actress, Annabella, whom he'd married in 1939. Theirs was a lavender marriage of convenience, evocative of Barbara Stanwyck's bond to Howard's other lover, Robert Taylor.

Howard had already had several talks with studio chief Darryl F. Zanuck about *Blood and Sand*. The cigar-smoking producer had wanted to borrow "your big tit broad," a reference to Jane Russell, to play the female lead, the Spanish beauty, Doña Sol, in the film. To get Russell to portray the temptress, Zanuck at one point offered Howard \$35,000 a week for her services. Since he was paying his star only \$50 a week, that would have been a tidy profit for Howard. But he still turned down the offer, since he wanted to control Jane's career personally. He also wanted the American public to see her on the screen for the first time as Rio in *The Outlaw* and not in some Zanuck production which Howard couldn't control.

After losing Jane, director Rouben Mamoulian was forced to test three dozen actresses before settling on Rita Hayworth, whom he'd borrowed from Harry Cohn at Columbia. Howard may or may not have known Rita when she was Margarita Cansino dancing in border towns with her incestuous father, Eduardo. Rumors still persist that Howard seduced Rita in Mexico when she was only a teenager.

Flying to the set of *Blood and Sand* in Mexico City with Johnny Meyer, Howard hired a Mexican chauffeur to drive him to the film's location. He was ushered into Tyrone's dressing room where the two sometimes lovers warmly embraced. When he broke away from Tyrone, Howard carefully checked out the actor's matador costume. In the film, he'd been cast as Juan Gallardo, the bullfighter.

Howard appraised the costume as carefully as he'd evaluated Jane Russell's breasts through his camera lens. "Bullfighters are supposed to show their cock and balls," he told Tyrone. "You're showing a concave down there."

"I'm wearing a jock strap," Tyrone protested. "Orders of Zanuck personally."

"Valentino showed basket in *Blood and Sand*," Howard reminded him.

"For me, it's a no, no," Tyrone said. "Besides, from what I hear, I don't have as much as Valentino."

Howard kissed Tyrone again. "Sweet bottoms don't need big dicks."

He was very disappointed with his friend's *traje de luces*, claiming that all that embroidery and beading made Tyrone look fifty pounds heavier. "You'll photograph paunchy." Devastated by the critique, Tyrone feared Howard was right. To save the day Howard and his chauffeur drove Tyrone and him to the best maker of bullfight costumes in the city. There, at his own expense, Howard ordered the designer to come up with a more flattering *traje de luces* for the star.

Howard was right in ordering new costumes for Tyrone. In New York months later, the film critic of *The Herald Tribune* wrote that Tyrone's "fans will become delirious with pleasure at the figure he cuts with his hosts of costumes."

Another male critic, perhaps gay, got even more carried away with Tyrone's handsome, dashing appearance in the films. "In spite of the charms of Miss Hayworth and Miss Darnell," he wrote, "their beauty pales the moment Tyrone Power in toreador pants comes onto the screen. He's not a serious threat to the bulls but a menace to the ladies in the audience."

A tender moment between Howard and one of the supporting players came the following morning. Howard walked over to knock on the door of Nazimova, the former queen of MGM. In *Blood and Sand*, the once grand diva of Hollywood had been cast as Tyrone's scrubwoman mother. Howard knew of the involvement, perhaps romantic, between his father and Nazimova in the heady days of Hollywood in the early 1920s. To honor that long-ago friendship, he presented the faded star with a gold bracelet studded with diamonds and rubies. She burst into tears of gratitude.

The next afternoon, Howard ordered his pimp, Johnny Meyer, to accompany him on a cruise of Mexico City. "I might find some new talent to audition," he told Meyer. "After Tyrone last night, I want something young and virginal." At a private club where Meyer had taken his boss to watch "exhibitions," Howard confided to him that "the sex was better than ever. Errol's taught him a lot. Tyrone is the only man I've ever known who can reach a climax while you're chomping down on his nipples. Clark Gable can't do that."

"So, at last, I know what went wrong in the sack between Gable and you," Meyer said. "The King didn't like Tyrone Power you working on his nipples."



Tyrone Power

Tyrone's wife, Annabella, though staying with him in Mexico City, was never introduced to Howard. Meyer suggested that Annabella must be pursuing her own pleasures with some señorita, while her husband shot his movie.

Howard learned that Tyrone hadn't been lonely before Howard's visit. The bisexual actor was carrying on a torrid affair with his co-star, Rita Hayworth. "It won't last beyond the picture," Tyrone told Howard and Meyer. "I've already got Betty Grable in my sights when I go back to film *A Yank in the R.A.F.* with her."

"What about Linda Darnell?" Howard asked. "She's a beauty and only nineteen, I hear."

"Funny you should ask," Tyrone said. "Just yesterday she was asking me if she could meet *the* Howard Hughes."

"Arrange it!" he commanded Tyrone, as if the actor were part of his hired help like Meyer.

Howard would not meet Linda until the following evening. A previous invitation came from a bullfighter known only as Armillita. Mexico's leading matador at the time, he'd been hired by Zanuck to perform the bullfighting scenes for Tyrone in *Blood and Sand*.

The matador had invited both Howard and Tyrone to watch his dressage ceremony. Arriving in his dressing room, Armillita confronted them stark naked. Glancing down at his nudity, he asked, "Do you think my fans will be able to distinguish between me and the real bull?"

Both men laughed nervously as they watched the heavily endowed matador stuff himself into his "suit of lights." His dresser carefully arranged the bullfighter's genitals. "It's their job," he said, winking at Howard and Tyrone. Looking down at the dresser, he said, "That's why *mariposas* are always attracted to the job of dresser."

That afternoon, at Mexico City's Plaza de Toros, some 30,000 spectators turned out to watch Armillita fight the bull in front of Zanuck's cameramen. That was the largest crowd ever assembled to watch a movie scene being shot.

Hours later Tyrone invited Linda Darnell to join Howard, Meyer, and himself for dinner at the city's most exclusive Mexican restaurant. There, Howard had arranged to have a private band serenade them—"only love songs," he'd instructed the musicians.

Wearing a black lace gown with plunging *décolletage* and a mantilla from Seville that showed off her creamy breasts, the sultry nineteen-year-old brunette, Linda Darnell, walked into the dining room on the arm of Tyrone Power. All heads turned to look at these dazzling young stars of 20th Century Fox. Tyrone led her over to the table where Howard and Meyer stood up to greet her.

"At long last we meet," Linda said, extending her hand to Howard and ignoring Meyer.

"My pleasure has long been overdue," he said. "Your costume is beautiful."

She glanced down at the exposed part of her breasts. "I haven't seen *The Outlaw* yet, but from what I've seen of those publicity stills for Russell, I don't think I can compete."

"You're a worthy contender," he assured her before inviting her to take the seat of honor at his table.

Born in Dallas, Texas, in 1921, Linda was already being hailed as the "Glory Girl" of Hollywood when she was introduced to Howard. At 20th Century Fox, she was known for her beauty, not her acting skills. Her life as a teenager read like a cliché-ridden, ghost-written, movie star autobiography.

Born to a postal clerk of pioneering stock, she'd been pushed into show business through her ambitious, stage-struck mother. At the age of five, she was sent to learn tap dancing. "I never mastered it like my future best friend, Ann Miller," Linda recalled, "but I could have given that little bitch, Shirley Temple, competition if given a chance."

At 14, she was a photographer's model, and a hatted photograph of her at the age of 15 reveals looks that were mature for her age. Winning a "Gateway to Hollywood" contest at the age of 16 led to a screen test at RKO in 1937. That didn't work out, but Darryl F. Zanuck "saw something" in Linda. By 1939 he'd cast her as the lead in *Hotel for Women*, which gave her star billing over such established stars as Ann Sothorn, Lynn Bari, Jean Rogers, Joyce Compton, and even the doyenne of the social world, Elsa Maxwell.

Before meeting Linda, Howard, based solely on her photographs, told Meyer that Linda had "dark, lustrous hair just like I like it. Blondes are a sometimes thing. Blondes are like eating rattlesnake in Texas. You don't do it every day."

As the dinner progressed, Howard began to realize that Linda wasn't the inexperienced virgin he'd at first assumed. Nor was she the bitter, disillusioned alcoholic she would become. In later years, she was given to making pronouncements like, "I've got more balls than most men do. If there's anything I hate, it's a weak man."

Her director, Henry Hathaway, who'd guided her through *Brigham Young-Frontiersman*, in 1940, also starring Tyrone Power, had found her the "sweetest gal who ever lived."

Howard also found her sweet but not virginal like his own discovery, Faith Domergue—nor as young as Faith who had been only fifteen as opposed to Linda's "more mature" nineteen.

Before Linda came to the table, Meyer, who knew every sordid detail about Hollywood, told his boss that she was "sleeping with that chicken

farmer, Mr. Marlene Dietrich.” He was referring, of course, to Marlene’s much neglected husband, Rudolph Sieber. “Marlene’s a tough act to follow,” Howard said in response.

When the waiter served Linda a platter of beef with too many fiery red peppers, she yelled “Fiddledeedee” when tasting it.

“You must have learned that from Scarlett O’Hara,” Tyrone said.

“It’s my favorite cussword,” she said.

By the time she was eating her second order of flan, and was deep into her third margarita, she pointedly asked Howard, “All evening you’ve been looking at my eyes, although I dressed to display my breasts which I thought you’d be devouring with your eyes. Did you get tired of breasts while editing *The Outlaw*?”

“I’ll never tire of them,” he said. “But I find your eyes liquid. Like those of a fawn. I noticed last week that Louella Parsons called you an American Cinderella. That true?”

“If it is,” she said, sliding over on the red leather banquette to get closer to him, “I’ve met my Prince Charming.”

“After that little bit of dialogue,” Meyer later said, “Linda was practically all over Howard. Touching him everywhere. Putting sugar in his coffee. She wanted my boss, and I knew before the night was over she was gonna get him too.”



Linda Darnell

Over coffee, Linda confessed that in the Thirties Tyrone had been her favorite movie star. “I had a crush on him. Wrote him fan letters. Collected all his pictures in newspapers and magazines. Stole publicity shots of him from displays at the movie theater.”

In his usual undiplomatic way, Howard asked: “You two making it in the sack?”

“Not at all,” she said. “I made a pass at him when we made *Daytime Wife* for Fox last year. Tyrone told me, ‘I’m a married man.’”

“Since when did that stop Ty?” a drunken Meyer asked. Looking at the actor, he said, “I hear you give it away to anybody who asks.”

“Why not?” Tyrone said defensively. “They’re curious. They want to see what I’m like in bed. When their curiosity is satisfied, we can be friends.”

Quickly changing the subject, Howard said, “I think Zanuck is right to keep teaming you two, referring to Linda and Tyrone. “You’re the perfect complement to each other. With that dark hair, sex appeal, beauty, and a certain sultry quality, you’re evenly matched. I saw you in *The Mark of Zorro*. You two photograph beautifully together.”

Linda amused the men at her table by telling how she was called into Zanuck’s office her first day on the lot. “He talked to me for ten minutes about my career and its possibilities. Then he called me over to his desk. He pushed his chair away and exposed himself to me. He must have been playing with himself. ‘How’s that?’ he asked me. ‘The biggest whopper in a town of whoppers.’ I told him that I was impressed, thanked him for the preview, and asked him to put it away.”

Howard took Linda away for the weekend. He never told Meyer or Tyrone where because he wanted to shake them. But he was rhapsodic when reporting later to both Meyer and Tyrone about Linda’s charms. He said that he planned to add her to “his stable of fillies.”

He claimed that he’d taken a bath with her. “I feasted on her melons before tasting juices a little farther down. Thick, sweet nectar as only teenage pussy can be. Just a slight hint of apricot of all flavors. I went down and deep until I found just what I was looking for.”

“What, pray tell, was that?” Tyrone asked.

“You stick to cocksucking,” he told him. “You never did like to eat pussy. But I do. I call myself *Surelick* Holmes. I fanned that kid’s fires. We spent the rest of the weekend heaving and gyrating.”

In the future, other lovers would not give as flattering a report about Linda in the boudoir. Joseph Mankiewicz, who directed her in the memorable 1949 *A Letter to Three Wives*, once said, “I don’t even think she knew who was on top of her.”

Howard reiterated his view that Linda and Tyrone might become the most celebrated screen team of the 1940s. “Two dark-haired beauties,” he said. “Sexy with lush contours. Where either of you need curves, you’ve got them in great dimension. Although the camera regrettably can’t show it—maybe one day—you’ve got a beautiful cock. She’s got beautiful breasts. Both of you have silky pubic hair in the exact same shade. It’s as if you were twins.”

Nadine Henley had become Howard's private secretary in October of 1944. A few weeks after she was hired, he called her into his library where he was staring into the dying ashes of his fireplace. He had not shaven in days. "There was a wild look about him," she later said. "I was a little bit afraid of him. I'd heard so many stories about how eccentric he was."

Noah Dietrich had called that morning, a really urgent call, and had demanded to speak to Howard. He refused to take the call, and he always took Dietrich's calls. "Mr. Dietrich was infuriated," Nadine said. "After getting him on the phone for decades—at any time of the day or night—Mr. Dietrich wasn't allowed to speak to Mr. Hughes."

Nadine claimed that she sat there in the library for almost thirty minutes with her pad in hand to take dictation. Not a sound came from him. His eyes never left that fireplace. "At one point, I asked him if he wanted me to put on another log."

"No," he finally said. "I want to see the last dying ember burn out."

"And that's what we did," she said. "We sat there without speaking until the fireplace had turned cold. Then he told me that he'd brought me into the library to dictate his last Will & Testament. My first suspicion was that he was going to commit suicide."

When he started to dictate, she was astonished at his words. It sounded like no Last Will & Testament she'd ever typed.

"It has suddenly come to my attention," he said in his soft but high-pitched voice, "that I am being treated unfairly by the War Department, by the executives of the Hughes Tool Company in Houston, by Ava Gardner, by Faith Domergue, and by Noah Dietrich. Therefore, as a final gesture to them, I choose to grant each of them a final bequest of one U.S. dollar."

To her astonishment, he repeated these exact words to her four times.

Very gently, she said, "Mr. Hughes, you are repeating yourself."

He looked up at her. "It cannot be," he said. "I never repeat myself." As if realizing that he was repeating himself, he broke into uncontrollable sobbing and demanded that she leave the library.

In the hallway, she called Dr. Verne Mason, hoping he could inject her boss with something to make him feel better.

It took about half an hour for Dr. Mason to drive to Bel Air. She took his arm and directed him to the library. Once there, she knocked on the door. No answer. She tried the knob, finding the door locked. Repeated knocks and calls to Howard produced no result.

Going around to the back of the house, Dr. Mason, with Nadine looking on, found a window open. He crawled inside the library.

Howard was nowhere to be seen.

"For eleven months, Mr. Hughes just disappeared from the planet," Nadine claimed.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Las Vegas, 1944-45

Although World War II was still raging in both Europe and the Pacific, Howard was convinced that the Allies would ultimately triumph over Germany and Japan. During sleepless nights, he became obsessed with the vision of his flying cargo boats as key elements in the war effort, hauling a vast tonnage of personnel and supplies across the Atlantic to the battlefields of Europe. His reconnaissance planes, as he once boasted to Glenn Odekirk, would keep America informed “every time Hitler went to take a piss.” Regrettably, production was chronically slow at Hughes Aviation, and the prototypes for both the flying cargo boat and the D-2 reconnaissance plane were far from ready even for test flights. As a faint light appeared at the end of the wartime tunnel, Howard was haunted with the realization that he’d lost an amazing opportunity to become a key industrial player in the greatest drama in the history of the world.

He feared failure. More than that, he lived in daily dread that he’d become the laughing stock of America, a disgraced aviation hero once worshipped by millions of adoring fans.

“He developed the worst case of the shakes I’ve ever seen,” Dietrich said. “He couldn’t control his hands. Not wanting people to see that he was coming apart, he hid his hands in his pockets.”

That didn’t solve the problem. He developed a plainly visible nervous tick. He couldn’t keep food down, not even his favorite butterfly steak and peas. If he managed to force food down his throat, he’d vomit shortly thereafter.

His trusted friend, Odekirk, had begun to doubt that Howard could continue to direct Hughes Aviation. His decisions became so erratic and preposterous that behind his back, Odekirk sometimes rescinded his orders after Howard had issued them.

He began plotting a move to take a plane into the air and literally disappear from the face of the earth. “A flight to nowhere,” he eerily told Odekirk. The low point came when Howard asked Odekirk to fly with him in a plane out into the Pacific. Howard wanted to nose-dive the plane into the ocean, disappearing into the murky depths.

“But I want to live,” Odekirk protested. “I enjoy my life. My work. My family. You should find yourself some beautiful gal. Make her your wife. Settle down. Quit taking on jobs like these impossible orders from the War Department. You’ve got money. Everything. You shouldn’t be experiencing this kind of living Hell!”

Odekirk reported that when he said that, Howard broke down in front of him. Sobbing, he held his friend in a tight grip, begging him to escape with him. “We’ll disappear into the desert together, instead of the ocean.”

“Howard, I don’t want to run away to the desert,” Odekirk said. “I’m needed here. There’s a war on. You’re needed too. This is no time for a vacation.”

Suddenly Howard turned vicious, perhaps out of fear that he’d shown weakness. “Fuck you!” he said. “I don’t need you. I’ve got friends who are more loyal than you. Joe Petrali, for instance. He’d do anything for me, go anywhere I tell him to. You’ve let me down.” He stormed out of Odekirk’s office. Odekirk became afraid that Howard was going to fire him that day, but he didn’t. Instead, Howard just disappeared, without a word, even to Noah Dietrich, about where he was going and when he planned to return.

When Dietrich heard that Howard was missing, he at first assumed that one of Howard’s worst ongoing fears had been realized: he’d been kidnapped.

Confusingly, the rebuilt Sikorsky, the one Howard had salvaged from the bottom of Lake Mead, was not in its hangar, and could not be accounted for, having disappeared during the early hours of the morning before the workers showed up for the day. Upon further investigation, Dietrich then learned that two of the staff members at Hughes Aviation had also disappeared: Joseph (Joe) Petrali and Richard (Dick) Beatie.

Finally, a guard at Hughes Aviation revealed that he had spotted Howard, accompanied by Beatie and Petrali, climbing into the cockpit and flying into the early dawn, heading eastward toward the rising sun.

Thus began one of the strangest chapters in Howard’s life, and it’s still relatively unexplained today.

The gossip at the time involved the theory that Howard had embarked on a secret mission for the U.S. Government, and that he’d been entrusted with some dark plan that might win the war for the Allies. In later years, after atomic bombs had been dropped on Japan, hastening the end of the war, the rumor emerged that Howard was heroically testing the planes that would carry the deadly bombs into Japanese airspace.

That false rumor still persists in some quarters. The truth is much different and far less dramatic.

Odekirk later admitted, “Howard had become completely unglued. He couldn’t stay in California any more. He didn’t want people to see him getting crazier by the minute. He feared he’d be committed to some asylum. He told me he was having nightmares about getting locked up. All night he claimed he heard the sound of cell doors banging shut. In one of his worst scenarios, he said that he’d dreamed that J. Edgar Hoover had him locked up in a cage like you’d find in a circus holding some dangerous animal. In this dream, Howard said he was stripped of all his clothes, put in that cage, and driven through the streets of all the major cities of America so people could mock him and toss rotten, germ-infested food at his cage. My boss was in real bad shape.”

Faith Domergue later expressed her belief. “He didn’t tell me where he was going or when he’d come back—or even *if* he’d come back. I cried my eyes out night after night. Finally, I became convinced that Howard had to leave the world temporarily—all that wartime production, all those lawsuits, even those who loved him. I guess you’d call it ‘finding yourself’ No one will ever really know how tormented he was during that period. By the third month, I came to believe he was dead somewhere. I pictured his corpse lying in some Nevada desert, the buzzards having devoured the flesh before it rotted!”

Howard never formed any particularly close bond with Dick Beatie. It’s believed that he was chosen to fly away with Howard only because a third man was needed.

In contrast, a strong bond had formed between Howard and Joe Petrali, most of it forged during the long months it took to rebuild the Sikorsky after its retrieval from its grave at the bottom of Lake Mead. Joe had spearheaded its reconstruction. Sometimes he’d be with Howard in one of the hangars at

Culver City, accompanied only by a security guard, until three or four o'clock in the morning. Joe never revealed the degree to which a sense of intimacy had formed between the two men at that time. But Dietrich observed that Joe, at least temporarily, had replaced Glenn Odekirk as an emotional anchor in Howard's life.

Joe Petrali, or "Smokin' Joe" as his friends called him, did not have a pretty face. Errol Flynn, who had met him briefly, called him "a dime-store version of Humphrey Bogart."

Howard, along with many other men of his era, had been fascinated by Smokin' Joe's exploits. From around 1925 until deep into the 1930s, he was respected as America's finest motorcycle racer. You name it—board track racing, hillclimbs, speed records, dirt track—Joe was the champ. When he first met Howard, he was a genuine hero, having won a highly impressive total of 49 AMA national championship races. Today, Joe's name also continues as a footnote in the history of aviation, as he was the flight engineer during the infamous only take-off of the Spruce Goose in 1947.

Joe was a year older than Howard, although his birth certificate had been lost in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. That presented a problem for Hughes Aviation, since it would have helped in the procurement of Joe's security clearances.

Later, Odekirk offered some of his own theories about what had motivated Howard. "I believe that somehow he had connected the restoration of the Sikorsky to his own rejuvenation. Maybe he figured that in the same way that Joe Petrali had restored the ruined airplane, he could also restore life and vigor to Howard. I know that doesn't make sense, but that was my belief at the time."

Howard's decision to spirit himself into oblivion aboard the Sikorsky was not as spontaneous as it might have seemed. Some of the details about his escape from Culver City were revealed in an article written by Joe Petrali and published posthumously in *True* magazine in 1975. (Joe died of a heart attack in Arizona on November 10, 1973.) In the article, Joe stated that every day, during the course of at least a month, Howard had ordered him to roll the Sikorsky out onto the tarmac at Culver City and prepare it for takeoff. Joe did this morning after morning, and then routinely rolled it, after a few hours, back into the hangar. On the morning when Howard actually showed up for the flight, Joe came close to not rolling the Sikorsky onto the runway. "I figured it'd be a waste of time and Howard would never show. How wrong I was. Howard showed up with only a few possessions stuffed into a cardboard box. 'The Lone Wolf is ready to fly,' he announced to Dick and me." A few months earlier, Errol Flynn had dubbed Howard "The Lone Wolf."

On the morning of his disappearance, Howard looked at both Dick and Joe. "You lucky guys are coming with me."

At the time, they later revealed, both of them thought Howard was going to fly them to San Francisco, or perhaps Mexico City. Joe never realized that this flight would stretch into a journey that lasted a full eleven months.

"We didn't even bring a change of underwear," Dick later said.

Piloting the Sikorsky himself, Howard flew over the beautiful but barren Sierra Nevada Mountains, heading toward Las Vegas. He didn't say a word to his two-man crew. Both Joe and Dick were apprehensive about where their boss was taking them. "It even occurred to me that he might be kidnapping us," Dick later said.

In those days, photographers routinely hung out at the Las Vegas airport, hoping to snap celebrities arriving for an off-the-record weekend at the still emerging resort. Aware of this, and to avoid publicity, Howard piloted the Sikorsky to an obscure and unpaved landing strip in mesquite bush country, twenty-five miles from the center of Las Vegas.

That morning, a sand storm was raging across the desert, blowing sagebrush and tumbleweeds across the makeshift runway. During his landing, sand pelted the aircraft, and gusts of gale-like winds bombarded it. In his deteriorating emotional condition, with his nerves shattered, Howard did not appear to Joe and Dick that he was capable of making the landing. He bumped the ground five times, hard, before the tires stuck to the dirt runway.

Suddenly, he overshot the runway and hit sand dunes. In the mesquite bushes, wild rabbits scampered for safety. The wheel that guided the plane's direction struck an obstacle and tore loose from its strut, spinning high into the air before crashing into the scrub. Unsupported by its front wheel, the fuselage scraped against the jagged and arid terrain as the ruined plane came to a thumping halt.

Despite the violence of the landing, the three men disembarked from the craft without any injuries and immediately surveyed the damage. "After all our work, and after spending \$600,000 on its reconstruction, the Sikorsky was a lame duck once again—and after only one flight," Joe lamented. He told Howard that it would take a month of hard, sweaty labor to repair the craft.

"Howard was devastated," Joe later said. "He'd come to identify with that Sikorsky as an extension of himself. He sometimes referred to it as his deathtrap. He said that if he could pull the Sikorsky together again, he could pull himself together again. I know this gets complicated, but the Sikorsky was the metal embodiment of Howard himself. He was sobbing when we drove him away. For the first time in my life, I felt sorry for Howard Hughes, a man who had everything."

As their temporary home, Howard selected El Rancho, a bungalow cluster bordering what eventually became known as the Vegas strip. "Howard ordered us to get blankets and nail them over his two windows," Dick said. "He wanted to blanket out the daylight." This blotting out the sun would become a pattern that would last until the end of Howard's life.

In total seclusion, he lived for five weeks in a dark room at El Rancho. "Dick and I knew that he was going through a period of recovery. He didn't read any newspapers, and he didn't have a radio. He didn't want the outside world to intrude. Every day I brought him a box of chocolate chip cookies, a quart of milk, and three candy bars—and that's all he ate to survive."

During those five weeks, Joe and Dick, in a rented plane, made frequent trips back to Culver City to secure parts and to fly Hughes Aviation mechanics back to the barren airfield outside Las Vegas to work on the damaged Sikorsky. Although he'd been (and would continue to be) a "pinch-penny" about many money matters, Howard told Joe that regarding the costs of repairing the damaged aircraft, "the sky's the limit."

"While we were working on the Sikorsky, Howard couldn't bring himself to even go and look at it," Joe said. "In his mind, at least, the damage caused to the Sikorsky became more important than his subsequent failures to deliver the Spruce Goose or the D-2 reconnaissance plane. He began to feel that everything he touched was doomed to failure. Sometimes, late at night, he'd summon me to his bungalow and tell me that he wished he'd never gone into aviation. 'Planes tried to kill me,' he told me one night. 'I've devoted my life to them, and they want me dead. I should never fly again. I'll take the train for the rest of my life.' Yet on other occasions, Howard seemed fanatically interested in the resurrection of the Sikorsky, debating the location and position of every bolt. "Sometimes," Joe said, he'd ask me the same question five—even ten—times. I was very patient with him. I knew I had to get that plane ready to fly again. It was as if Howard's very life depended on it."

Both Joe and Dick were under gag orders, imposed by Howard, not to reveal Howard's whereabouts to any of his colleagues in Culver City. When interrogated by Dietrich during some of his supply runs, Joe, on Howard's orders, told him that Howard had abandoned the Sikorsky, rented a private plane, and had flown toward Mexico.

As Christmas of 1944 approached, both Joe and Dick pleaded with Howard to let them fly back to Los Angeles to be with their families for the

holidays. He adamantly refused, telling them that he might need them “at any moment—and you’re to stand by. Besides, Christmas Eve is my birthday, and I thought the three of us might have a little party together.” At that point in his life, Howard still believed the fiction that his mother had created—that he was born on Christmas Eve and not in the late summer of 1905.

Disappointed, Dick and Joe spent many hours sitting around El Rancho playing cards. Howard didn’t want either of them to go out at night in case he needed their services. Finally, depressed and rebellious, Dick came up with a mutinous idea. He urged Joe to fly with him on a private plane for a short holiday visit to Los Angeles, arranging for a note to be delivered to Howard’s room after they were airborne.

Grateful for the respite from too much desert, too much Sikorsky, and too much Howard, the men did just that, flying back to El Rancho and their problems the day after New Year’s. They feared Howard’s reprisals for their “betrayal.” But to their surprise, after their return to the desert, they discovered that Howard, after paying a month’s advance rent on his bungalow, had mysteriously disappeared. Driving in a rented car to the barren airfield, they also found out that the Sikorsky was missing. There was no note from Howard—nothing.

At first both men feared that they’d been fired for defying their boss. Joe decided to stay and wait for Howard, but Dick would have “none of that.” The next morning he was a passenger aboard a commercial flight back to Los Angeles. Reporting for duty at Culver City the following day, he expected to receive notification that he’d been fired, only to find that his old job was still open, his desk piled high with paper work.

Spending each lonely day and night alone at El Rancho, Joe maintained the vigil for Howard’s return. It was three o’clock on the afternoon of February 2, 1945 when Howard suddenly opened the unlocked door to Joe’s bungalow and barged in. “After all those weeks where Howard had looked like he was withering on the vine, he appeared invigorated and raring for action,” Joe later said. “Apparently, he’d begun reading the newspapers again. All he said to me was, ‘Any day now, our boys are gonna cut off Hitler’s balls and feed them to his German shepherds.’”

He didn’t chastise Joe for disobeying him and flying back to Los Angeles for Christmas. Nor did he confide the whereabouts or the condition of the Sikorsky. As for Dick, he made no inquiries at all, never even mentioning him, almost as if he didn’t exist.

Joe went to his grave never telling the truth about his relationship with Howard. But from Johnny Meyer, Noah Dietrich, and Howard’s chance encounters along the way, details of Howard’s eleven-month disappearance have trickled out, although not in the lush details that Hughes watchers would prefer.

Johnny Meyer remains the only source for the claim that Howard forced Joe to submit to oral sex during their long disappearance.

When Howard reappeared after his mystery trip, the nature of his relationship with Joe changed considerably, at least according to Meyer, admittedly a second-hand source of information. Howard’s pimp later claimed that Howard lay on the bed in the bungalow room at El Rancho, listening to the radio. Surprisingly, he asked Joe to take a shower.

Joe later confided to Meyer that he didn’t really need a shower, having taken one that morning, but Howard insisted. He told Joe that he planned to take him to the hot spots of Vegas that night, and he wanted him very clean and smelling nice before introducing him to any woman.

No one ever considered Joe Petrali as handsome in the style of some of Howard’s sex partners, notably Errol Flynn, Robert Taylor, and Tyrone Power, but Joe must have been a dazzler when he pulled off his clothes. Judging from second-hand reports, Howard was intrigued with the sight. Meyer later stated that Joe told him this: While showering, Howard came into the bathroom and pulled back the curtain. Fully clothed, he bent down on his knees and fellated him under the running water. Joe, a heterosexual, submitted to Howard’s demands. He was probably more shocked than he was sexually aroused. But he must have satisfied Howard, who would continue to fellate Joe when not otherwise engaged with strangers he picked up.

Later Joe’s talents as a sex object would be verified by both Lana Turner and Ava Gardner. Each of them met Joe on separate occasions. “He was always hanging out with Howard,” Ava said. “How could you not meet him?” Meyer maintained that Lana was the first of the actresses to sample his charms.

“After a while, I passed him on to Ava,” a drunken Lana confessed one night at the Beverly Hills Hotel. “Then, Joe got involved with Joan Crawford, who never wanted to miss out on *anything*. Smokin’ Joe was sure passed around from bed to bed in those days, but darling Howard got there first. But not before Joe’s wife, of course. If he had one. I never knew. Never cared.”

For his night on the town with Joe, Howard steered his rented car to a ranch-style house on the outskirts of Las Vegas. A private club, open to outsiders only by special invitation, it was amusingly named the Prickly Cactus. Howard’s gangster friend, Bugsy Siegel, was said to have put up the money for this house of prostitution and had granted Howard free membership as one of its inaugural members. Howard had been a frequent customer at this club since its opening.

The madam of the house called herself “Belle Watling,” taking her name from the bordello keeper in *Gone With the Wind*, as memorably portrayed by actress Ona Munson. Belle introduced Joe and Howard to her latest batch of girls, most of whom had, sometime in their pasts, arrived as show-business hopefuls at Union Station in Los Angeles. As the reality of their dim chances for stardom became more obvious, some of them, at least, opted for a relatively lucrative sojourn at the Prickly Cactus.

For Howard and Joe, “Belle” had reserved four of the most popular girls in the house. Each had been picked because of their resemblance to one of the era’s reigning beauty queens. Joe later told Johnny Meyer that he and Howard faced a choice of “Lana Turner,” “Rita Hayworth,” “Betty Grable,” and/or “Ava Gardner.”

Supposedly, since Howard had never bedded Ava Gardner in real life, he decided to spend a few hours with her dead-ringer. Joe claimed that selecting his partner presented a difficult choice for him, but he eventually settled on Betty Grable “because every GI in World War II wanted to screw her.” He said he would have gone for both “Rita” and “Lana,” too, but that earlier, Howard “had drained me dry.”

Joe was exhausted when Howard drove him back to his bungalow at El Rancho and then announced, “We’re leaving at five o’clock sharp!”

“But, boss,” Joe protested. “I’m beat.”

“That’s five o’clock sharp!” Howard said. “Not 4:59, not 5:01. Five o’clock sharp!”

“Can you at least tell me where we’re going?” Joe asked.

“When you get to where we’re going,” he said, “you can ask somebody on the ground where you are. If they don’t know, they’re pretty stupid, wouldn’t you say?” With that remark, Howard walked toward his own bungalow for one hour of sleep.

In the Sikorsky that Joe had rebuilt, Howard interchanged his pilot duties with Joe. Together, they flew across the West. From Las Vegas, they flew to Reno until Howard tired of that town. From Reno, they flew to Palm Springs, hiding out in secluded motorcourt bungalows, never in a star-studded resort where Howard might be recognized.

In a few weeks, it was on to Mexico City. When he grew bored South of the Border, he flew north to Arizona, where he often retreated.

“It was back and forth, wandering aimlessly from desert to desert,” Joe later recalled. “Dreary motel after dreary motel. Howard didn’t know where he wanted to go. In any place we landed, he grew restless.”

Aboard the Sikorsky, Joe’s final flight with him was east to Louisiana.

San Francisco/Mexico, 1945

Details of Howard’s whereabouts in late December of 1944 and January of 1945, just after having fled from Las Vegas in the Sikorsky, alone and without Joe or Dick, emerged from an unlikely source. It came from the drag artist, “Pussy-Katt,” whom Howard had first encountered in San Francisco when he took Ava Gardner to Finocchio’s to be entertained by a transvestite revue.

He’d made contact with “her”—actually a him who demanded to be called her—with the promise of a future date. Howard was true to his word, returning to Finocchio’s again for a meeting with the seventeen-year-old pretty boy who’d been born in Dayton, Ohio in 1929. Pussy-Katt’s real name was Steve Clayton (she’d taken the name of a stepfather).

Breaking into the world of show-business drag in San Francisco and lying about her age, Pussy-Katt in her publicity claimed that, “I’m too pretty to be a boy—and much, much too pretty to be a mere gal.”

Before meeting Howard, Pussy-Katt had been involved in a scandalous chain of events that had even reached the ears of both Howard Hughes and Louella Parsons. The gossip maven couldn’t print it, of course—“it’s too scandalous.” During the course of a night on the town, a group of friends who included Errol Flynn, William Lundigan, Bruce Cabot, and David Niven were rumored to have invited Pussy-Katt and some of her associates back to their hotel suite at the Fairmont for “a night of debauchery evoking the Roman Empire.” According to the rumor, Howard had been tantalized by that story and wanted to duplicate some aspects of it, privately, with Pussy-Katt.

Pussy-Katt later claimed that Howard repeatedly sodomized her when he invited her back to his suite at the Fairmont after her show.

According to the wild stories Pussy-Katt told her cronies at Finocchio’s, Howard became mesmerized by a book on eunuchs that he partially read while waiting for her to get dressed one afternoon in her apartment. In this book of sexual practices of ancient Egypt, Howard supposedly read that the most beautiful boys in the land—each of them highly prized as sexual objects—were subjected to the brutal practice of having their penises, testicles, and scrotums removed.

Many of the other eunuchs at court had to suffer removal of only their testicles and scrotums. According to the theory, sodomites of that era claimed that young boys who had suffered the removal of all of their genitalia were more sexually satisfying because they had only one way to receive sexual pleasure—and that was from being penetrated rectally.

If Pussy-Katt is to be believed, she claimed that Howard persuaded her to fly with him to Mexico City where she underwent sexual mutilation. “There wasn’t that much to cut off anyway, honey,” she later said. “Besides, \$50,000 turned my head.”

After she recovered in a clinic in Mexico City, Howard flew her to Acapulco—a sleepy town then, just emerging as a resort. There he installed her in a rented villa, promising to return when she’d recovered from her surgery, to test the theory of the ancient Egyptian sodomites.

Howard, and again only Pussy-Katt’s word is the source of this, continued to fly to Acapulco for oft-repeated visits over a period of nearly two years. When he grew bored with her, he left her enough money to open up a local transvestite club—Finocchio’s South—which flourished for three years in Acapulco, often attracting celebrities from Hollywood.

Eventually, because of alleged prostitution on the premises, both male and female, and illegal drug use, the club was shut down by the local police.

After her club was closed, Pussy-Katt just faded from the radar screen. She was once reported to be a performer at Madame Arthur’s, a transvestite revue in Paris that was originally established in the 1930s. But no one is sure what became of her.

What is known is that after his sojourn in Acapulco in January of 1945, allegedly leaving Pussy-Katt to recover from surgery in the villa he’d arranged for her, he flew to Phoenix, again without alerting Joe, Dick, Noah Dietrich, or anyone else about where he was.

Joe Petrali, during most of January of 1945, was still stuck in the Las Vegas desert at El Rancho, and wouldn’t be aware of Howard’s whereabouts until his reappearance in early February. “As our trip progressed,” Joe later recalled, “Howard was showing more and more of his paranoia. I can understand why Howard wanted to get away from Toolco and from the boys at Culver City, including Noah Dietrich. All of Howard’s companies were in turmoil, and things were hysterical all the time. But Dick and I were his flyboys. It was just crazy to keep secrets from us. We hadn’t betrayed him. Dietrich always suspected that we knew where Howard was at all times. Actually, Dietrich was wrong. We knew where Howard was when we saw him. Where Howard flew without us, we haven’t a clue.”

As it was revealed many years later, one of the things he did during his long disappearance involved a secret rendezvous with Cary Grant.

Nogales, Arizona, 1945

In most cases, whenever Howard called Cary Grant, the actor came running if his film commitments allowed him to do so. Knowing that Howard had disappeared from both Toolco and Hughes Aircraft Company, and not having heard from his friend in weeks, Cary was concerned for Howard’s safety. It was a relief to the actor when a call came in from Howard, asking him to fly at once to Arizona to be with him. Free to go, and without any ironclad film commitments at the time, Cary left at once without telling anybody where he was going.

Arriving in Nogales, Cary went immediately to a mysterious hotel room, R-3, to which no maid had been allowed entrance since Howard’s check-in. What he found inside sickened the fastidious Cary. Disheveled, Howard was sprawled nude in the center of a smelly bed rank with rotting semen, as if he’d been lying there masturbating for days.

His normally skeletal frame had lost an additional thirty-five pounds. Cary was shocked at the deterioration. Candy wrappers and empty milk bottles were scattered around the room. It turned out that he’d been surviving on a quart of milk at breakfast, one at lunch, and another at dinner. In the corner of the room was a large cardboard box half filled with almond-studded Hershey bars, Howard’s only food source other than the milk.

Much more alarming, feces and urine covered newspapers strewn across the tiled floor. Although the hotel accommodation included a bathroom, he had used the newspapers to relieve himself, like a cat or dog, not bothering to actually walk as far as the toilet.

Like a protective wife, Cary set about organizing and making things right. First, he called management and demanded that Howard be transferred to

another suite. Then he paid a maid two hundred dollars to have Howard’s former suite cleaned and sanitized.

In a new suite, Cary carefully bathed Howard and cut his long, greasy hair after washing it. He also trimmed his toenails and fingernails before giving him a close shave. Cary called room service and ordered a butterfly steak and small green peas sent to the suite.

Cary had to spoon feed Howard, cutting the meat into very small pieces so that he wouldn’t choke. Very slowly, Howard managed to eat the food. Pushing his plate away before he was finished, he broke into uncontrollable sobbing. For the first time, Cary saw firsthand the toll that his friend had paid for the failure of the Spruce Goose and the D-2 reconnaissance plane.

When he returned to Hollywood, Cary confided to director George Cukor his belief that all those plane and car crashes had caused some sort of brain damage. How else to explain Howard’s derelict state and his abandonment of Culver City and millions of dollars worth of unfilled government contracts?

When he stopped sobbing, Howard told Cary that he’d continue wandering across the American landscape “like a vagabond until I find myself.” If George Cukor got it right, Howard told Cary that, “I can’t commit to anyone except you. You’re my only friend. All the others are using me for my money, the women to advance their careers, the boys to get a hundred-dollar bill or much more. With you, it’s unconditional love.” Even if those weren’t the exact words, as recalled by a second-hand source, it is believed that they mirrored Howard’s sentiments at the time.

It will never be known in any detail what Howard and Cary talked about during those precious days they spent together in Nogales in 1945. Cary was also emotionally disturbed that his “loveless marriage” to Barbara Hutton was coming to an end.

Cary often turned to Howard for advice, especially in financial matters. But he hadn’t listened to Howard three years previously. Then, on July 4, 1942, at Lake Arrowhead, in the mountains of southern California, he’d taken the Woolworth heiress as his bride. At the time, Howard had been horrified that his best friend and sometimes lover was marrying his former girlfriend, one he’d known during their mismatch at the Savoy Hotel in London. Howard had turned down Cary’s request to attend the wedding and be his best man. Newspapers around the world published the Hutton/Grant wedding picture under the caption CASH ‘N CARY.

At the time of his meeting with Howard in Arizona in 1945, Hutton was only months away (July 15) from filing for divorce, charging Cary with “grievous mental distress, suffering and anguish,” which was certainly true. Unlike Hutton’s future husbands—often homosexual—Cary did not seek alimony. In Nogales, knowing that the divorce was imminent, Howard urged Cary “to go for the big bucks.” Cary refused.

Hutton, speaking to her homosexual cousin, Jimmy Donahue, said, “During my marriage to Cary, I don’t remember seeing him. He got up at five o’clock to leave for the studio. I woke up at two in the afternoon. He came home at seven and went to bed. By that time, I was fully dressed and ready for an evening on the town. While I was out, he slept. By the time I got home at dawn, he was already dressing for the studio. I do recall passing him in the hall one morning. During my marriage to Cary, Howard Hughes saw far more of him than I did.”

Throughout a lifetime of broken friendships, Howard’s bond with Cary would always be strong, enduring for almost half a century, long after sexual passions had ended. Lovers, both male and female, would come and go from the lives of these two closeted bisexuals. But Cary and Howard would be “lovers for life,” as Barbara Hutton told Jimmy Donahue. “I guess my husband loves Howard,” she claimed. “He certainly never had any love for me. We’ve slept in separate bedrooms ever since our wedding day. Long after Cary has dumped me, he’ll still be carrying on his relationship with Howard. But, if truth be told, I think the love of Cary Grant’s life is Cary Grant. Ditto for Howard.”

Information about Cary’s secret visit with Howard during his long disappearance would not be unearthed by the press of that day. However, a second secret rendezvous between the two men became publicized around the world.

Early in 1947, long after pulling himself together and making his whereabouts known to his colleagues at Toolco and Hughes Aviation, Howard flew Cary from Los Angeles to New York “for business and pleasure.” Howard personally piloted his friend in a converted B-23 bomber left over from reconnaissance duties during World War II. The custom-retrofitted aircraft was called “The Flying Penthouse.” Extravagant amenities included a lavish bedroom, a bathroom with a custom-made bathtub, and a wet bar stocked with rare whiskies and vintage French champagne.

In New York, at an emergency board meeting of TWA, Howard agreed to lend the financially troubled airline ten million dollars. TWA was suffering from a too rapid expansion and a disastrous pilots’s strike that had lasted for more than two weeks.

After a brief sojourn for business matters in Washington, D.C., Howard invited Cary for a quick vacation in Mexico. Cary had time because finishing touches were being made on the script of his next picture, *The Bishop’s Wife*, in which he was slated to star at RKO opposite Loretta Young.

On his flight from Washington to the Southwest, Howard’s last radio contact was at the control tower at the Indianapolis airport. For the holiday in Mexico, Johnny Meyer was already waiting for Cary and Howard on land. “I’d arranged only the finest in boy ass for my two airborne queers,” he later revealed.

Flying south into air space above Texas, Howard planned a refueling stop in Amarillo, and alerted the control tower there that he planned to land his bomber there to refuel. En route, he encountered a violent storm roaring across much of the state. To avoid the fury of the storm, Howard directed his plane to El Paso instead, where weather conditions were judged as safe for landing, and where, evidently, there was plenty of fuel.

Several hours had passed since his last known radio contact in Indianapolis, and no one at the Amarillo airport had heard from him. Local aviation authorities grew apprehensive that the plane carrying two of the world’s most famous men had gone down somewhere in the hills. After the violent storm, small search planes took off to scout for wreckage.

Radio bulletins were issued across America. Two of America’s most celebrated men were believed to have died in a plane crash. Newspaper offices were alerted for “the biggest double obituary of the century.” One frontpage of a Chicago paper printed a mock blowup of its special edition: HUGHES AND GRANT DIE IN PLANE CRASH.

From El Paso, Howard flew Cary to Guadalajara, Mexico, where he and Cary checked into El Reforma Hotel. It is not known, but it is believed that Howard was aware of the furor surrounding his so-called disappearance. He seemed determined to let the world speculate whether he were dead or alive. Dietrich later claimed that the refusal to make contact with aviation authorities was “Howard’s fuck you to the world.”

When they arrived at the lobby of El Reforma, checking in under assumed names, Howard and Cary were greeted with a blazing newspaper headline: SEÑORS GRANT AND HUGHES BELIEVED DEAD IN AIR CRASH. Selfishly, after learning about the furor associated with the misconception, neither of them alerted friends or associates that they were alive. Arrogantly, Howard and Cary continued to stay at the hotel incognito, despite the frantic headlines.

Thinking they were not in their room, the hotel’s housekeeper, Consuelo Marijan, who just happened to be a movie buff, used her passkey to enter their suite. She screamed at the sight of the two naked men asleep in each other’s arms. An alert business manager of the hotel, hoping for publicity for his under-booked resort, immediately alerted the local press. Soon bulletins were coming into news rooms all over the world. Wire services in Mexico City proclaimed that Howard and Cary were no longer *presumidos muerto* (presumed dead).

One radio newsman in Mexico claimed that “like Jesus, Señor Hughes and Señor Grant have risen from the dead.” Faced with a media storm, Cary flew back to Los Angeles on the next available plane. Arriving there, he told the press that reports of his death had been “greatly exaggerated,” ripping off a line from Mark Twain. Howard, however, stayed in Guadalajara where he welcomed the latest girlfriend in his life, the beautiful actress and his future wife, Jean Peters.

Louisiana, 1945

Joe Petrali never learned where Howard had disappeared to after Petrali had rebelliously flown back to Los Angeles for his Christmas holiday in 1945. It was only later revealed to him that Howard had flown himself to San Francisco, Mexico City, and Nogales, Arizona. When Petrali reunited with Howard in February of 1945 in Las Vegas, his boss told him that he wanted to continue their travels in America. This time, only the two of them would be flying, without Dick Beatie.

Without knowing the day’s flight plan, Petrali showed up at the landing strip outside Las Vegas at three o’clock in the morning to ensure that the Sikorsky was in tiptop shape for flying. Two hours later a battered car pulled up near the plane. Attired in a raccoon coat—the type frat boys wore in the early 1920s—Howard emerged from the vehicle. “Let’s fly,” he called to Petrali.

Piloting the plane himself, Howard refused to divulge his flight plan to the Las Vegas control tower. “We’re flying East, boys,” he said over his radio. “East.”

This was a dangerous defiance of authority over the wartime skies of America. The control tower could have called the Air Force and asked them to intervene, even shoot down the Sikorsky if it did not properly identify itself. But nothing like that happened. Someone alerted the control tower that the plane was being piloted by “none other than Howard Hughes on very secret government business.”

Petrali never wrote about this, but later confessed to friends, as well as to Noah Dietrich, that when Howard flew over Texas, he was crying. “That state held some sort of bitter memories for him that he must have dredged up.” His co-pilot recalled that in an impetuous move Howard seemed to nose-dive the plane toward the earth as if he were going to crash it on his home state. After Petrali started screaming, Howard came to as if aware of his impulsive act for the first time. He suddenly righted the plane and flew out of Texas into Oklahoma.

It was not until Howard was flying over Oklahoma that Howard finally revealed to his co-pilot their destination: Shreveport, Louisiana. Petrali later claimed that he never figured out why Howard landed in Shreveport. “He had no business there at all. Since he had to land someplace, I think he chose Shreveport as one of the least likely places for Toolco executives in Houston to come looking for him.”

A thunderstorm blackened the skies over Louisiana as Howard landed his Sikorsky at Shreveport. He selected the most battered car he could rent at the airport and drove to the most rundown hotel he could find, The Shreveport Inn, which usually housed vagrants and drunks. “For a week, he stayed in that lonely room,” Petrali said. “I brought him milk and cookies—that’s all he wanted.”

Every night Petrali went out to a bar or a movie. He recalled that after sitting through some Betty Grable movie, he came back to the hotel to find that Howard had disappeared from his room.

As it turned out, Marvin K. Ezell, a patrolman for the local police, spotted what he later described “as a derelict, probably from up north, sitting on a curb-side drinking a quart of milk, which he probably stole from some store.” In his report, he claimed that the “stranger wore dirty clothes, torn in places, and had at least a week’s growth of beard.” He also reported that he was wearing a beat-en-up fedora. When O.C. Merritt, another officer, was called to the scene in a squad car, he demanded that Howard produce identification. When Howard refused to show any identification and would not even tell the officers his name, he was hustled into the squad car and driven to police headquarters.

Before the chief of police, he admitted that his name was Howard Hughes. He produced a room key for his hotel to show them he was no vagrant. At first the chief didn’t believe “this obvious looking bum.” But when Howard produced \$3,500 from his pockets—“nobody in Louisiana except Huey Long carried around that kind of dough,” the chief later said—the officers began to believe Howard. Nonetheless, they called the local manager of Toolco, which had an office in Shreveport. Although he’d never met Howard, he’d seen thousands of pictures of him. He rushed down and identified Howard.

Howard showed up at the Toolco plant the following morning, asking for fifty-thousand dollars in cash. A quick call to Noah Dietrich in Hollywood got an okay to release that kind of money. Dietrich demanded to speak to Howard but he refused. While authorizing the cash, Dietrich asked the manager of the plant to figure out how to detain Howard for the day—“but no force”—until executives from Toolco in Houston could fly to meet him. “Desperate business” awaited Howard’s decisions, Dietrich told the plant manager.

By the time the officials had flown in from Houston, Howard had disappeared again. This time he instructed Petrali to fly back to Los Angeles as an ordinary passenger aboard a commercial airplane flight. He said that he’d have no more need of his services and that “the folks” at Hughes Aviation “need you more than I do.”

It was later learned that for the next leg of his mysterious odyssey in 1945, Howard had selected two flight engineers from Hughes Aviation, Ray Kirkpatrick and Robert Martin, and without Petrali’s knowledge, had them secretly flown in from Culver City.

In control of his Sikorsky again, this time with Kirkpatrick and Martin on board, Howard headed for Orlando, Florida. Once in Florida, he rented a car and drove both men to Orlando’s Greyhound Bus Station. He’d stuffed all his possessions into a cardboard box. To their astonishment, he then boarded the bus heading for Miami, ordering them to fly the Sikorsky without him back to Culver City. Bewildered, they watched helplessly as he took a seat near the back of the bus as it headed south.

No one in either California or Texas would hear of him again for three months.

With his obligations and his defense contracts collapsing, with urgent business needing attention, Howard set out on yet another leg of his midlife odyssey, the exact details of which may never be known.

In Houston, his aunt, Annette Lummis, hired her own private detectives to search the country for Howard. She called Dietrich daily, and soon began accusing him of conspiring with Toolco executives in Houston to “have Howard done in—you’ve murdered him and I just know that!” She told Houston

friends that her nephew one day would be discovered “in a block of ice in a warehouse somewhere.”

Only a glimmer of light has been shed on what Howard was doing in Miami. In October of 1959, a waitress came into the old offices of *The Miami Herald*, asking to sell a story. In those days, *The Herald* rarely bought stories. It assigned George S. Mills, a former reporter for the defunct *Brooklyn Eagle*, to see what the woman wanted. An aging bleached blonde at the time, she identified herself as Lulubelle Hayes. She claimed that for one month in 1945 Howard Hughes had lived with her in a small apartment she occupied on South Flagler Street.

Not only that, but she had photographs. George examined the photographs and decided that they did indeed look like Howard Hughes, although the subject in the photographs was unshaven and always wore a fedora. Since George was a copy editor, he turned the pictures and the woman over to Jane Wood Reno, a doggedly reliable staff reporter. The late Mrs. Reno was the mother of Janet Reno, who became Attorney General of the United States during the Clinton administration.

With the approval of *The Miami Herald's* managing editor, George Beebe, Mrs. Reno set out to investigate the mysterious disappearance of Howard Hughes and what he was doing in Miami in 1945 and later in The Bahamas.

Her investigation would never turn up anything conclusive but it would produce some powerful hearsay.

Miami/The Bahamas/Mexico, 1945

The Miami Herald never published Mrs. Reno's revelations because they could not be verified as authentic. Even so, her managing editor, George Beebe, believed that her investigation had turned up accurate information but had not produced what Beebe called “the smoking gun.” Nonetheless, the editor wanted to go ahead with a three-part series revealing the details of Howard's infamous disappearance during the final days of World War II. But his powerful publisher, John Knight, pulled the plug.

The world press did not know that Howard had mysteriously descended on South Florida. One night the police in Fort Lauderdale received a report that a strange-looking man was on the beach completely naked and making a bonfire of his clothing. Had Howard's syphilis reoccurred? A squad car was dispatched, and Howard was arrested.

There is no record of this arrest in Broward County files. Although it could never be proven, Mrs. Reno believed that Howard “bribed his way out of that jam.” Not wanting more trouble from what appeared to be an out-of-control tycoon, two policemen drove Howard to the Broward-Dade County line and released him. He was left alone to make his way on foot down the coastal strip to Miami Beach and, ultimately, to Miami itself.

In 1959, Lulubelle Hayes reported to *Herald* editor George Mills that she met Howard in a bar and took him home with her. He'd introduced himself as “Robard Lummis.” Making thirty-five dollars a week as a waitress, the Georgia-born blonde said that she supported him on her meager salary. Each night she brought him a plate of food from the diner where she worked for quarter tips pushing blue-plate specials.

One night, as Lulubelle claimed, she came home from work to find a rather lavish man's wardrobe spread out on the bed in her small apartment, including a tuxedo and at least three dress suits, along with new shoes, ties, and some shiny white shirts. She was astonished that Howard had acquired such expensive finery, thinking he was a “down-and-out snowbird.” He never told her how he acquired all this clothing. When she got off work the following night and rushed home, her lover and the clothing had disappeared.

She never saw him again.

From the Port of Miami, Howard rented a manned private yacht and sailed for a secret rendezvous in The Bahamas. From Miami, he had arranged a private meeting with the Swedish multimillionaire, Axel Wenner-Gren.

With his mop of white hair, and with a figure described as “robust,” Wenner-Gren struck many people who met him as the “reincarnation of a Viking.” The Duchess of Windsor, his friend, called him “the pinkest man I've ever met,” a reference to his skin color.

Like Howard, Wenner-Gren was one of the richest men on the planet. The Swedish-born industrialist had invented both the refrigerator and the vacuum cleaner, and he controlled Electrolux, one of the world's most powerful companies. When he first met Howard in Nassau in 1938, the two tycoons had jointly established a corporation known as the Rover Steamship Company. Its headquarters were in Panama City where you could register any vessel or company if you paid off the right people. During the war, supposedly because of Panama's close connections to the United States, Wenner-Gren had been forced to transfer the company's headquarters from Panama to Stockholm (Sweden was officially neutral throughout the course of World War II) “where it'll be out of harm's way for the duration.”

The Rover Steamship Company was ostensibly devoted mainly to exploiting business opportunities in the West Indies, ranging from sugarcane to weaponry. The exact nature of Howard's business dealings with Wenner-Gren may never be known. Noah Dietrich was not a party to these secret dealings. Supplying weapons made in Europe, notably in Sweden, to Banana Republics plotting various revolutions seems to be at the crux of Howard's dealings with the Nazi sympathizer. There were also legitimate shipping interests involved, as in the transport of tobacco from Cuba, sugarcane from the Dominican Republic, and even large shipments of fresh fruit to U.S. markets. Dietrich never knew from what hidden stash of funds Howard got the money to invest in the Swede's enterprises, both legitimate and nefarious. A lot of the company's business involved customers and suppliers in Cuba, then controlled by the corrupt dictator, Fulgencio Batista, or in the Dominican Republic, then under the iron fist of General Rafael Trujillo. Like Hitler himself, although not on such a grand monster scale, both Batista and Trujillo were Fascist dictators. This presented no problem to a Nazi collaborator like Wenner-Gren or an ultra right-wing American patriot like Howard himself.

Mrs. Reno discovered that there were several eyewitnesses who had spotted Howard in The Bahamas, mainly servants. Upon arriving in Nassau, Howard was transported to Wenner-Gren's mansion, Shangri-La on Hog Island (later renamed Paradise Island). Some of their meetings occurred aboard the *Southern Cross*, which Howard had previously sold to the Swedish industrialist for two million dollars.

Since he had acquired the vessel, Wenner-Gren had hauled the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, then stationed in Nassau as Britain's official representatives, aboard the *Southern Cross* to Miami when she was suffering “the worst toothache in the history of the world.”

Unlike his sometime lover, Errol Flynn, or his rival, Charles Lindbergh, Howard was never suspected of being a Nazi sympathizer, much less a collaborator. His ties to Wenner-Gren were based more on financial advantages than on any support for Wenner-Gren's politics. Like most of the informed world at the time, Howard was well aware of his friend's involvements in the Krupp industries, his role in supplying munitions to the Third Reich, and the close bond the Swede had established with Nazi Field Marshal Hermann Göring.

Six years previously, in 1939, Wenner-Gren had met with Göring in Germany and had then flown to London. There he convened with Prime Minister

Neville Chamberlain to try to broker some “permanent peace” between Nazi Germany and the British Empire.

Hitler’s unprovoked attack on Poland abruptly ended Neville Chamberlain’s dream of appeasement. Howard—and this is not known for certain—may have been aware that Wenner-Gren was supplying munitions from his Swedish company, Borfors, to the Third Reich. In 1939 he’d also founded The Bank of The Bahamas when he’d purchased Hog Island. Through its affiliation with the Stein Bank of Cologne, Wenner-Gren was helping finance Gestapo activities.

Technically, the Swedish tycoon had been barred from entry into The Bahamas at the time of his secret meetings there with Howard in 1945. He’d been “blacklisted.”

Since August 17, 1940, the Duke of Windsor had been the governor of The Bahamas, then a colony within the British Empire. As King Edward VIII, he’d abdicated his throne to “marry the woman I love,” the scandal-soaked American divorcée, Wallis Simpson.

Bowing to pressure from both Whitewall and Washington, the Duke of Windsor, as governor, signed a document declaring his dear friend, Wenner-Gren, *persona non grata* in The Bahamas. Wenner-Gren was ordered to leave The Bahamas at once, just as Howard himself would eventually be told the same thing. The Swede then sailed aboard the *Southern Cross* to Mexico, where he acquired a mansion in Cuernavaca. There he lived for the duration of the war, venturing out only rarely, and only under the cloak of extreme secrecy. Some of those visits were to The Bahamas, where he met discreetly with the Windsors. Norman Island in the Exumas was believed to have been the island where Wenner-Gren had a rendezvous with the Windsors.

In 1943, it was the Duke himself who invited Wenner-Gren to a secret meeting in The Bahamas despite his having blacklisted him. The Duke had been informed of an imminent plot wherein he’d be kidnapped from his low-security “tour of duty” in The Bahamas and imprisoned by the Nazis. Hitler would then try to arrange a prisoner’s exchange with Britain, their former king returned if they’d free Hitler’s former deputy, Rudolf Hess, then a prisoner in Britain. Apparently, the Duke believed at the time that he desperately needed the industrialist’s support to avoid such a fate. In the wake of his face-to-face dialogues with the Duke, Wenner-Gren intervened with his friend, Field Marshal Göring, and the Nazi plan to kidnap the Duke was cancelled.

At some point, probably in 1942, the darkest year for the Allies in World War II, Howard flew to Mexico to meet with Wenner-Gren to discuss the Rover Steamship Company and other mutual business interests. Johnny Meyer was aboard Howard’s flight to Mexico where part of his job would be the arrangement of sexual liaisons for his boss. Meyer accompanied Howard to at least two dinner parties at the Cuernavaca mansion of Wenner-Gren.

Meyer claimed that the Swede was in an ebullient mood, predicting that Hitler would “outdistance” Britain in the war and eventually defeat the United States in a carefully orchestrated series of invasions.

Also according to Meyer, during his dinner parties in Cuernavaca, Wenner-Gren revealed to Howard Hitler’s plans, as transmitted to him through Field Marshal Göring, for a post-war America. Göring was convinced that as storm troopers marched through the streets of Boston and New York, as they’d done in Paris, millions of German-Americans would rise up for the Fatherland, rebelling against U.S. government oppression. Instead of defending their adopted country, they’d help in its subjugation. Within that scenario, the dictator would install the Duke of Windsor as viceroy, with the assumption that Americans would consequently embrace and endorse his American-born “queen.” Meyer recalled that at Cuernavaca “Howard found the plan laughable.”

Roughly three years later, during their Bahamian rendezvous of 1945, Wenner-Gren presented a radically different scenario to Howard. At that point, with Russian and American forces zeroing in on a full-scale invasion of Berlin, an astute and worldly man like the Swede had to admit that the Nazi regime was close to the point of collapse.

Wenner-Gren, therefore, sought Howard’s support in his plan for profit-making in a post-war world. Wenner-Gren needed a massive infusion of cash and influence, preferably from American sources, if his scheme to become “the major player” in the development of post-war Europe were to be realized.

In advance of Howard’s arrival, Wenner-Gren had already secured, privately, the cooperation of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor.

During previous visits to Nassau, Howard had met the royal pair before. But the Windsors, eccentrics themselves, found Howard much too eccentric for their refined tastes. On Howard’s second night on Hog Island, Wenner-Gren threw a private dinner party for Howard, the Duke and his Duchess, and three or four trusted friends, whose names are not known.

Amos Symonette, a Bahamian aide to the Duke, later reported to Mrs. Reno at *The Miami Herald* some “tidbits” of conversation that he’d overheard on the night that the Duke and Duchess, along with Howard, were entertained by Wenner-Gren. The Duke startled his fellow guests by reporting that he planned to resign as governor on March 15, 1945.

Symonette told Mrs. Reno that the Duke seemed disappointed that the war might be concluded. At one point, if Symonette is to be believed, the Duke actually blamed “Roosevelt and the Jews” for America’s entry into the war, leaving out the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The aide to the Duke claimed that Howard remained silent throughout the recitation, although it was known that both Howard and Wenner-Gren shared the governor’s anti-Semitic views.

The Duchess cited several financial worries and shared her disappointment that drillers did not strike oil on their vast tracts of land in Alberta, Canada.

Wenner-Gren was more reassuring about the future. Now that it appeared that the Third Reich was losing, he was rapidly switching his loyalties over to the Allies since he knew that they would be the source of his future earnings in the post-war era.

There will be money to make—“big, big money”—he assured Howard, the Duke, and the Duchess, after the war. “More money than has been made at any time in the history of the world. There is a daunting fortune to be made just in rebuilding a devastated Europe.”

Although his grand scheme was never activated, it seemed that Wenner-Gren was advocating some sort of capitalistic and profit-making venture that eerily evoked some of the tenets of the U.S. financed Marshall Plan for the recovery of a war-torn Europe.

At the dinner, citing the bombs that had devastated parts of England, he said he’d need the Duke’s political influence in “the resurrection of London.” The Swede was hoping for millions of pounds in government-sponsored contracts, and he was just assuming that the Duke still had political influence in Britain.

After the dinner, and on the following day, Wenner-Gren, along with his alcoholic American wife, the singer, Marguerite Ligget, sailed to the Bahamian Out Islands with Howard. He even let Howard command the *Southern Cross* again. At the time, the yacht was staffed by former officers of the Swedish Navy, each of whom were alleged to have pro-Nazi sentiments.

Since Wenner-Gren was known for having zero tolerance for bad dress, both among his guests and crew, Howard dressed nightly for dinner in the wardrobe he’d acquired in Miami.

Although details were lacking in Mrs. Reno's report to *The Miami Herald*, Howard's erratic behavior on the cruise shocked and profoundly upset Wenner-Gren. The industrialist finally concluded that Howard had become "a wreck of a human being" on the verge of a total breakdown. He urged Howard to spend time at a retreat in Mexico that could restore him physically and mentally. At one point, Howard is alleged to have stood up at the dinner table and urinated into a bowl of food. He could be heard sobbing deep into the night, and he also frequently appeared nude on the deck.

Howard kept repeating simple phrases over and over again. He'd do irrational things such as ordering bottles and bottles of water delivered to his cabin until he'd depleted the supply on board. At one point, after a visit to Norman Island, Howard jumped overboard and began swimming away from the ship to the point where he had to be rescued by the crew, all skilled swimmers.

By the end of their cruise through the Out Islands, Wenner-Gren had obviously concluded that Howard in his condition was too reckless to take on as a business partner in any capacity.

At Howard's request, the *Southern Cross* sailed on to Cat Island in The Bahamas, a sybaritic retreat both then and now. Once there, the yacht picked up Errol Flynn, who was not only Howard's sometimes lover but a close friend of Wenner-Gren himself. After bringing Errol aboard, the *Southern Cross* sailed back to Mexico.

Arriving at port, Howard was invited to stay in Cuernavaca with Wenner-Gren, but Errol had made other plans. Howard and Errol told Wenner-Gren good-bye and were driven to the Cuernavaca home of a notorious homosexual, Harry Carstairs, who was believed to have been a Nazi collaborator.

Carstairs was famous in Mexico at the time for securing "the world's most beautiful boys," all male prostitutes. He constantly demanded a fresh supply, dismissing those young men of whom he'd grown tired. As a special treat for guests such as Errol (a frequent visitor) or Howard, he had the young men lie nude all day around his Olympic-size pool. His guests were invited to stroll among the young men and make a selection, taking any of the hustlers upstairs for seduction in one of the lavishly decorated bedrooms.

After two weeks of that, Howard had had his fill. Renting a private plane, he flew Errol back with him to Los Angeles where Howard wanted to resume his life.

Errol later told such friends as Bruce Cabot and David Niven that during their time together in Cuernavaca, perhaps inspired by the dialogues with Wenner-Gren, Howard had revealed a permutation of two of his long-standing dreams. He hoped to develop the greatest reconnaissance plane in the history of aviation. It would fly over Communist-held territories after the war. He also he wanted to pilot the Hercules cargo plane on its inaugural flight.

Not only that, but Howard had also vowed to buy one of Hollywood's major film studios, promising Errol that he'd make him king of the studio.

"And for my Queen?" Errol asked.

"Rita Hayworth."

Los Angeles, 1942-1964

Passing through the outer offices of Samuel Goldwyn, Howard stole a copy of *Life* magazine. Two months before, he'd told Noah Dietrich that he could no longer afford to subscribe to the magazine. Therefore, whenever he wanted to read it, he was forced to lift a copy from a subscriber.

The date on the cover was June 8, 1942. Jane Greer, then known by the ingenuous name of Bettejane, was modeling a newly created uniform for the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, which later became the Women's Army Corps (WAC). Howard was immediately captivated by this teenager's picture. She was eighteen at the time. "She's sloe-eyed," he told Johnny Meyer. "With a Mona Lisa smile. Get me this girl. Track her down. Put her under personal contract to me."

Howard wasn't the only man reading that issue of *Life* magazine. Beating Howard to Bettejane, Rudy Vallee called her mother, claiming that her daughter should be in pictures, and that he was the man to help make it happen. A movie fan like Mrs. Greer already knew of the crooner's reputation as a womanizer. She accurately determined that Rudy wanted into "my daughter's pants more than he wanted to make her a movie star."

Mrs. Greer refused to let Rudy date her daughter, even though she'd been a fan of this wavy-haired singer with the quivery vocals. He had been a sensation in the 1920s, as famous in his heyday with screaming fans as were Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, and the Beatles. To get to Jane, *The Vagabond Lover* would have to wait his turn.

But when Howard called Mrs. Greer expressing interest in the movie star potential of her daughter, things were different. Even though he had a far more extensive reputation as a womanizer than Rudy, Mrs. Greer, for some reason never explained, accepted his offer of rail tickets to Hollywood and—with a promise of future stardom—a possible movie contract for her daughter.

Jane later recalled that "Howard Hughes was just a name in the newspapers to me—an aviator, and the producer of a very controversial movie, *The Outlaw*."

The five-foot, five-inch beauty with dark brown hair and haunting brown eyes had a deep-toned voice and perfectly chiseled features. Her look, especially her enigmatic smile, was the result of her struggle with Bell's palsy, a form of partial paralysis which struck her at the age of fifteen. The muscles of her face were temporarily immobilized, and she practiced for hours in front of the mirror "to return expression to my face."

Her only professional training had been as a model and as a "girl singer" with Enric Madriguera's band at The Latin Club Del Rio in Washington, D.C. Her contralto voice was pleasant enough for audiences that weren't particularly demanding, but, as Jane later admitted, "I was no Dinah Shore."

After only a week in Hollywood, Jane found herself under "virtual house arrest" in an apartment that Johnny Meyer had secured for Jane and her mother. Jane was told that she was never to leave the house, that all supplies and foodstuff would be brought in for her. She was to wait by the phone for Howard to contact her. "Imagine me, a young girl, arriving in glamorous Hollywood and sitting by the radio every night waiting for a phone call. Mother was nearby with her knitting. After a few months of this, I couldn't take it anymore. I started to slip out at night. Actually Rudy Vallee obtained my phone number, and I began to date him. Soon I was the girl singer with his Coast Guard band. Howard's spies soon found out."

She remembered that it was three o'clock in the morning when she woke up to find Johnny Meyer and his cohort, Charlie Guest, standing over her bed. Guest was an assistant of Howard's, and had once been his golf instructor. "At first I thought rapists had broken in on me," Jane said. "I screamed."

Since Howard was her landlord, and had a passkey to her apartment, Meyer had let himself in, along with Guest.

"Meyer ordered me to get up and leave immediately to see Howard," Jane later recalled. "I was wearing a nightgown but there was no time to get

dressed, not even to refresh my makeup and put on a dress. I was told that Howard often interviewed members of his staff at three o'clock in the morning. 'He never sleeps and never pays attention to time,' Guest told me. I slipped a trenchcoat over my nightgown and was driven to 7000 Romaine Street."

She was ushered into the studio's theater-like screening room. Only the first row was illuminated. Looking around, she saw that all the seats were empty, with no one in sight.

"I was there for a long time," she said, "and suddenly I heard footsteps. Then I saw a shadowy figure, tall and lanky. I just knew it was Howard Hughes. He stood near the light, but only his feet were illuminated. He was wearing tennis shoes. He took a seat in the front row, and called for me to come and sit beside him. I was scared."

Jane reported that for a few minutes Howard just stared at her, not saying a word. "I was far too terrified to speak," she said. "Here I was, sitting with the richest man in the world—me, little Bettejane. All I could think about was that my mother used to give Donne—that was my twin brother—and me two cents on some nights to go to the store to buy lemon-flavored hard candy. We had no food in the house. Penny hard candy was an old timey remedy to stave off hunger in a kid when the pantry was bare."

"You look like my mother," he said. "I don't remember her name, but you remind me of her."

"I don't know if it's a compliment for a young woman to be told by a man that she looks like his mother," Jane said.

"I've learned some very bad news," he said, "and I want you to tell me it isn't true. Are you dating Rudy Vallee?"

"He's a nice man."

"No, he's not," he said. "Vallee is a pervert. Besides, I didn't ask if he's a nice man. I asked you if you were dating him."

"I've been singing with his band—I wouldn't call it dating."

"You were instructed never to leave the apartment," he told her. "You disobeyed me. You are never to see Vallee again."

"He's been very nice to mother and me."

"It's over between you! Never, never see him again!"

"I have a contract with you," she said, standing up and exploding in anger.

"That is for appearances on the screen, of which there have been none. What I do with my private life is no god damn business of yours. Do you think you own me?"

"I see," he said. He stood up, towering over her. "I have to teach you a lesson. You're from back East. But you're in California now. I run this town. No one defies me without paying a price." He walked away, turning to look back at her. "Good night."

"What kind of price are you talking about?" she demanded to know.

He glanced at her ominously. "You'll find out."

In time, she learned that that price meant no screen roles for her.

On December 2, 1943, Jane impulsively married Rudy Vallee, mainly to escape from Howard's iron thumb. At the Hollywood-Westwood Community Chapel, a band from the Coast Guard arrived for the ceremony, and the wedded pair passed beneath an arch of crossed sabers. Rudy took her to live in a 22-room mansion in the San Fernando Valley that had once been occupied by the fading star, Ann Harding.

Howard had warned Jane that Rudy was a pervert. After a month of marriage, she began paying closer attention to Howard's assessment. Vallee insisted on dressing her in "a whore's underwear," including black stockings and black spike heels—"real Joan Crawford fuck me shoes," Jane said. He also dyed her hair jet black and insisted that she paint her face a chalky white. After her costume met with his approval, he demanded that she whip his buttocks with a leather belt until they were raw. Only then, would he have sex with her.

Vallee urged her to buy out her contract with Howard, which she eventually succeeded in doing. The contract was settled for \$7,575, with Jane agreeing to pay him back at the rate of \$25 a week. After two checks, she stopped payment, and he never insisted.

Much to Howard's delight, her marriage to Rudy was rocky from the beginning. Rudy was even more of a pervert than Howard had told her. Thinking he'd gone back to womanizing, after only two months of marriage, she eavesdropped on him, only to discover that her husband employed a "madame." The madame was male, and he arranged for well-built hustlers to accommodate her husband.

In March of 1944, she separated from Rudy. Although they got back together temporarily, they parted for the final time in June of that year.

Even before their divorce was final, Howard had come back into her life. Although she had secretly been dating Howard, Jane told the press, "Rudy is the only man for me. Our divorce has brought us closer together. This time our marriage will last forever." At the very least, these remarks were disingenuous, as she hoped to shield her true affair with Howard from the press.

By August of 1944, she was appearing before RKO cameras making her debut in *Two O'Clock Courage*.

In later life, Jane refused to discuss the intimate details of her life with Howard, but she did talk about him. Johnny Meyer was more forthcoming, claiming that Howard's seduction of the young starlet occurred in his suite at the Town House Hotel. He was so pleased with her as a sexual partner that he later rented her a private apartment overlooking Sunset Boulevard. There he could rendezvous with her away from her mother.

Jane recalled her immediate weeks with Howard, "post Rudy," as happy ones. "It was like Howard was denied a proper childhood because of his mother. He wanted to be a boy again with me. Actually I was still a girl myself in those days. I felt that Howard, already in middle age, was trying to recapture some lost youth with me."

"He loved throwing baseballs at milk bottles in the amusement arcades," she said. "He had a charming little boy quality that I found endearing. I think he won every Kewpie doll in Santa Monica for me. My apartment soon filled up with Kewpie dolls. He liked magic mirrors, haunted houses, games of chance."

"I got the full treatment from him," Jane said. "I got to see his charming side. He was taking me everywhere. The Cocoanut Grove. El Mocambo. Walks along the Santa Monica Pier. We ate pink cotton candy and rode the carousel. He sent roses to my mother, white gardenias to me."

Reunited with Howard, she would eventually sign a seven-year exclusive contract with him at RKO, although he would lend her out. Her paycheck was \$2,500 a week, very good terms since some major stars in those days were pulling in only \$750 a week.

She didn't suspect his growing mental deterioration until he took her to the Chi Chi Club in Palm Springs one Saturday night for dinner. Sitting at distant tables were two of Howard's former girlfriends, Ida Lupino and Norma Shearer, each with her immaculately dressed suitors. Each of them would later corroborate the details of the ensuing drama.

Doctors in later life would diagnose Howard's condition as OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder).

Howard's behavior became visibly irrational at Chi-Chi's when he ordered three chocolate chip cookies for dessert. When the cookies were served, he tried to count the chocolate chips in each cookie. Startling to her, he maintained that each cookie was short three chocolate chips. He summoned the

chef to his table and demanded that he rebake the cookies. “I want there to be fifteen chocolate chips in each cookie,” Howard told the chef. “Not fourteen, not sixteen, but fif- Jane Greer teen.”



Jane Greer

Since it was Howard Hughes, the chef agreed to bake new cookies, each with fifteen chocolate chips. While the chef was doing that, Howard excused himself and headed for the men’s room.

Jane dreaded whenever Howard rose to go to the men’s room. Often she was left a wallflower at table. He conducted most of his business during his dates with her, calling associates from pay phones. That night in Palm Springs he was gone for so long that Jane slipped a waiter a five-dollar bill to go to the toilet to find what was keeping him. In the bathroom, the waiter discovered Howard compulsively washing his hands until they were red and raw. After much struggle, the waiter was able to break Howard out of “some trance.” Later Howard explained that he was “washing away deadly germs.”

On several occasions, she noticed that he’d stand in front of doors waiting for someone to leave or come in so he wouldn’t have to touch a doorknob. At night she often wore gloves and would open doors for him.

Later, in a restaurant in Los Angeles, Howard once again disappeared into the men’s room. Another five-dollar bill, and a waiter emerged later to tell her that her date was standing naked in the men’s room washing his white shirt in the sink. He hadn’t worn any underwear that night. Jane managed to enlist the help of the manager, who secured a freshly laundered white shirt which he kept on hand in case one of his waiters spilled something on himself. The waiter was able to get Howard into the shirt. With Jane’s assistance, he was led out the back entrance. In his battered Chevy, Jane drove him home that night.

Her worst memory was when he drove her in that same decrepit Chevy to a deserted beach north of Malibu. She was dressed in a beautiful satin gown for an evening on the town and objected to where he’d taken her. “I want to go dancing,” she said, “Not for a swim.”

He asked her to sing two songs for him, both from a picture where she’d played a “nitory canary,” *The Falcon’s Alibi*, in 1946. The songs were, “How Do You Fall in Love?” and “Come Out—Wherever You Are.” When she’d finished singing, he got out of the car and pulled off all his clothes.

“Howard, I told you, I’m not going swimming,” she protested.

“I’m not going for a swim,” he told her. “I’m going to go into the water and float out as far as I can into the sea, deeper and deeper. I plan to kill myself.” He stalked his way toward the water. She ran after him, trying to force him to come back. He whirled around and slugged her in the mouth, knocking her down on the sands. Her nose was bleeding.

Frantic, and not knowing at first what to do, she ran back to the car where he’d left the keys. Starting the motor, she drove to the nearest motor court and phoned Johnny Meyer. She was afraid to call the police.

Breaking speed limits, Meyer and what Jane called “three of his goons” arrived at Malibu in half an hour. If Howard had meant to kill himself, he would have done so by now. As the men searched the beach for Howard’s body, she sat in the car, nervously smoking one cigarette after another. In what for her was an eternity, but was more likely forty minutes, the “goons” returned, walking slowly up from the beach with Howard.

One of Meyer’s men had taken his jacket and placed it around Howard’s nude, skeletal frame. The men put Howard in the back seat of his Chevy, with Meyer taking the wheel. Without being allowed to speak to Howard, Jane was driven home by one of Meyer’s men in a separate car.

She asked her driver to stop at a filling station so she could go into the women’s room and wipe the blood from her face.

When she got home, she found her mother sitting by the radio knitting. “Did you and Howard have a nice evening?” her mother asked.

As Jane remembered, she raced up the steps and bolted the door to her bedroom and didn’t emerge again until the weekend had come and gone.

Gradually, Howard’s fixation on Jane waned. She married Edward Lasker, a rich producer and attorney, in 1947.

Although Howard had derailed Jane’s career, he didn’t block it completely. She went on to become a Queen of Film Noir, along with Barbara Stanwyck, and he watched her achieve screen immortality when she appeared opposite sleepy-eyed Robert Mitchum and Kirk Douglas in *Out of the Past* in 1947. Jane played the sleek, charming, and baby-faced killer, Kathie Moffett. She was an icy *femme fatale*, one of the great manipulative temptresses of 40s noir. In the film, Robert Mitchum delivers his most famous line to Jane, “Baby, I don’t care.”

Once her control freak, Howard became less and less interested in Jane’s career. His only instructions to his executives at RKO were to “keep Jane bad-no good gal roles for her.”

She recalled a final phone call from Howard in 1964—“or maybe in 1963.” She was making a film called *Where Love Has Gone*. “What an appropriate title for the story of Howard Hughes and me,” she said.

Despite their long-time estrangement, Jane believed at the time that Howard would definitely arrange a screening of *Where Love Has Gone*, purely for nostalgic purposes. It starred three of his former girlfriends: Jane Greer herself as well as Bette Davis and Susan Hayward. It had been based on a

novel by Harold Robbins, who had caricatured Howard in another novel, *The Carpetbaggers*. Further, the plot for *Where Love Has Gone* was based on the murder of gangster Johnny Stompanato, Lana Turner’s former boyfriend, allegedly stabbed by the star’s daughter, Cheryl.

In the 1970s, as Howard lay dying in darkened hotel rooms in various parts of the world, he often watched *Out of the Past*. He’d lived long enough to see it become a film noir cult classic.

“Howard’s voice sounded choked, as if he’d been crying,” Jane said. “I’ll always remember his final words to me.”

“How could you, Jane, how could you do this to me?” he asked her. “How could you hurt the only person in the whole world who has ever loved you.”

“I didn’t really know what he was talking about,” she later said. “I hadn’t seen him in years. ‘What have I done to you?’ he asked me. ‘Tell me, for god’s sake, what have I done?’”

“You know,” he told her. “You’ve always known how you’ve hurt me. It was no accident. From the very beginning, you’ve plotted to destroy me. You and all the others. I know that the people plotting against me had to have a ringleader. Tonight watching *Out of the Past* I came to realize for the first time that that ringleader is you. I saw how you manipulated Robert Mitchum and Kirk Douglas—just like you tried to do to me. But I outsmarted you.”

“I’ve never plotted against you,” she protested.

“I watched you tonight on TV,” he said. “You are the ice goddess herself. You were put on this earth to lure men to their deaths.”

“Howard, you’re talking nonsense!”

“So, now you want the world to think I’m crazy,” he said. “You’ll pay for this. If it’s the last thing I do, I’ll see that you pay....” His voice drifted off.

“Howard, Howard, I shouted into the phone,” she said. “It was like I was speaking into outer space. I never heard from Howard again—it’s a bit sad, really.”

Los Angeles, 1945-47

When Guy Madison, one of the handsomest men ever to grace the silver screen, took off his shirt for the camera, and posed wearing rolled-up Navy dungarees, he looked like one of the exaggerated male body sketches drawn by Tom of Finland.

In contrast, Gail Russell was called “angelically beautiful.” Her big, sad, haunted eyes brought a kind of poetic melancholia to the screen, the camera capturing a deeper sadness that pervaded her real life and ultimately destroyed her.

This young man and this young woman would unite into a disastrous marriage in 1949. Fan magazines went wild, proclaiming the pair “the most gorgeous couple in Hollywood.”

But long before that event, Howard, in the words of Johnny Meyer, “sucked both Gail and Guy dry.”

Ever on the lookout for male beauties, some of whom he’d obtain studio contracts for, Henry Willson was cruising the beaches of Santa Monica one hot afternoon when he spotted Robert Ozell Moseley in a pair of white bathing trunks. On temporary leave from the Coast Guard, Moseley was “the most gorgeous thing I’d ever seen in Hollywood, even with hair on his chest,” Willson claimed. “He had naturally tousled blond hair. There was a soft cleft in his stiff-jawed chin. Playing volleyball in the sands with a pack of sailors, he had the sweetest smile in the history of the world. When he smiled, it brought out his >dimples.”

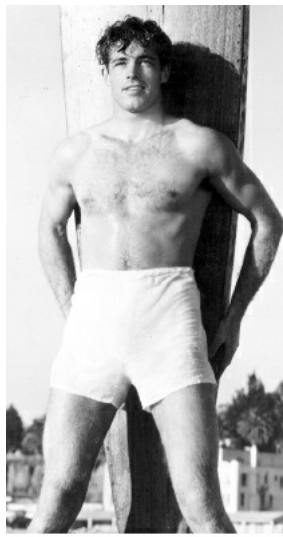
When Willson pitched his new discovery to his boss, David O. Selznick, accompanied with a lavish description of his attributes, the producer barked: “Drop these homosexual fantasies. Can this guy act?”

“With looks like I’ve described, you want Sarah Bernhardt too?”

“Okay, but the name’s got to go,” Selznick said. “Robert Ozell Moseley sounds too much like a Presbyterian deacon.”

Willson claimed later that he selected the name of “Guy” because the young man was the kind of “guy” every girl wanted for her own. He took the surname of Madison from a Dolly Madison cake truck rolling past him. Originally Willson wanted to call Guy “Rock Madison,” but the agent decided to save the name “Rock” for one of his future discoveries.

Guy was about as straight as any other handsome actor in Hollywood. When fat, pudgy Willson picked him up that day on the beach, he wasn’t adverse to returning to the agent’s home and even taking off those white bathing trunks and posing nude for Willson’s private collection of male pornography. When Willson tired of “flaccid shots,” Guy produced an erection for the agent, which was later sampled in the privacy of the agent’s boudoir. That boudoir in those days was busier than any male gym in Hollywood.



Guy Madison

Often Willson seduced young men and never did anything for their careers. In Guy's case, he actually got him a job. Appearing before the cameras for the first time, Guy, with no acting training or talent, did a bit part in Claudette Colbert's homefront tearjerker, *Since You Went Away*, released in 1944. He appeared in a scene with Jennifer Jones and Robert Walker, the latter playing a milquetoast, insecure soldier. In the film, Walker actually faints when meeting this "pretty boy" sailor. Since it was 1944, no homosexual subplot was intended. Perhaps it was shortness of breath on Walker's part.

When *Since You Went Away* opened across America, this cute-as-a-button sailor, Guy himself, caused young girls "to fall out of the balconies," the press proclaimed. A career was born, and filmdom's future Wild Bill Hickok was on his way.

In post-war Hollywood, Guy Madison became a pinup, the male version of Betty Grable during the war years. Willson had scored big with Howard by signing Jack Buetel, and the agent was eager to show off his discovery, first with a set of nude photographs and later with a private screening of *Since You Went Away* at Howard's offices at 7000 Romaine Street. Howard was smitten, ordering Willson to arrange a private meeting with the film's handsomest actor.

When Howard took Guy to dinner, an agent from the FBI was listening behind a banana palm. When Howard invited Guy back to a bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel, another agent was reporting on their movements. Back in Washington, J. Edgar Hoover devoured these reports, which he later destroyed. One night in Hollywood, Willson jokingly claimed that he suspected "Nelly Hoover" was using the reports on Guy and Howard "for masturbatory purposes."

During the so-called romance between Howard and Guy, the actor had been cast in the 1946 soldiers-come-home drama, *Till the End of Time*. Guy appeared opposite another handsome young actor, Robert Mitchum. In time Robert, not Guy, would become Howard's all-time favorite star. In the film, which Howard reportedly saw three times, one of the plot sequences involves Guy taking Robert in his arms. Gay America swooned when the picture was released.

One day when Guy drove up to Willson's home, the agent was startled by a change in his appearance. "Not bad for a former telephone lineman making thirty five dollars a week," Guy said.

"He had a beautiful new car, very luxurious," Willson said. "I forgot the make. He was wearing a suit that only the King of England could have afforded. He wore a gold bracelet watch from Tiffany. He even wore a pair of gold cufflinks studded with diamonds. Not only that, he had a new apartment with the rent fully paid a year in advance. That weekend he was sailing on a luxury yacht to Catalina. In a few weeks, he'd be flying with Howard to San Francisco, Nevada, or Arizona. If he had to go somewhere, Howard would order that a TWA plane be held for his boy. It was quite a life as long as it lasted."

Guy was born in Bakersfield in 1922, and had some old-fashioned California sense that hospitality had to be returned. He decided to invite Howard over for a July 4 cookout in his backyard where the temperature hovered at 88° F

Willson claimed that Howard would never eat ground beef. But for Guy, he did. Of course, Howard insisted on going to his trusted butcher and ordering the beef—only the choicest cut—ground in front of him and only after the grinder had been sterilized. He even drove over to Donna's Burgers in San Fernando Valley. Donna weighed at least 300 pounds but made the best hamburger buns in Los Angeles at the time. She even made the catsup herself from tomatoes grown in her own garden. Armed with some of her supplies, Howard arrived for a burger cookout in Guy's backyard at his barbecue grill, perhaps a first for America's hero.



Gail Russell

Howard continued to dress sloppily, but for some reason he wanted Guy to be the best dressed man in Hollywood. In spite of his busy schedule, he would often take his boyfriend to Bernie Frome, the best men's tailor in the Los Angeles area. Brooklyn-born Bernie supervised the fittings himself in front of Howard's critical eyes. It was rumored that Howard's purchase of a wardrobe for Guy inspired Billy Wilder to write a scene into *Sunset Blvd.* In that now classic clip, Gloria Swanson, cast as the faded silent screen star, Norma Desmond, purchases an expensive, tailor-made wardrobe for her gigolo, as portrayed by William Holden.

Sometimes Howard would take Guy to the tarmac at Culver City for flying lessons. On some weekends he would often "disappear" with Guy.

Both Willson and Guy were well aware of Howard's fondness for women with big breasts. "That's not the whole story," Guy confided to Willson one afternoon. He unbuttoned his custom-made shirt to reveal the evidence. "After a night with Howard, I can't take off my shirt for a week. Hickey city. Until I met Howard, I never knew I had breasts."

But there was trouble in paradise, and Willson saw it coming. The agent later claimed, "There were things Guy just wouldn't do in spite of how demanding Howard was. He'd submit to blow-jobs but wouldn't give them. I guess Howard got tired of trying to beat down Guy's barriers. I found too many other hot guys willing to do anything Howard wanted. At least he didn't leave Guy without a little token of his appreciation. Often he'd just dump them."

Greg Bautzer had replaced Neil McCarthy as Howard's attorney. The handsome lawyer king of the boudoir was successfully coping with Howard's jilted lovers and helping Howard avoid process servers. "As a parting token of Howard's affection," Bautzer settled fifty thousand dollars of Howard's money on Guy.

Ironically, Howard was dating Guy at the same time he was seducing Gail Russell. "For all I know, Guy was leaving Howard's bungalow as Gail was on her way in," Willson said with a certain wry amusement. "Maybe the two met that way. Who knows? I never asked. Howard must have been greatly amused when his two former lovers—one male, the other female—eventually tied the knot. I never knew if he sent them a wedding present."

Since the end of World War I, the word "bimbo" had been used to describe both dim-witted men and good-looking but dumb women, often blondes.

For Guy Madison, Howard coined the word "himbo."

When the author encountered a shirtless Guy Madison mowing his lawn at Thousand Oaks in 1992, he no longer looked like the actor labeled by Hedda Hopper as "the prettiest boy to ever set foot in Hollywood. Newer male pinups had risen to replace him. Even the gladiator movies he'd made in Europe had dried up. He was last seen on the screen in 1976 in *Won Ton Ton, the Dog Who Saved Hollywood*.

When confronted with questions about Howard Hughes, Guy at first cited him as "a distant memory."

As the night wore on, and over drinks, he became more revelatory, although requesting that his role in the life of Howard Hughes never be publicly revealed. He was filled with stories that included everybody from Robert Mitchum to Shirley Temple to Jean Simmons (Howard's unrequited love). He even asked the author to write his memoirs.

Those memoirs never materialized, mostly because Guy made it clear that he didn't want any intimate details revealed about such key forces in his life as Howard Hughes, Henry Willson, or his former wife, Gail Russell.

Guy Madison did not survive *Till the End of Time*, the title of his 1946 movie. He died on February 6, 1996.

"Arthur Miller once wrote a screenplay called *The Misfits*," Johnny Meyer said. "It was the last picture that each of its stars, Marilyn Monroe, Clark Gable, and Montgomery Clift, ever made. Each of them was doomed almost from the start of that picture. If some screenwriter ever wrote the story of Howard Hughes and Gail Russell, it would have to be called *The Misfits* as well. No two people were as ill matched as Howard and Gail. In some ways, I blame myself. I brought this odd couple together."

Gail had attended Van Nuys High School with Howard's big-bosom discovery, Jane Russell. Gail had sparkling blue eyes—"bluer than Frank Sinatra's"—and a dark, haunting, almost exotic beauty that caused her to be compared frequently to Howard's former lover, the orgasmic Hedy Lamarr.

Unlike most girls who attended Van Nuys, Gail, who had come from Chicago, wasn't dreaming of stardom in the movies. In spite of her angelic beauty, she was dreadfully shy and terrified of the camera.

Nonetheless, she was "shoved" into motion pictures when she was only 19, appearing briefly in *Henry Aldrich Gets Glamour* in 1943 before securing a better part in *The Uninvited* in 1944 with Ray Milland. If Gail Russell is remembered at all today, it is because of this picture. In the movie, she played Stella Meredith. The hit song from the film, *Stella by Starlight*, is forever associated with Gail.

It was on the set of *The Uninvited*, that Gail began to drink vodka to steady her nerves as part of a trend that would steadily increase.

When Gail was introduced to Howard by Meyer, the actress had scored her first hit, *Our Hearts Were Young and Gay*, in 1944.

From the first night he spent with Gail in his bungalow in Beverly Hills, he was captivated by this doe-eyed beauty. He told Meyer that he found her “dusky.” Unlike her future husband, Guy Madison, Gail was a compliant lover, giving in to Howard’s demands. She was later to tell Meyer that Howard made her “do demeaning things,” although she never explained what that meant. He found her weak but also malleable, and he felt he was in total control of her, unlike his other teenager, Faith Domergue, who frequently defied him, and who occasionally ran away from him.

The more he got to know Gail, the more he realized that she was relying on vodka to get her through a day at the studio and a night with him. He did everything in his power to wean her from the bottle. He went so far as to remove all liquor in her surroundings. For dinner, he always took her to places that didn’t serve alcohol.

In spite of this, she managed to sneak around and find a bottle somewhere. He accurately warned her that drinking will “destroy your beauty and wreck your career.” But she didn’t listen. At the time he was dating Gail, he was also issuing the same warning to Ava Gardner. She didn’t listen either.

Unlike many of his mistresses, whom he’d use and dump, Howard for months and even years had a “soft spot in his heart for Gail,” in the words of Johnny Meyer. “Gail would get in one jam with the police after another, often because she liked to drive while completely polluted. She got arrested many times. Every time that happened, Howard would call Greg Bautzer, who got her off.”

Howard continued to see her for two years. Even after he stopped dating her, he accepted her calls. Whenever he learned about another of her run-ins with the police, he’d call Greg to discreetly post bail and get her released from jail.

By 1950 Paramount decided that it would not renew her contract after she’d made *The Lawless*, the final picture called for in her contract. Howard’s warning had come true. In spite of her very limited talent, it was believed that she could have been a major star if not for her drinking.

Although Howard was in control of RKO, he did not use his power and influence to get Gail cast in one of his pictures. On the set of *My Forbidden Past* in 1951, he told Robert Mitchum: “We’ve got work for Jane Russell, maybe even Rosalind Russell, but no Gail Russell.”

Meyer believed that Howard gave Gail “a few infusions of cash” post-1950 but his patience with her was wearing thin. His spies kept Howard abreast of her affairs, notably with John Wayne when he helped her win the lead in *Angel and the Badman* in 1947. But after Paramount dropped her, the parts dried up at other studios except for an occasional role.

In November of 1953, when Howard learned via Greg Bautzer that Gail had been arrested once again for drunk driving, he refused to listen to her call for help or post bond. “Enough is enough.”

He’d learn that Gail had pulled up behind a police car and had persisted in honking her horn at the officer, who eventually arrested her. Photographers were waiting at the station. A photograph of her being restrained by her jailer, Robert Mildrew, made frontpages of newspapers around the nation.

Gail once tried to explain to Howard and others, even her husband Guy Madison, why she drank. “I was possessed with an agonizing kind of self-consciousness where I felt my sides tightening in a knot, where my face and hands grew clammy, where I couldn’t open my mouth, where I felt compelled to turn and run if I had to meet new people. When my parents had guests, I would run, get under the piano and hide there. Everything happened so fast in my life. I was a sad character. I was sad because of myself. I didn’t have any self-confidence, I didn’t believe I had any talent. I didn’t know how to have fun. I was afraid. The bottle made me believe in myself. It gave me the self-confidence men had taken from me. What was I afraid of? Guy used to ask me that. Howard asked me that too. But he too was haunted by his demons. I used to tell them that I didn’t exactly know what I was afraid of —of life, I guess. Isn’t life something to be frightened of?”

When Jane Fonda made *The Morning After*, released in 1986, she studied Gail’s life as a means of convincingly playing an alcoholic.

Although a few minor roles awaited her, her career was all but over after that final arrest. “Demon rum had her in its grasp,” Meyer once commented. She was found dead on August 26, 1961, in her tiny studio apartment in West Hollywood. She was only 36 years old. Her corpse was surrounded by empty vodka bottles and tubes of barbiturates. Her death was attributed to acute alcoholism which had induced a heart attack.



Gail Russell with her jailer, 1953

Vancouver/Las Vegas/Los Angeles, 1945-47

As regards men, Yvonne de Carlo had nowhere to go but up after an elderly boarder in her grandfather’s house walked into her bedroom nude one morning and urinated on her as she slept. Rudely awakened to life and its vagaries, Yvonne was sixteen years old at the time. From there she would go,

after many a detour, to having sex with humpy Burt Lancaster (her costar in the 1947 *Brute Force*) on a black mink coat under an oleander bush in her back yard.

Her path would inevitably lead to Howard. Historically, over a period of several decades, his bed partners and her lovers would sometimes overlap: Robert Stack, Robert Taylor, and Clark Cable. Like Howard, the megaphoned crooner, Rudy Vallee would not only be attracted to Jane Greer, but to Yvonne as well. A different type of millionaire playboy, Prince Aly Khan (son of the Aga Khan) would often fall for the same women Howard did, especially Gene Tierney and Rita Hayworth (whom he married). The Prince would also pursue Yvonne.

A native of Vancouver, and a former dancer, Yvonne rose very slowly in show business after an unpromising start filled with many disappointments. When she was appearing in bit parts, Howard took no notice of her. Costarring in *The Road to Morocco*, with Bob Hope and Bing Crosby, actor Anthony Quinn was enraptured by Yvonne in her small part as a harem dancer. “I want to place you on a pedestal where I can worship you hour after hour. With your goddess-like figure, you should never wear clothes.”

By 1945, Yvonne was cast in her first starring role in *Salome, Where She Danced*. In it, she played a Mata Hari type spy. Howard finally took notice of her. Ironically, the role had originally been intended for his girlfriend, Jane Greer.

Even before its release, Howard had seen Yvonne shimmy her way through *Salome* five times. “He seemed crazed by Yvonne,” Meyer said. At the time, Yvonne was billed as “The Most Beautiful Girl in the World.” That may be hard for television viewers to believe, as she is best remembered today for her most famous role, that of Lily Munster in the 1963 CBS-TV series, *The Munsters*.

As a film, *Salome*, a Technicolor fluff, was dismissed as a “fantastic horse-opera” by *The New York Times*. Howard wasn’t interested in either the picture or the story—only Yvonne. “She’s pulchritudinous,” he told Meyer.

“I don’t even know what that means,” his pimp said.

“A looker with tits.”

Immediately after his long film session with *Salome*, Howard demanded that Meyer set up a rendezvous between him and its star. Within hours, Meyer learned that Yvonne had returned to Vancouver to celebrate Yvonne de Carlo Week, the hometown girl who had made good in Hollywood. On hearing this, Howard demanded that Meyer fly immediately to Vancouver to arrange a date for him.

In Canada, Meyer encountered Yvonne at a gala dinner thrown in her behalf. She readily agreed to meet Howard.



Yvonne De Carlo

Taking off on September 5, 1945 in his D-23, Howard violated wartime regulations and flew across the Canadian border into British Columbia. To gain clearance during those closing days of World War II, he falsely claimed he was conducting top-secret government business. In spite of the rationing that was stringently enforced at the time, he tapped into a supply of emergency army fuel. At the Canadian border, authorities noticed the Army Air Corps’s star emblazoned on the fuselage of his B-23, and quickly cleared him.

In Washington, J. Edgar Hoover heard about this impulsive flight. He immediately assigned two of his agents in Vancouver to follow Howard’s trail. He was mystified why the aviator would be making this sudden and mysterious flight to Canada. Hoover’s initial fear was that Howard was going to turn over secret plans to Canadian aviation authorities, or cut a separate deal with them to build aircraft superior to anything the United States was flying at the time.

Left behind in Los Angeles were Lana Turner, Linda Darnell, Ava Gardner, and a “poor and lonely” Faith Domergue.

The next evening in Vancouver, Howard showed up at yet another dinner honoring Yvonne, “the conquering heroine.” She vividly recalled her first sight of him in her memoirs, *Yvonne* published in 1987 and dedicated to everybody “from kings and princes to truck drivers.” She found him “lanky, underfed, and remarkably sad. I immediately felt my maternal instincts coming out. Not that I was attracted to him in any way; I just felt kind of sorry for him.”

The next day he met her family, grandmother and all, and took her to the best golf course in Vancouver where he tried to teach her the game. That sport was followed by a sightseeing flight over Vancouver and, later, a shopping expedition. He even remembered to purchase a leather purse for grandmother.

After his first date with Yvonne, Howard told Meyer that the actress resembled his mother, but he’d said that about many women—true or not.

In Washington, Hoover assigned two of his agents in Vancouver to trail both Yvonne and Howard. A journalist was also on their trail. He called his

scoop into *The New York Post*, whose headline the next day proclaimed: HUGHES CHASES DE CARLO TO CANADA.

Action was immediate at the War Materiel Command in Washington. Officials there stripped Howard of military privileges for his personal fleet of airplanes and also cancelled his fuel priority.

Even a maid was hired at Howard's hotel suite to search for "rubbers" from Howard's nightly lovemaking with Yvonne. When one was found, it was dispatched to Washington where Hoover had his laboratory test Howard's semen.

Hoover's wiretaps revealed many of Howard's plans, including his plans to extend TWA routes across the Pacific, an expansion that would position his airline into direct competition with Pan American.

Later, an FBI report (#62-2682), wrongly concluded that by October 2, 1945, Yvonne De Carlo had succeeded Ava Gardner as the primary consort of Howard Hughes.

When it was time to leave Vancouver, Howard threw a big party for Yvonne, her family, and friends, bringing in an orchestra for the occasion. Yvonne recalled that "I felt like a queen."

She remembered more, finding that his seduction of her "wasn't bad—maybe a little too much on the clinical side." At that point in his life, he'd been studying medical books on sexual intercourse—"you know," he told Yvonne, "the kind that's delivered in plain brown paper."

She felt that his lovemaking grew better in time—"maybe all that reading paid off." In her view he was more an "expert" lover than a "passionate" one. In her memoirs, she claimed that Howard would go into the differences between male and female orgasm, calling the female climax "an implosion, a reaction to the male explosion." At times she found his clinical sex talk boring.

She was among the first to notice that he had stopped cutting his toenails. "He had long, curling toenails that nearly wrapped themselves around his toes," she said.

He was growing increasingly obsessed with the penis size of men who had made love to women he was also seducing. This began to manifest itself with Yvonne, as he demanded details about past lovers—"right down to dimensions."

She did not have to report to the studio right away, so he flew her to Reno and on to Las Vegas where he checked her into El Rancho with himself. There she remembered his bathing of her. He always liked his women very clean before he performed oral sex on them. Soaping her breasts, he said, "There is nothing quite so appealing on a woman as a nice set of lavalieres." Years later, when Yvonne was "comparing notes" about men with Ava Gardner, she told her that Howard was something of a "lavalier man." Ava laughed but already knew that.

In Las Vegas, Howard was not secretive in his courtship of Yvonne, appearing at such clubs and resorts as the Flamingo with her. She wondered why their names weren't getting into the press. Later, she found out that Meyer was bribing columnists with whiskey, French perfumes, and even gold watches to keep their romance out of print.

Howard wooed her between phone calls. "He was always taking a call or making one," she said. At a stopover at a small airport, as she was coming out of the women's room, she overheard him angrily talking to someone on the phone. "Is this your final answer?" Howard asked this unknown person. "You just plain don't give a damn, do you? You never cared at all, did you?"

Yvonne didn't know who he was talking to and "tippy-toed" back to the plane without his discovering her.

When he'd joined her in the cockpit, he grabbed her by the shoulders. "Are you serious about me?" he asked.

She stuttered through her reply. "Why... uh, yes... yes, I am."

All he did was nod at her answer, as he prepared his private plane for takeoff.

Once in Vegas he presented her with a tiny watch with a black ribbon strap. "A watch that one could find for ten dollars at a corner drugstore," Yvonne said. In contrast, he'd presented Ava Gardner a cardboard box filled with a million dollars worth of jewelry from Tiffany's. Yvonne would have preferred an engagement ring like he'd presented to Ginger Rogers.

From Vegas, he flew her to Pebble Beach for three days, checking her into a lavish suite adjoining his at the Del Monte Lodge. He confided in her that he hadn't been here since the late 20s when he'd arrived with Billie Dove and had proposed marriage to her, only to be rejected.

Yvonne later admitted that she fully expected a marriage proposal from him as well, but none was forthcoming. "He probably knew I wouldn't have turned him down," she later wrote in her memoirs.

Before flying back to Los Angeles with Howard, Yvonne said that she was "seriously in love." Back at work at her studio, she continued to see Howard at his suite at the Town House Hotel where they spent many a beautiful evening making love. They were often spotted about town, perhaps at a dinner at Perino's, where that well-dressed couple sitting at the next table might well have been FBI agents.

Her rival at Universal was a beauty from the Dominican Republic, Maria Montez. Today, one of the reigning figures of cinematic camp, Maria Montez is known as "Cobra Woman." Even though they were rivals at the studio, Maria and Yvonne became friends off-screen. Yvonne remembered meeting her for lunch at the Brown Derby. Accompanying Maria was none other than Pat DeCicco, her agent. "Thees Howard Hughes," Maria said. "He ees not for you."

"Don't you know about all the other girls in his life?" DeCicco asked. "Don't overlook Linda Darnell and countless others, a whole stable of chicks stashed away."

Yvonne recalled that she "felt sick" at hearing these revelations, although knowing they were true.

She said that she wanted to announce to the world: "Hey, folks, he's mine." She kept waiting and waiting for a marriage proposal that never came. Finally, she decided to confront him. "Will we ever be married?" she asked him one night at the Town House. "No!" came his instant reply.

Three years went by before she heard from him again. One night he showed up unannounced at her home with a script under his arm. She was shocked by his appearance. As if sensing that, he kept asking her how he looked. She told him he looked fine.

"I lied," she later wrote. "He looked dreadful—like a caricature of his former self. His face seemed drawn, there was a pronounced stoop to his shoulders, and he walked with a slight limp. He had aged at least twenty years and had become a shell of the man I had known and loved."

In front of him, she read the script he'd brought along, claiming it had two great female parts—one for Ava Gardner, another for her. After putting down the script, she told him that the part would be wrong for her.

That was the last time she ever saw him. Years later, she said she didn't even get to keep the cheap watch. One night a robber broke into her house, stealing not only the watch but all of her other jewelry as well.

As the years went by, an aging Yvonne spoke kindly of Howard, calling him "one of the most important loves of my life."

Over a period of six years, beginning in 1940, Howard pursued Linda Darnell on and off, sometimes going for months without calling, and then just showing up. She'd married her cameraman and "father figure," J. Peverell Marley in 1943, but a wedding ring didn't deter Howard in his pursuit of her.

Originally in 1939, Marley had fallen for Linda while she was still under-aged, or, as he preferred to say, "jailbait," or "San Quentin quail." She was appearing opposite Tyrone Power in *Daytime Wife* when she caught Marley's attention. At the time, "Pev," as he was nicknamed, was the best friend of Tyrone. The two men spent so much time together in Tyrone's dressing room and in the Fox sauna that Darryl F. Zanuck warned his chief male star "to cut out this faggot stuff!"

The cameraman, who'd photographed such stars as Pola Negri and Gloria Swanson, rival silent screen vamps, was not handsome like Tyrone but exceedingly charming.

Linda said that on the set of *Daytime Wife*, she'd kiss Tyrone and could feel his hard-on rising. "After a take, I'd go and sit on Pev's lap. I'd get him aroused as well. It was like a game with me. But I always lost. Hot and bothered, Pev would go and give his noon-day fuck to Ty—not me. He said I was too young, and Ty was too willing. Pev worshipped beauty: beautiful Ty or beautiful Linda. I guess he liked fucking me better because he married me."

Throughout the war years, Linda and Howard were so secretive about their relationship that her own agent, a generally trusted friend, William Schiffin, didn't know about it. The only person Linda trusted with her secret was her best friend, Ann Miller. Like Howard, Miller was born in Houston. A leggy brunette with a mile-wide smile, she was known at MGM for her gun-fast tap dancing and breathtaking spins. She and Linda remained close friends until Linda's tragic death.

After both Linda and Howard had died, Ann spoke somewhat candidly about their secret relationship, and her own role in it.

Linda called her agent, William Schiffin, one April day in 1946. She told him that Howard Hughes had phoned her and had invited her for lunch. Over the phone, she asked Schiffin to come along as a chaperone. She also lied to him, claiming that she'd never met Howard before and was afraid that he'd put the make on her unless she was accompanied by her agent.

"You don't need a chaperone," Schiffin chided her. "You're a big girl now!" Nonetheless, he agreed to accompany her to this luncheon. He mistakenly thought his client would be meeting Howard for the first time.

A limousine arrived to drive them to the airport. "Oh, my God," Linda said, "he's going to fly us to New York for lunch—I just know it."

"You wouldn't expect the great Howard Hughes to invite us to lunch at Barney's Beanery, now would you?" he asked her.

"Stick with me at every minute," Linda pleaded. "I hear he's the biggest wolf in Hollywood and he might take advantage of me."

At the airport, an attendant greeted the agent and his star and directed them aboard a TWA *Constellation*. On board, they were startled to find that they were the only passengers, and that the plane's destination was San Francisco. As the large and virtually empty plane taxied down the runway, that same attendant served both of them champagne, pouring it from a rare bottle of Dom Perignon from Howard's pre-war stash of liquor.

Once airborne, Linda was directed to the front of "Connie" where she found Howard in the pilot's seat. She hadn't seen him in more than a year. He invited her to be seated as his co-pilot.

"I don't know what happened in the cockpit," Schiffin later said. "All I know is I hadn't drunk French champagne since the war, and I was going to get my fill." By the time Connie reached the Bay area, Schiffin was drunk. He did remember Howard and Linda getting off the plane, hand in hand, and walking across the runway as he staggered behind them.

Howard had booked the entire top floor of the Fairmont Hotel just for the three of them. He'd even hired a small private orchestra to play for them. An elegant champagne buffet of lobster and caviar had been laid out. "The bastard even knew Linda's favorite flower," Schiffin said. "Yellow tulips. Those flowers were everywhere." The agent/chaperone claimed he had to excuse himself to retreat to his own bedroom because he was about to puke from all that champagne consumed on an empty stomach.

"After San Francisco, Howard wooed Linda with a vengeance," Ann Miller said, "in spite of my warnings that he would use her and then drop her. I also warned her about other women. I knew Lana in those days too." She was referring, of course, to Lana Turner at MGM. "Lana told me that she was going to become the next Mrs. Howard Hughes. I also knew Gene Tierney, who, in spite of Oleg Cassini, was also considering walking down the aisle with Hughes. Even Paulette Goddard hoped that she might marry Howard, that he'd jump-start her career the way Chaplin had done."

Howard hadn't thought much of Linda's last film for Fox, *Centennial Summer*, in which she'd co-starred with Jeanne Crain and Cornel Wilde. He viewed it as a rip-off of Judy Garland's *Meet Me in St. Louis*.

He did accept her invitation to fly for a visit to the set of her next film, *My Darling Clementine*, later described by *Time* magazine as a "horse opera for the carriage trade." Linda, playing an earthy mistress, Chihuahua, was co-starring with Henry Fonda and Victor Mature, directed by John Ford.

Howard flew to Monument Valley, California, for the outdoor scenes.

Monument Valley, 1946

On the set of the film, Howard spent more time with Ford, Mature, and a rising young actor, John Ireland, than he did with Linda. "Howard said they were just playing cards," Linda later told Ann. The tap-dancer wondered if that were "all those boys were doing. I've heard stories," the much more sophisticated Miller told Linda.

Howard came to the set and virtually ignored Henry Fonda, but he bonded with Victor Mature, who was playing the role of Doc Halliday. Howard also related to the film's director, John Ford, and spent considerable time with a young actor, John Ireland, playing Billy Clanton. At that time, Ireland was attracting more interest for his exploits in the boudoir than he was on the screen.

One actress facetiously claimed that she had to be taken to the hospital and "sewed up again" after having intercourse with the massively endowed Ireland. Joan Crawford once confided to Billy Haines that Ireland "went where no man has ever gone before—except Porfirio Rubirosa."

Mature resented hearing stories about Ireland's endowment. Before Ireland hit Hollywood, Mature was the cock of the roost. When serving as a petty officer in the Coast Guard in 1943, he was photographed lying "buck ass naked" on an army cot reading a book. A private took that later-to-be-infamous snapshot of Mature. Somehow the picture made it back to Hollywood where it was widely reprinted and distributed, especially to gay America. Gore

Vidal once wrote that if Nazi soldiers had seen that picture of Mature's endowment, they would have surrendered immediately.

A close friend of John Wayne's, character actor Ward Bond, was also appearing in the picture. He once said that he and John Wayne had long known that Ford was a closeted bisexual. Bond suspected that the director was servicing both Ireland and Mature during the shooting of the film. "He was fond of saying that 'all actors are crap,'" Bond claimed, "but he could easily succumb to a handsome actor if he packed the right pistol."

Born of Austrian immigrant parents in Kentucky, Mature had virtually invented the word "beefcake." In spite of his wooden performances on the screen, Mature was extroverted and gregarious in private. Howard had been impressed with the actor's physique ever since he'd seen him as a fur-clad caveman opposite Carole Landis in *One Million B.C.* in 1940.

Like Ford, Mature was another closeted bisexual, preferring anonymous homosexual encounters in parks, toilets, at beach clubs, and in the back seat of cars in parking lots. Theater ushers were a specialty. In contrast, the women he seduced over the years were A-list beauties—notably Gene Tierney, Veronica Lake, Elizabeth Taylor, Lana Turner, and Rita Hayworth, each of whom would also be seduced by Howard.



Victor Mature

"I can't act," Mature told Howard, "but what I've got that the other competition doesn't is this." Drying off in front of Howard after a shower, he gave him a front-row overview of his beefy charms. Howard later told Johnny Meyer, "I wasn't sure if Victor were talking about his muscular body or his genitals—both mighty impressive."

Over dinner on his first night in Monument Valley, Howard ate with Mature, leaving Linda to sit it out in her hotel room. Mature confided in Howard: "I can't help it if I've got a good set of muscles. But I want to prove I've got something more. I'm tired of being nothing but a male striptease artist."

At that point, and hoping to seduce Mature later that night, Howard promised him the lead in a future picture.

When Howard became chief at RKO, he remembered his long-ago promise to his sexual partner in Monument Valley. He borrowed Mature from 20th Century Fox and cast him to play an Italian-born gambler in *Gambling House*, released in 1951. Mature starred opposite Howard's young mistress, Terry Moore, in this lackluster film.

Impressed with Mature's performance in the bedroom—not on the screen—Howard also cast him in *His Kind of Woman* the same year. That film starred Jane Russell, still under personal contract to Howard. In 1952, he cast Mature once again in *The Las Vegas Story*, in which he also appeared opposite Jane.

That picture is known mainly today because of a lawsuit brought by its scriptwriter, Paul Jarrico. Jarrico had written a pro-Communist propaganda picture, *Song of Russia*, for MGM. In April of 1951, when Jarrico refused to admit if he were a Communist in front of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, Howard fired him. By that time, Howard had become a violent anti-Communist. He also removed Jarrico's name from the screen credits and blacklisted him. Refusing arbitration with the Screen Writers Guild, Howard was sued for \$350,000. But the complaint was dismissed by a judge.

Howard later told Meyer, "I could have Mature any time I wanted him, and I wanted him frequently. But my favorite male star is Robert Mitchum. That handsome devil, however, has always eluded me. Maybe one day!"

Los Angeles/Chicago, 1946-65

After visiting Linda on the set of *My Darling Clementine*, Howard flew to New York on a business trip. What Linda didn't know was that he was escorting Lana Turner to Manhattan. Unaware of the two-timing going on, Linda became convinced that Howard was going to marry her. She absolutely refused to listen to the warnings issued by Ann Miller. In fact, she became so convinced that they'd eventually marry that she called her producer at Fox, Darryl F. Zanuck, to tell him that she was quitting pictures to become the full-time wife of Howard Hughes. "I'm giving up my career for him."

"You're out of your fucking mind!" Zanuck shouted at her. "That horny bastard doesn't need a wife. He needs a harem and a few shirtless teenage boys on the side."

Linda was rearranging her life to marry Howard. She knew that her marriage to Marley was "all but over—just waiting for the burial." But when

Howard flew back to the West Coast, he didn't even call her. Instead he phoned Ann Miller.

"At first I thought Howard Hughes was calling me for a date," Ann said, "and I didn't want to betray Linda. But I thought I'd better go out with him without telling Linda. I figured I'd at least learn what he was up to. After all, he was Howard Hughes!"

Over dinner with Howard, he told her what he hadn't told Linda. Their relationship was over. "There will be no marriage," he said to Ann, who wasn't at all surprised. She'd been warning Linda of that all along. "Tell her to call off those god damn wedding plans. I'm going to marry Lana."

Ann later claimed that she spent ten days and ten nights with Linda, fearing that she might take her own life. "I told her that it was all over between Howard and her," Ann said, "and she took it real bad. She was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. I don't think she really loved Howard. Who could love that one? She just wanted to be Mrs. Howard Hughes. But what gal didn't?"

What Ann admitted only years later was that she went out on four dates with Howard, after she'd delivered the bad news to Linda. "The way I figured it, he didn't want Linda but he might want me. What a fool I was. I gave him what he wanted, but he told me I was too flashy—that he preferred a more natural look in a woman. I placed several calls to him over the next few months after he broke with Linda. He never returned my calls. I was never around long enough to be called one of the gals in his harem."

When many of his former mistresses fell on bad days and pleaded with Howard to come to their rescue, if only with a small loan, he turned both a figurative and literal deaf ear to them. On other occasions, he could be generous, as he was with Linda. Even though he'd broken with her, he still regarded her with a certain affection.

When he read that her home had been broken into and all her clothing stolen, he asked Meyer to hire a couple of private dicks to investigate. These detectives tracked down the robber. It turned out to be John Spainhour, an out-of-work gay actor who had worked briefly for Linda as her unpaid secretary, answering fan mail.

Spainhour had been having a torrid affair with song-and-dance man, Dan Dailey, a married homosexual. The talented hooper had appeared in some of Fox's major musicals, playing opposite Betty Grable. Dailey was the most likely suspect.

A cross-dresser, he'd stolen dresses or gowns worn by either Betty Grable or Linda during his raids of Fox's wardrobe. Both Grable and Linda had complained to Zanuck about these thefts. "Dan had made several midnight raids on my wardrobe before," Linda told Ann Miller. "But never anything so daring as to get his gay friend to steal from me."

On learning the details, Howard righted all wrongs. No stranger to cross dressing himself, he ordered Dailey to return Linda's wardrobe—"every stitch of her clothing; and, yes, even the panties." To compensate, Howard gave Dailey a gift certificate worth five thousand dollars at one of the leading department stores of Beverly Hills.

"Howard always had a soft spot in his heart for drag queens," Meyer once said.

Howard entered Linda's life once again when he cast her in *Second Chance* in 1953. He starred her opposite his favorite male star, Robert Mitchum. Howard had discovered 3-D and wanted to be a pioneer in the new medium, although he would soon drop it. At the time he cast her in the film, Linda's career was on the skids as she moved deeper and deeper into "that certain age" and alcoholism, two lethal combinations in Hollywood.

After *Second Chance*, he would see her only one more time.

In April of 1965, her career virtually over, her finances in disastrous shape, Linda visited her close friend, Jeanne Curtis, in her new home in Glenview, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. She had first met Jeanne on the set of *Unfaithfully Yours* in which she'd co-starred with Rex Harrison in 1948.

Linda had stayed up late that night, drinking and smoking, to watch *Star Dust* on television. She'd made the film in 1940, the year she'd met Howard. Peverell Marley had been the cameraman. But at the time Linda was not sleeping with Marley but with two actors in the film, co-stars John Payne and George Montgomery. Louella Parsons had called them "the two handsomest men in Hollywood."

At some point during that night in Glenview Linda fell asleep with a cigarette in her hand. The room caught on fire. Delivered in an ambulance to the Skokie Valley Community Hospital, she was in tragic shape upon arrival. The intense heat had fused fragments of her pajamas to her skin. In surgery for three hours, much of the burnt tissue was cut from her body. Nearly ninety percent of her body was "turned into a smoky fossil," said Dr. Peter Verges. "There's not a lot we can do to save her." A tracheotomy was performed so that she could breathe. Fluids were fed intravenously into her charred body.

Motivated by some mysterious business, Howard was in Chicago at the time. His aides drove him to the hospital. One of his Mormon guards went inside and bribed a hospital official, allowing Howard to come in dressed as a doctor.

As such, he was allowed to enter Linda's private room where she was guarded 24 hours a day. Thinking he was a doctor, a nurse, Sarah Beevil, told him, "I don't think Miss Darnell is in any pain—she has no nerve endings left."

Howard stood looking down at what was virtually a corpse. Linda's eyes were swollen shut, and she'd slipped into a dreamy state of unconsciousness. The nurse told Howard that about an hour ago, she'd heard Linda speak. She said, "I'm not going to die. Who says I'm going to die?"

"To hear her voice I had to put my finger over her tracheotomy," Sarah said.

There was an eerie, almost creepy quality in the "doctor," Howard himself, standing and looking down at this burnt-out shell of a once beautiful woman to whom he'd made love so frequently. It was as if he had to see for himself that she was rapidly fading from life.

"It wasn't that he was in love with Linda," Johnny Meyer later said. "Who knows what really went on in the head of Howard Hughes, but I think he wanted to see what a burn victim looks like when it survives a fire. Howard often told me that he feared he'd die in a fiery plane crash. He dreaded living after the crash more than he did dying in the crash. He didn't want to hold onto life when life meant nothing but pain and agony. I think he really wanted to see Linda before she went. In some voyeuristic, obsessional way, he was seeing his own future corpse. He always told me that he knew he'd die while airborne. In that, his vision was prophetic."

The nurse, Sarah, intruded on Howard, bringing him back to reality. "What more can I do to help you, doctor?"

When he heard that, he said nothing but quickly left the hospital room and headed rapidly down the corridor before he could be exposed.

Mercifully, Linda never woke up and went peacefully to her death. A memorial service was held on May 8 at a private chapel in Burbank, but Howard did not attend. Neither did he send flowers.

One of his Mormon guards later revealed that Howard watched *Blood and Sand* nearly every month for years. "Over and over again," the aide claimed.

The movie had starred three of his former lovers, all in their prime. In order of his seduction of them, they were Tyrone Power, Linda Darnell, and Rita Hayworth.

Most tales about the life and loves of Lana Turner, MGM's icy blonde sex goddess of alluring sensuality, claim that she met Howard after the war. Lana, in later life, had a different version. She maintained that she met Howard in 1940 and was introduced to him by her friend, Johnny Meyer, who made a career of knowing all the up-and-coming screen goddesses of his day.

At the time Meyer arranged for Lana to have a date with Howard, she was also being pursued by Clark Gable, who was supposed to be madly in love with Carole Lombard, and by Spencer Tracy, who was supposed to be madly in love with Howard's ex, Katharine Hepburn.

According to Lana, during one of the many drunken evenings she used to spend at the deluxe bar of the Bel Air Hotel in the 1960s, she gave Meyer her private phone number and told him that Howard could call her. Greg Bautzer, Howard's attorney who had already taken Lana's virginity, had sung her praises to Howard. The fact that Lana was married at the time to bandleader Artie Shaw didn't bother Howard in the least. It can be assumed that whenever Howard started dating Lana, Artie was out of town.

Lana was about twenty, as she recalled, when Howard first came to call on her, wearing a battered fedora and a dirty white shirt, arriving in an even more battered Chevrolet. Although she claimed that she didn't really care for sex that much, the list of her lovers seemed to prove otherwise. That roster would be long and notable, including Desi Arnaz and Richard Burton, with supporting roles played by Sean Connery, Kirk Douglas, Victor Mature, Robert Stack, Frank Sinatra, President John F. Kennedy, and countless pick-ups, including several (known) gas station attendants.

A jealous screen vamp, the aging Gloria Swanson, dismissed Lana with a stinging comment: "She is not even an actress... only a trollop." Robert Taylor, her co-star in the 1941 film *Johnny Eager*, had a different view: "Lana is the type of woman a guy would risk five years in jail for rape."

Her boss, Louis B. Mayer, did not believe Lana's oft-stated comment that she wasn't interested in sex. "She was completely amoral," he once said. "If she saw a stagehand with tight pants and a muscular build, she'd invite him to her dressing room."

After Johnny Meyer's pre-arranged dinner date with Lana, and two other nights on the town set up by Howard himself, she had a complaint. At the time, she was also secretly dating Robert Stack, "but that was more of a friendship than a romance," she later claimed.

Lana's complaint was that on all three dates, Howard hadn't even made a pass at her—"not even a kiss on the cheek." Robert said that he told Lana that she could get Howard in bed if she acted more alluring. "I must have been a fool to have said that," Robert recalled years later. "Imagine me telling the blonde sex goddess of MGM—Hollywood's original 'Sweater Girl'—to act more alluring."

Robert gave a pool party at his family home at Rossmore and invited both Lana and Howard, each of whom arrived separately. Lana was already in a bikini-like two-piece bathing suit when Howard pulled up in his battered Chevy two hours late. He was attired in a dirty white shirt, baggy trousers, and a fedora. He refused Robert's offer to don a pair of bathing trunks, presumably because he was embarrassed to show off his skinny frame.

Perhaps Lana had decided to take Robert's advice and make herself more alluring. "I'd told her that Howard was a boob boy, and if there's one thing Lana had, it was boobs, as every movie fan who'd seen those bouncy tits in *They Won't Forget* could testify."

"I remember it like it was only yesterday," Robert later recalled. "Lana took a running dive into my pool. As she did, her strap broke loose and just floated away. She swam around a bit. It was hard for her to swim and cover her boobs at the same time. Finally, she emerged like Venus from the pool, modestly trying to conceal herself and deliberately not doing a good job of it. Ever the gallant gentleman, Howard was waiting at poolside with a large pink bath towel."

"That seemed to do the trick," Robert said. "When Lana called me the next morning, she claimed that she'd gone to bed with Howard but had found sex with him unsatisfactory. She said that he'd gone down on her but she'd refused to return the favor. 'I don't like it that way, as you know,' she said. 'We finally ended up in the missionary position,' she claimed."

For oral gratification at the time, Howard still had easy availability to the greatest female beauties of the 1940s along with a series of aspiring and extraordinarily handsome young actors supplied by Henry Willson, *agent extraordinaire*.

If Lana is to be believed, her affair with Howard, at least during most of the war, was "a casual thing." Considering that she had two husbands during this period, Artie Shaw and Stephen Crane, her word sounds genuine.

In fact, she later claimed that it was Johnny Meyer who invited her to a dinner where she met husband number two, the handsome young Crane who told her he was in the tobacco business. With Crane, Lana would have a daughter, Cheryl Christine, born July 25, 1943. Howard sent Lana a diamond bracelet to mark the occasion. World headlines and one of the greatest scandals in Hollywood history would await Lana and Cheryl.

Lana remembered that after she'd filmed *Johnny Eager* with Robert Taylor in 1941, she arrived home from the studio to find Howard sitting only in a bath towel in the living room. Her mother, Mildred, was sewing up a tear in his trousers. "Why the towel, Howard?" Lana inquired. "Are you embarrassed for us to see you in your shorts?"

"Not wearing any," he told her, as Mildred laughed.

"What?" Lana howled. "You go around with those dirty slacks next to your body...with no shorts?"



Lana Turner

“That was all the sewing that went on for Howard in the Turner household,” Lana later said. “Don’t believe all that bullshit in the press, especially Louella’s column, that I had all my towels embroidered with the initials of LH in anticipation of a marriage to Howard. Besides, I hate embroidered towels.”

Once between pictures when Lana remembered that she was “growing restless,” she called Howard and asked him if he’d teach her to fly. She’d read that he’d taught former lovers like Billie Dove and Katharine Hepburn how to fly. Dropping work on his new version of the XF-11, he readily agreed. “He picked me up in his battered car, drove me to Culver City, and the next thing I knew we were on our way to Nevada. After another missionary position night of sex, he took me to what looked like an abandoned airfield. There he taught me to fly day after day. He told me that one day I might play a lady pilot in a film.”

Although Howard neglected the much-married Lana for months at a time during the war years, he was there for her when she needed assistance. On one frantic morning she called him to tell him that she’d come down with a bad case of syphilis, and she feared that she might have infected him. It was never proven but Lana—perhaps erroneously—felt that she’d contracted the venereal disease from her lover, the Turkish actor, Turhan Bey. Howard didn’t want to tell her that he might have given her the disease himself. Nonetheless, he arranged for her to get the best of medical treatment.

Before he resumed a sexual relationship with her months later, he sent Dr. Verne Mason to examine her to make sure she was completely cured.

Lana called Howard two more times during the war with medical emergencies. In each case she was pregnant. Instead of thinking one of her husbands was the father, she cited on separate occasions both Mickey Rooney and later Desi Arnaz. Each time Howard generously flew her to Mexico City where she checked into a private and very discreet clinic, as he’d arranged, to have abortions.

It wasn’t until February 14, 1946, on Valentine’s Day, that a proposal of marriage came in from Howard. At a cost of \$250,000, he invited some Hollywood stars to fly with him to New York. He would be piloting TWA’s “Connie” himself.

For ten days, he’d booked the stars into the exclusive Sherry-Netherland Hotel in Manhattan. Aboard the plane was the blonde bombshell, Virginia Mayo, the Samuel Goldwyn star, in whom Howard had expressed some sexual interest until she got airsick.

Other notables aboard this publicity junket were Paulette Goddard, the faithful Johnny Meyer, gangster Bugsy Siegel, William Powell, Edward G. Robinson, Myrna Loy, Walter Pidgeon, Jack Warner, Jack Carson, Tyrone Power, Frank Morgan, David O. Selznick, Randolph Scott, Harry Cohn, and Celeste Holm. Also on board was Lana herself, Howard’s “official” date. She was flying with her daughter, Cheryl, and Cheryl’s governess. In spite of having Lana aboard, Howard had privately instructed Meyer to arrange dates with both Veronica and Paulette during their ten-day stay in Manhattan, with Howard paying all the expenses. Even so, both Paulette and Veronica were ignored during the cross-country flight. Only Howard’s lover, Cary Grant, was allowed to sit in the co-pilot’s seat next to him.

Constance Moore, the musical star, was also on board with her husband, Johnny Maschio, the Hollywood agent who had laboriously arranged the nuts-and-bolts details of the celebrity trip as a means of building publicity for Howard’s struggling TWA. Constance remembered that restaurateur Dave Chasen back in Los Angeles had supplied the food—“everything from the best Beluga caviar in tins to bottles of Dom Perignon in ice buckets. Even baked Alaska for everybody was airborne. But we encountered what seemed like dangerous turbulence. Perhaps we were flying over Colorado. Howard came back into the cabin and removed a quart of Russian vodka. Cary Grant later told me that Howard had soaked a towel in the vodka and was de-icing the plane’s windshield. At first I thought he was going to drink the liquor because he knew that all of us were going to crash over the Rocky Mountains.”

Unknown to Howard, one of the attendants serving his guests was an agent for the FBI sent by J. Edgar Hoover as a spy. By the time Howard’s party reached the Sherry-Netherland, Hoover’s men had also bugged the suites Howard had rented: one for Lana, another for himself, one for Johnny Meyer, and yet another for young Cheryl and her governess.

Also bugged by the closeted Hoover, the final suite was reserved for Cary. During the stopover in New York, Howard was a frequent visitor to Cary’s suite. Hoover, a closeted homosexual himself, later joked to friends, “From the tape, I learned that Hughes is the husband, Grant the wife.”

When the bellhop opened the door to Lana’s suite, she was dazzled to find it filled with ivory-colored roses, her favorite flower, and dozens of gardenias and purple and white orchids. The next morning, he took her on a shopping expedition to the boutiques along Fifth Avenue, with a final stopover at Tiffany’s. Unlike her friend, Ava Gardner, Lana was not adverse to accepting expensive jewelry from rich sugar daddies.

On the third night, at El Morocco, Howard proposed marriage to Lana. She was at the peak of her career, having triumphed in a big box office success, *Weekend at the Waldorf*, in which she’d played a stenographer in an updated version of *Grand Hotel*. Joan Crawford had played the original role. Howard had already seen her upcoming triumph, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, which would become her most memorable role in her most

enduring film. From MGM she was pulling in a salary of \$250,000 a year, making her one of the ten most highly paid women in America.

Lana recalled that she'd retired about one o'clock that evening after more missionary position sex with Howard. Unknown to her at the time, Howard called her friend, Linda Darnell, and proposed marriage to her on the same night. He told her, "You're the only woman I've ever loved. All the others were mere window dressing until you came along." When she heard that, Linda accepted. She eagerly listened to his next words. "Ava and Lana are all about fake glamour. You're the real thing, a true beauty."

In her autobiography, modestly called *Lana: The Lady, The Legend, The Truth*, published by E.P. Dutton in 1982, Lana, for reasons of her own, minimized her affair with Howard. That was understandable because the last thing she wanted the public to know was "the naked, intimate truth," as the jacket of the paperback promised but didn't deliver. "Touted as a tell-all," wrote one reviewer, "it's more of a tell something."

Back in Los Angeles, Howard agreed to marry Lana in a secret ceremony scheduled for May 10. She'd even gone to "Irene," the MGM designer, and had ordered a special wedding gown. Johnny Meyer showed up as Howard's best man. Lana hadn't even told her mother, Mildred, that she was marrying Howard, who had remained the favorite suitor among her daughter's beaux.

The flowers, the pianist, and even the minister were on time, arriving at the chapel at nine o'clock that morning. No Howard.

"Where is he?" Lana implored Meyer to tell her. He honestly didn't know. "It was a nightmare that featured an uncontrollable Lana who grew more hysterical as the day grew old. She called Noah Dietrich's office every thirty minutes. But Dietrich didn't know where Howard was either. He assured Lana that his boss "often disappears at the oddest times."

"That was not very reassuring to Lana," Meyer later said. "By four she practically had to be carried out of the chapel and sedated by Dr. Mason. She wasn't in love with Howard, but she sure wanted that god damn wedding ring on her finger. I think she was in love with the idea of being married to Howard Hughes. Being Mrs. Howard Hughes in 1946 would have been a very big deal, a very big deal indeed."

Lana quickly recovered from being jilted at the altar. In time, she would forgive Howard and perhaps seek a bit of revenge as well. Within weeks, she told Meyer that she'd fallen in love with Howard's lover.

Tyrone Power himself.

Maybe Lana shouldn't have been so gleeful in reporting the news. The idea of his two former lovers, two incredible beauties, making love together excited Howard. "Somehow he planned to get in on that action too," Meyer claimed.

Actress Paulette Goddard died in 1990 at her villa in Porto Ronco, a small resort village on the Swiss side of Lake Maggiore. In declining health and believed to have been eighty-five years old at the time, she was examining her decaying teeth in a mirror after having carefully inspected a catalogue of her jewelry being auctioned off that week at Sotheby's. Not many obituaries of film actresses are announced on the frontpage of *The Wall Street Journal*. But Paulette was "known in the best of banks," to paraphrase the song from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. She was one of the richest women Hollywood ever called its own, and the biggest gold-digger of the town's Golden Age.

Daring to offer advice to Marlene Dietrich, she once said: "Never, ever sleep with a man until he gives you a pure white stone of at least ten carats. Every woman needs jewels. They're small, easy to carry—easy to hide, in case the woman has a falling out with the man whom she regards as a keystone in her life."

When she seduced men, she liked to date from the A-list. Her aim was always high. Having married (presumably) the biggest name in Hollywood, Charlie Chaplin, she continued a roster of conquests which was not always limited to actors: Aldous Huxley, producer Sir Alexander Korda, Aristotle Onassis, the Mexican painter Diego Rivera, producer Joseph Schneck, socialite and multimillionaire Jock Whitney, and even author H.G. Wells. She even married one of her author lovers, wealthy Erich Maria Remarque. She didn't neglect seducing actors either: Clark Gable, Gary Cooper, Spencer Tracy, and John Wayne, to name only a few.

A former Ziegfeld Girl and later a Goldwyn Girl, Paulette had been signed by David O. Selznick to play Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*. She lost the part, of course. Selznick privately said he suspected that Chaplin and Paulette weren't really married, and the producer feared some "moral backlash" against the film if this secret were revealed. To compensate for her loss of the role, Chaplin presented Paulette with a gold Cabochon emerald and diamond bangle-bracelet.

Meyer claimed that Howard never bought her jewelry, but he did purchase a most unusual gift for her: two original portraits of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, each signed by Walt Disney. At the time, Paulette was disappointed with "such a cheesy gift," although the portraits in time were valued at a "small fortune" by collectors. Meyer jokingly said that the Disney art might have inspired Paulette to become a connoisseur of the arts, herself. In time, she amassed a multimillion-dollar art collection of her own, including paintings by her lover Rivera, such works as "Flower Vendor" and "Young Woman With Sunflowers." On her own, she acquired art by Dalí, Baumier, Degas, Cézanne, Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, and Modigliani.

Johnny Meyer is the only one who ever seemed to know about the brief Goddard/Hughes affair. "Sexually, I think Howard's coming together with Goddard..." He paused. "Forgive the Freudian slip. I think they made it in the sack. Before Howard, I used to pimp young girls for both Chaplin and Errol Flynn. The Little Tramp told me that Paulette was a great fellator—right up there with the best of them."

She even received a kind of screen immortality for this sexual skill. One night all of Hollywood learned that Paulette had disappeared under the table at Ciro's nightclub, performing her specialty on Anatole Litvak, former husband of Miriam Hopkins and lover of Bette Davis. When shooting *Shampoo* in 1975, Warren Beatty included this under-the-table fellatio scene inspired by Paulette.

Even though married at the time to one of her poorer husbands, actor Burgess Meredith, Paulette was eager to entertain Howard after he'd flown her across the continent and installed her in the Sherry-Netherland. In fact, she'd confided in her new girlfriend, Veronica Lake, that she planned to become the second Mrs. Howard Hughes. "Of course, I'll have to dump Burgess." Paulette and Veronica had bonded ever since they'd starred together in the 1943 *So Proudly We Hail!* "Hughes is the only man in America rich enough for me," Paulette told Veronica.

"What turned Howard off was the gold-digging side of Goddard," Meyer claimed. "Paulette wanted to get her hooks into Howard so bad that she tried too hard to please. She made her intentions too obvious, and that frightened Howard. After the third night with Goddard, he went back to the arms of Lana, Cary, or whomever. That "whomever" turned out to be Veronica.

"Howard's romantic link with Veronica was different from that with Goddard, which was all about sex," Meyer said. "People accused Howard of being a nutbag. When he took up with Veronica, he met his match in the nuts department!"

Unknown to Paulette, Veronica also had designs on Howard. He'd installed her in an accommodation two floors below Paulette. Above both of them

were other lovers, Lana Turner and Cary Grant, installed in suites of their own at the Sherry-Netherland. Instead of having to cross town, all Howard had to do to visit these various lovers was to take the hotel elevator.

Thinking her relationship with him was going successfully, Paulette made plans to continue her affair when both of them returned to the West Coast. She invited him to go sailing with her aboard “Charlie’s yacht—I got that in the divorce settlement along with a million dollars.” Meyer claimed that Howard later said, “She got a million from Chaplin. I bet she’d want ten million from me.”

Although most of Paulette’s movies are forgotten today, except by die-hard fans, she lives on in screen history for having appeared opposite Chaplin as the gamine in *Modern Times* in 1936 and again with her then-husband, Chaplin, in the 1940 *The Great Dictator*.

Her relationship with Howard, in spite of Paulette’s attempts to make it otherwise, remains a mere footnote.

“When Howard came together with that found her mesmerizing, possibly psychot- ?ic,” Johnny Meyer claimed.

Her fame forever rooted in the war years of the 1940s, Brooklyn-born Veronica Lake was most often referred to either as “sexy” or “sultry”—or both. She claimed that, “I wasn’t a sex symbol, I was a sex zombie.”

With her peek-a-boo bang that dropped down the right side of her face, she became one of the most celebrated blondes of her day, with news of her four separate marriages making headlines across the entertainment media.

At the time Howard met her, Veronica no longer had her trademark peek-a-boo. The War Department had requested that she change her hairdo. Too many factory women, working in defense plants, were imitating her hair style and getting their low-hanging bangs caught, sometimes tragically, in machinery on assembly lines. Like the Biblical Samson, the cutting of her hair seemed to diminish Veronica’s standing at the box office. Her popularity was on the wane. She’d never recover her glory days as a leading box office attraction of World War II.



Paulette Goddard

Through Johnny Meyer, Howard had learned about Veronica’s infamous sex-and-booze orgies at her home. Not all of her parties were orgies. She was also known for her relatively wholesome monthly kitchen parties. Many Hollywood stars showed up, the female beauties donning aprons to cook “for the men folk.” In time, Howard himself would be a guest too. But Veronica was always careful not to invite him when she asked Paulette Goddard.

It was at one of these kitchen parties that Veronica would later make the claim that Howard was not really deaf but was only pretending. “I know for a fact that he could hear a pin drop in the next room. His deafness is just a ploy he uses to trick people he’s doing business with. He can hear every whispered secret during a business meeting.” Although that was her impression, she was mistaken.

In New York, Howard landed his Connie at LaGuardia. Veronica recalled that the booze, even champagne, had flowed throughout the plane’s transit across the continent. Not only the stars were sated, but the press members he’d invited along on the junket arrived drunk.

“When the plane landed,” she said, “Howard got real stingy. He even chased one reporter across the tarmac, the guy was making off with a half empty bottle of booze. Here he was, the richest man in the world, standing in front of half of Hollywood raging until he got the whiskey bottle back.”

In her vanilla autobiography, *Veronica*, published in 1971, she claimed that she’d never had an affair with Howard. That was not quite true. On the set of *Slattery’s Hurricane*, released in 1949, in which she’d co-starred with Linda Darnell and Richard Widmark, she confided to Linda that she did go to bed with Howard, but that it hadn’t worked out. “The plumbing was there, but it was out of order.” She was no doubt referring to Howard’s impotence.

She later admitted that she’d been less than candid in her autobiography. “If I had written everything I know about this town, there’d be a rash of divorces and at least a hundred people would die of apoplexy.”

Without actually admitting that he’d failed sexually with Veronica, Howard once told Meyer: “I’m sorry she didn’t get to sample my big surprise. I would like to have known how I measured up to the competition.” Presumably, Howard was referring to Veronica’s other lovers, four heavily endowed men: Milton Berle, Gary Cooper, Victor Mature, and Porfirio Rubirosa.

In spite of their not making it together in the sack, Veronica and Howard became friends. He affectionately called her “Ronni.”

He was attracted by her rebellious streak, and she liked the way he flaunted authority, be it the War Department or movie censors. “It’s you and me against the wind, kid,” he once told her.

Veronica later had kind words for Howard. “He was a strange man, which comes as no surprise to anyone—so aloof and detached but with a trace of warmth for those fortunate enough to be touched by it.”

She might have viewed him as strange, but that was how much of Hollywood regarded her. As a teenager, she had been diagnosed as a schizophrenic. Her mother refused to have her committed or treated for her illness, and as Veronica grew older, her schizophrenia deepened. This was reflected by her heavy boozing and the abuse of her first child. Her orgies were another manifestation of her deeply rooted problems. At one time, she called Hollywood “one giant, self-contained orgy farm, the inhabitants dedicated to crawling into every pair of pants they can find.” She also began picking up strange men randomly encountered. Sometimes she’d pick up men on the street, pulling up to the curb in her car and calling to them. “Hi, I’m Veronica Lake. Get in if you’d like to fuck a movie star. I’ll let you play with my peek-a-boo if you’ll let me play with yours.”

In the years ahead, as Veronica’s financial situation worsened, Howard could have helped her but he didn’t. Through Johnny Meyer, he learned that she’d been evicted from her apartment and was living with Rita Beery, the lesbian ex-wife of actor Wallace Beery, who had once been married to Gloria Swanson. Meyer said that Veronica was having an affair with the ex-Mrs. Beery and was also “getting drunk and fucking Gary Cooper on the side.” Howard’s only response was, “Ronni always did go for the big ones.”

Veronica claimed that the last time she spoke to Howard was in late August of 1948. She called to offer him a suggestion for TWA.

“What is it, Ronni?” she quotes him as saying.

She revealed that on August 11, she’d flown in a 90-ton giant aircraft, the *Constitution*, a plane with a rocket take-off assist that was the largest craft of its type in service anywhere in the world. She said that the U.S. Navy had been proud of the way it had been depicted in *Slattery’s Hurricane*, which was about the Navy’s hurricane reconnaissance research in Miami. Navy brass invited 86 members of the press aboard the aircraft to view the picture.

During the three hours the *Constitution* circled over New York, the press corps was treated to a lavish lunch served by an armada of attendants. A temporary projection system was installed so they could view *Slattery’s Hurricane* while airborne.

“Howard, the greatest thing you can do for TWA is to offer in-flight movies,” Veronica urged him. “It’s the coming thing.”

“Thanks for the idea,” he told her. “Bye, Ronni.”

She was never to hear from him again. He never took another one of her calls. Nor did he answer any of her written pleadings to 7000 Romaine Street when she became completely broke and had to go into bankruptcy court. Later, she was forced to work as a barmaid in a New York hotel and as a factory worker pasting felt flowers onto lingerie hangers.

She died bitter, broke, and disappointed on July 7, 1973, three years before Howard’s own death.

“As for Howard and Veronica,” Meyer later said, “their love affair never even got airborne. But they must have sensed some kindred spirit in each other. Otherwise, their friendship would not have endured for as long as it did.”



Veronica Lake

Los Angeles, 1941-1946

Born in Brooklyn, the Veronica Lake daughter of a wealthy stockbroker, the sultry actress, Gene Tierney, spelled sex in any language. On the screen she’d portray characters who were Chinese, Polynesian, Eurasian, Arab, Sicilian, and even American, but she was always sexy. She told friends that her full name was Gene Eliza Tierney, forming the initials of GET. “I’m going to live up to my name, and GET what I want in Hollywood.”

Tyrone Power had met her on the lot of 20th Century Fox. Later they would appear together in 1942 in *Son of Fury*, which was followed by the far more memorable *The Razor’s Edge* in 1946, based on the famous novel by W. Somerset Maugham.

Howard and Tyrone had seen *Tobacco Road* together in 1941. In the film, Gene played a trashy character called Ellie May. In spite of her convincing onscreen performance, Tyrone assured Howard that Gene had more breeding than Katharine Hepburn. “The gal’s got class,” he told Howard. He was more intrigued with her sexy overbite. “A man can do a lot of things with an overbite like that,” he enigmatically told Tyrone.

On their first date, Gene invited him for dinner but warned him “I can’t boil water.” She did know how to drop two four-pound lobsters into a pot, and cook them for Howard. It was her favorite food, although he would have preferred a butterfly steak as he viewed lobsters as unclean. Nonetheless, he was smitten by Gene herself, not her cooking. She was a beauty, standing 5 feet, 5 ½ inches, weighing 122 pounds, and having brownish hair with reddish tints. He usually went for brunettes.

He was startled by how Gene, in the middle of a subdued conversation, would suddenly burst out with something, speaking at the top of her voice. At first this characteristic amused Howard, who was partially deaf anyway. But later it became an annoyance, because he preferred discretion.

He had become social friends of Constance Moore, and her husband, the agent Johnny Maschio. He was often seen at their house, perhaps thinking he would meet some beautiful starlet there, which he often did. He called them “killer tomatoes.”

One night Gene phoned him and asked him to escort her to a party at the Maschio home. He was flying to San Francisco that night and had to turn her

down. Later, Gene showed up alone. It was to be one of the most important nights of her life.

At the party she met a Russian count, Oleg Cassini, who was working for \$200 a week as a costume designer at Paramount. Gene later recalled that he was “the most dangerous looking character I had ever seen,” with his thin lips, wavy hair, and mustache. At the time, Gene was the star, Cassini a lowly member of the wardrobe department.

Neither could have known that Cassini’s career would one day outdazzle Gene’s, as he went on to become the premier fashion designer for the jet set. In time he’d be engaged to Grace Kelly and would eventually design a wardrobe for Jacqueline Kennedy during her tenure in the White House.

From the night of her first meeting with Cassini, which would lead to marriage on June 1, 1941, Gene would have two men in her life throughout the war years and beyond. Those two men, of course, would be her husband, Oleg Cassini, and Howard Hughes.

Long before he knew of his wife’s involvement with Howard, Cassini had learned much about Howard’s private life from a close friend the two rivals mutually shared—Pat DeCicco. DeCicco, then known as “Mr. Gloria Vanderbilt,” revealed to Cassini that Howard kept “a stable of thirty-six girls at all times, all under contract to him, although none of them ever appeared in a movie. They are on call like a stewardess working for an airline. They wait until midnight for a call to come in from Howard. That call from their boss rarely comes. Howard operates what is perhaps the first great American harem.”

For a while, Howard dropped out of Gene’s life after her marriage. In time, she became an Army wife, living at Junction City, Kansas, near Fort Riley, when Cassini went into military service. Through his spies, Howard kept tabs on her, wanting to know if she were secretly having affairs with any of the Army officers at Fort Riley. Apparently, she was not.

Gene’s troubles were compounded throughout her husband’s posting to Fort Riley. Although she was pregnant at the time, Gene agreed one night to appear as part of an entertainment review at the local Hollywood Canteen. A young female WAC heard about her inclusion in the show. Even though the woman was stricken with German measles, she rose from her sick bed to go to the Canteen to meet her favorite star.

Gene came down with the disease, which was disastrous for her unborn baby. The child, eventually named Daria, was born blind, deaf, and severely retarded. Months later, at a tennis match, Gene encountered the fan who told her what had happened. “I’m so sorry,” the young woman said. “My family warned me not to go. But I just had to see you. You’ve always been my favorite actress.” Gene slapped her face.

By this time, Cassini had been informed of Gene’s earlier involvement with Howard. When Howard tried to come back into her life, Cassini suspected that his rival was just using the Daria situation as an excuse to get close to Gene again. Nonetheless, Howard flew the best specialist from New York aboard TWA to examine Daria. After two weeks of extensive testing, he told Gene that her daughter’s condition was “incurable,” recommending that both Cassini and Gene put the pretty little girl in an institution that would provide for her care. Howard picked up the specialist’s \$15,000 tab.

Touched by Howard’s kindness, Gene began dating him again. In some way, she was doing this to get revenge on Cassini, whom she’d discovered was also having affairs on the side. At one time she suspected that he was having an affair with a beautiful blonde, whom Gene called “a cheap floozy.” Cassini did not deny the affair but claimed that “Marilyn Monroe is no cheap floozy. One day she may be as important as you are.”

Meyer later claimed that his boss fell in love with Gene all over again when he saw her in her most memorable and haunting film, the classic noir, *Laura*, released in 1944. “I couldn’t tell if Howard were in love with Gene or with Laura.”

One day Cassini learned that Howard had been leaving “urgent, urgent messages” with his wife’s “harsh Prussian caricature” [Cassini’s words] of a secretary.

Gene wasn’t very revealing (what actress is?) about her involvement with Howard in her highly sanitized autobiography, *Self-Portrait*. But details of her troubled relationships with both Howard and Cassini have been revealed over the years, notably in autobiographies of Cassini himself as well as of his brother, Igor Cassini. Other sources—including Jack Benny—have also revealed the conflicts within this famous trio.

In the 40s, it was customary for Cassini, usually on Tuesday nights, to go with his pal, Roger Gene Tierney Valmy, to the boxing matches in Santa Monica. Cassini later recalled that during one of these matches, he “had a sense that something was wrong at his household.” Excusing himself from Valmy, he drove back to his home. There he forced the Prussian secretary to admit that his wife had gone out to dinner with Howard.



Gene Tierney

With him, Howard had brought a cardboard box rescued from the safe of the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco. The box contained one million dollars worth of jewelry he’d purchased at Tiffany’s in San Francisco. During their disastrous weekend together at the Fairmont, Ava Gardner had refused to accept it. That night with Gene, he urged her to divorce Cassini and marry him. “I’ll give you everything on earth—and, yes, heaven too,” Gene remembered Howard as promising. He opened the box of gems and generously offered, “Take what you want.” Unknown to Gene, Howard had once offered the entire box to Ava. With the genders switched, the offer was similar to what Barbara Hutton would present to Cassini, following her divorce from Cary Grant.

Furious at his wife’s infidelity, Cassini decided to hide in his garage and wait for the return of the illicit lovers. He suspected that Gene would want to be delivered back home before his own expected return from the boxing matches. Cassini later remembered that he must have waited in that garage two or even three hours, his fury mounting. To clobber Howard, he looked through piles of junk, finally deciding on a two-by-four piece of lumber.

Finally, Cassini’s long wait paid off. Howard pulled up in front of the house in a battered Buick. Cassini could see and hear what was going on. “You’ve got to marry me and leave him!” Cassini heard Howard tell his wife. Jumping out of the car, she protested. “No, it’s not possible—it’s not

right. I'm already married." She fled toward her house, opening, then slamming the front door. Howard had gotten out of the car to follow her inside.

From the shadows, an irate Cassini emerged. "I could have killed that bastard," he recalled. "I meant to beat him over the head until he was dead. Instead I did something silly. I took the two-by-four and whacked his skinny ass. Howard, America's great hero, leaped back into his Buick and sped away into the night."

Getting into his own Buick, Cassini pressed the accelerator to the floor and roared up Wilshire Boulevard hot in pursuit of Howard. He beat Cassini to the Town House Hotel where he was staying. Having eluded Cassini, Howard ran inside.

Slamming on the brakes, Cassini stopped right at the entrance to the hotel and barged into the lobby. "Where's Hughes?" he shouted at the reception desk. Howard had already taken the elevator to the penthouse.

Getting off a separate elevator were three beefy bodyguards, each hand-picked by Johnny Meyer, to remove Cassini from the lobby of the hotel. The muscle-bound men picked the thin Cassini up and dumped him out on the street. Cassini yelled back at them: "Tell your yellowbelly boss never to walk alone in this town again."

Not knowing of this incident, Constance Moore and Johnny Maschio invited Gene and Cassini to their home for a party. A separate invitation was sent to Howard, who showed up alone, unaware that both Gene and Cassini had also been invited.

Howard was standing in the middle of the living room talking to Constance and her husband, when Cassini entered. On his arm was a beautifully gowned Gene in an outfit designed by her husband.

Cassini moved menacingly to confront Howard again. "You yellow coward!" Cassini called out in front of the startled guests. Immediately Howard turned and ran up the steps to the master bedroom where he barricaded himself inside.

Cassini chased after him, pounding on the door and calling him names. Finally, he gave up and went back downstairs to join his embarrassed hosts.

In about twenty minutes "a dozen of Johnny Meyer's best gorillas" [Cassini's words] arrived to escort Howard from the Maschio household. Howard, flanked by his musclemen, rushed down the steps and disappeared out the door. Knowing he was outnumbered, Cassini did not give chase this time.

This would not be the last encounter between these two jealous rivals. Their last confrontation occurred at a lavish party thrown by Jack Benny, in a setting that included a white tent in a manicured garden, masses of flowers, food by Chasen, and a private orchestra hired for the night.

Howard seemed in a more defiant mood on this evening, daringly taking Gene by the hand and leading her to a secluded part of the garden.

With a drink in hand, Cassini stood for half an hour watching his wife in animated conversation with Howard. Finally, he could take it no more. In a more conciliatory way, he walked over and asked Gene if she'd excuse them while he talked privately to Howard. Without saying a word, she left to rejoin the Benny party.

Sitting down next to Howard in the seat just vacated by Gene, Cassini told him, "You're really bad news! I don't believe your intentions toward my wife are honorable. I think you're a bullshit artist! If you really want my wife, I'll step aside. But only if you publicly announce that you're going to marry her instead of offering her these insulting baubles and making a nuisance of yourself. I also want you to deposit a million dollars in her bank account as proof of your good intentions."

"There's no need for that," Howard said calmly. "I'm a Texas gentleman. A man of my word."

"Bullshit!" Cassini said. "I should beat the shit out of you right now in front of *tout* Hollywood. You need to be taught a lesson."

To avoid a fight, Howard got up and walked immediately out of the party without bidding his host a good night. The next day, he penned a note and had it delivered by Johnny Meyer to Gene's studio. "You're married to a god damn, fucking off-the-wall madman!"

Meyer claimed that Howard did not completely "give up on Gene" after the Benny party but saw her very infrequently after that. The competition for Gene's charms heated up. Gene and Howard even shared two boyfriends in common: Tyrone Power and Victor Mature. In time actor Kirk Douglas was climbing a ladder to her window at night. Prince Aly Khan would become one of her biggest catches. Even an aging Spencer Tracy, when they made the 1952 *Plymouth Adventure*, went for Gene.

"What would you expect from a woman who started out by fucking the head of the studio?" Meyer once asked. He was referring, of course, to Darryl F. Zanuck.

Even though he was no longer seeing her, Howard's spies continued to keep tabs on Gene. He was among the first to find out that she was having an affair with John F. Kennedy. That must have caused Howard a certain pang, since he too had once wanted the handsome and charming young man for himself.

Like all sirens of the 40s, the career of Gene Tierney died down to only a burning ember. Her sudden disappearance in the late 1950s caused much speculation. It was later revealed that she'd suffered a nervous breakdown and had been temporarily committed to the Menninger Psychiatric Clinic in Houston, Texas to recuperate. Gene later claimed that "a curtain had been drawn over my mind," as she had trouble distinguishing between illusion and reality.

Unlike many of her contemporaries, including Veronica Lake, she did not end up in poverty. Gene married into great wealth. On July 11, 1960, she wed the Texas oil executive, W. Howard Lee, and moved with her husband to Houston, which ironically was Howard's home town.

Her last known comment about Howard Hughes was a lament. "If I had known what bad shape he was in, perhaps I could have helped him—or maybe he could have helped me."

She died on November 6, 1991.

As other, more voluptuous creatures entered Howard's life, he was no longer obsessed by Gene Tierney.

A new and far more alluring creature had appeared to him in her films.

Miss Rita Hayworth.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Beverly Hills, 1946

It was a Sunday morning on July 7, 1946. The war was over except for some Japanese soldiers still fighting on remote islands in the Pacific, having no idea that their country had surrendered.

In California, the sun had sent its rays to light the bullet-nosed XF-11, Howard's reconnaissance plane, which had originated years before as the D-1, but which had not been readied in time to assist America at war. "We missed out," said Glenn Odekirk.

As the sun rose higher, it fully exposed what Howard called "the most beautiful plane ever built."

For its test run that morning, it had been moved out onto the tarmac at five o'clock, since Odekirk wasn't certain when Howard would show up. Measuring 66 feet long, with a wing span of 100 feet, the twin-tailed craft weighed 47,000 pounds. Howard called its graceful lines and streamlined elegance "lean and mean."

Arriving at Culver City at 9:30am, Howard conducted a series of tests on the plane from the safety and privacy of Hughes Aviation's private runway, accompanied by Gene Blandford, his flight engineer. The tests went beautifully, though Joe Petrali wondered how the FX-11 would perform at 5,000 feet racing through the air at 400 miles per hour.

Petrali had learned that Howard planned to fly the plane by himself, and that he was going to kick Blandford out of the cockpit before becoming airborne. "Howard wanted all the glory for himself," Petrali later said. "I'd argued for days with him, even calling him a fool. I told him that it took two pilots to operate the XF-11. He wouldn't listen to me. Finally, I told him it was a suicide mission and walked away."

At the controls, before taking off, Howard got out of the plane and walked over to greet a beautiful young starlet, Jean Peters, whom he had taken an interest in ever since she'd signed to play opposite his friend, Tyrone Power, in the swashbuckling *Captain from Castile*. He'd asked Johnny Meyer to bring her to Culver City to watch the test run. Meyer rounded up some chilled bottles of wine and some southern fried chicken. What Howard didn't expect was that Jean would show up with her boyfriend, Audie Murphy, the most decorated American soldier of WWII.

If Howard were jealous of Audie that day, he tried not to show it. Shaking hands with Audie and giving Jean a light peck on the cheek, he headed toward the XF-11 for takeoff. Wearing a white sports shirt and wrinkled russet-brown slacks, he'd crowned his head with his lucky but floppy fedora.

Discussing his final flight plan with Odekirk, he climbed into the cockpit and buckled up for the test flight. Condemned by much of the War Department, Howard was determined to show the brass in Washington that he'd designed the world's most successful reconnaissance plane. He'd adorned the silvery wings of his Bullet with blue and white U.S. Air Force insignia.

The day was his. Or so it seemed. Before takeoff, he'd made a big mistake by ordering the plane filled with 1,200 gallons of high-octane fuel in violation of Army regulations that called for only half that amount. Telling only Odekirk, he planned to fly the plane for at least two hours, although regulations called for test flights to be no longer than forty-five minutes.

"Hell, this baby will fly all the way to New York if I want it to," Howard boasted. After taxiing to the end of the runway, he revved his engines, noting that it was already five o'clock. The sun had begun its gradual descent over the Pacific.

It was a tense moment for Howard. A successful flight meant vindication for him. The War Department had reduced their orders for the reconnaissance plane from one hundred to only three aircraft. His engineers had developed a new technique for the craft's propellers. They'd installed two sets of double counter-rotating propellers with four blades on each. "It was thought that the plane could obtain greater speed with eight blades on each side of the craft," Odekirk claimed. Howard was convinced that these new blades "could chew the air" better than conventional three blade propellers.

The government had protested Howard Hughes his testing the plane over the heavily populated area of West Los Angeles. The brass had wanted the craft test-flown at the Army Test Flight Base (later renamed Edwards Air Force Base) in the heart of the Mojave Desert, near Muroc, California. But Howard had prevailed.



Howard Hughes

He was too impatient to take the plane to the desert, and had been eager to test it at once after his engineers told him the craft was flight ready. He'd already waited too long for this day, having spent millions of dollars of government money and millions of other dollars from his own pocket on the XF-11. "I want my brightest dream to come true," he told Odekirk. "Finally," he said, "enough of this waiting and testing. I'm taking her up. That's the only way we'll know if shit happens."

Opening the throttle as wide as it would go, he gave complete power to his Pratt & Whitney engines, the largest piston-drive engines in existence, each delivering 3,000 horsepower.

Signaling to his ground crew and waving good-bye to Jean Peters, he also communicated to an observation aircraft circling overhead that he was ready for takeoff. Pulling back on the stick, he lifted the XF-11 skyward. Even to his partially deaf ears, he heard the sound of his landing gear retract.

The moment he was airborne, trouble set in. Something was wrong, as a red light on his instrument panels indicated. Some of the gears of his landing mechanism were malfunctioning, even though he'd heard the landing struts thump into their bays. Nervously he lowered and retracted the landing gear. Everything seemed all right, but that red light ominously stayed on. Then he came up with an idea. He lowered the landing gear once more, then retracted it. As he did, he pushed forward on the plane's control yoke, adding G-force to the wheels, as they folded into their bays. That seemed to do the trick, as that red warning light clicked off.

He blamed the light on the newness of the plane, later claiming it was "like a baby emerging from its mama's womb—I expected birthin' pains, as we say in Texas."

No longer earthbound, he would later tell Odekirk that, "I felt free at last," Gaining speed, he accelerated to his desired speed of 400 miles per hour, defying regulations. "I was going like a bullet shot through the air," he later said.

He headed westward toward the ocean, as the midsummer sun began its death into the Pacific. The XF-11's path was shaped like a half-moon, roaring first over Venice Beach, then over Beverly Hills before returning to the tarmac at Culver City. He had boasted that "all the doubting Thomases in the War Department will be eating crow for breakfast tomorrow morning." In total command of his "flying wonder," he turned his powerful new machine back in the direction of Culver City.

At 6:48pm, serious trouble set in. Without warning, the craft pitched violently to starboard. Within less than a minute, the airspeed menacingly dropped one hundred miles per hour. The plane was literally "falling out of the sky," he'd later say. His instrument panel gave no warning of any malfunctioning, and his powerful engines still functioned at their maximum speed.

Uncontrollably, the plane was pulling dangerously to the right. At first Howard feared that the right wing might be tearing itself loose from the plane. He stood up in the cockpit, knocking the lucky fedora off his head. Thinking the problem was being caused by his landing gear, he raised and lowered it twice, but it seemed to be functioning properly. What was wrong? Was this flight doomed? Was its pilot doomed as well?

Continuing to lose speed and "falling like a skier from an alpine peak," the XF-11 pitched badly. Sudden wind gusts blowing in from the Pacific only made flying conditions worse, shaking the plane with blasts.

"This mysterious pressure continued to be exerted on the right wing, and I didn't have a clue as to what was wrong," Howard later said. "It felt like someone had chained the heaviest Army tank to the wing. The god damn thing had this drag—no lift at all!"

He later told Odekirk that he had two thoughts—one of his mother, Allene, giving him a bath when he was a child, and the other that his estate would battle for years after his death.

In desperation, he contemplated bailing out, but determined that he had already lost so much altitude that that option was no longer viable. He adjusted the spoilers, the rudder, and the ailerons, but nothing worked. The plane continued to lose altitude. By the time he crossed Pico Boulevard, heading directly for the heart of Beverly Hills, he knew the time had passed for him to rescue the doomed craft.

At Santa Monica Boulevard, he was only five-hundred feet above the ground. Pedestrians on their way to dinner screamed. But their cries were obscured by "a death screech" coming from the plane itself. It was in a spiral dive.

"I'm going to die!" he shouted to the emptiness of the cockpit. But the plane in its own dying throes even drowned out that lament from a man facing death.

Howard was flying into a posh residential section of Beverly Hills on a quiet Sunday at twilight. Movie stars, producers, directors, their spouses, boyfriends, or girlfriends, had come in for the evening from their swimming pools. As he looked down, facing the inevitable, he felt that if he crashed into one of these deluxe homes, death would be instant.

"I knew I was going to die," he later told Glenn Odekirk. "But a kind of euphoria came over me. I didn't have to struggle with the plane anymore. It was fulfilling its own death wish. The fight was no longer in me. I surrendered myself to the power of the XF-11. It wasn't like I had much choice. I'd always feared a fiery death."

Making landfall at 160 miles an hour, the XF-11 plowed into the red-tiled roof of Jules Zimmerman, "dentist to the stars," at 802 North Linden Drive. "It was as if a giant razor had shaved off my roof and sent it crashing into my garden," Zimmerman later told the press. The endangered right wing was the first to break off, shearing a telephone line.

The impact slowed down the plane as it lunged forward, its wing slicing through the bedroom of Rosemary DeCamp, who was resting in the room at the time. She was a famous movie star of her day. Emerging from the bathroom, her husband, Municipal Justice John Ashton Shidler, was just walking into the bedroom at the time, a towel around his nude body. Both of them ran screaming from their bedroom, as the doomed craft piled into their garage, destroying it, before mowing down a row of poplar trees.

This unexpected rampage from the sky ended as the plane crashed through a brick wall on the back side of 808 North Whittier, the home of Lt. Colonel Charles A. Meyer. Saturated with fuel from the plane, it burst into an inferno of flames, but Meyer wasn't in it. He was working as an interpreter at the Nürnberg war trials, laboriously extracting as much information as he could out of bitter and vindictive men like Field Marshal Herman Göring.

Dismembered from most of the airplane's wings, the fuselage and the cockpit, with Howard trapped in it, made their final impact in an alleyway. The damaged fuel tanks exploded, as black smoke rose as if a bomb had hit Beverly Hills. The deafening blast could be heard for miles around, as a ball of orange-red flames shot into the air.

Howard later recalled being on fire, his leather jacket burning. Blood spurted from his nose, mouth, and even his ears. He screamed as he looked

down. The high-octane aviation fuel had ignited his left hand. He slapped it against his pants to put out the blaze.

Ripping off his burning leather jacket, he tried to escape, finding his left foot “hopelessly trapped” in the wreckage. He freed himself by slipping his foot out of its boot. “I remember vomiting,” he later said. “The smoke was nauseating.”

The plane had become an inferno. His burnt hand dripping with blood, he opened the trap door of the Plexiglas canopy. As he remembered, “I summoned strength that wasn’t in my body. It came from God knows where. I would have burned alive if I hadn’t escaped.” Amazingly, he hoisted himself out of the cockpit.

William Lloyd Durkin, a marine sergeant, was visiting James Guston, the son of the Swedish industrialist, Gosta B. Guston. To his astonishment, he witnessed one of the XF-11’s engines crash into the front lawn of his hosts. Although Durkin was certain that no one could have survived the crash, he rushed over to search for survivors. On his hands and knees, he crawled under the flames to reach what remained of the plane.

At first his search was in vain. He could find no one. He was about to flee to save his own life. “Suddenly, I heard this loud thud,” he recalled. “I looked over and saw the downed pilot struggling to free himself from the wreckage of the shattered fuselage. Howard collapsed into unconsciousness onto what remained of the broken left wing of the XF-11.

Suddenly, Durkin found that his own shirt was on fire. He ripped it from his body before wrapping his arms around Howard to pull him to safety. “When I got him to safety,” Durkin later told reporters, “I looked down at him. I hadn’t a clue as to who he was. I only found out later that I had saved the life of Howard Hughes. Actually, at the time there wasn’t much life to save. A hundred people in Beverly Hills had called the police and ambulances. But as I looked at this helpless creature I was holding in my arms, I thought that all the medical corps in the world wouldn’t piece this tall guy back together again.”

A Beverly Hills fireman was one of the first to arrive on the scene. He pushed Durkin aside and examined the body himself. Howard regained consciousness for a moment. “Did I kill anyone?” he asked before fading into unconsciousness again.

Throughout Beverly Hills, people were rushing from their houses into the streets to see what had happened. In a surprising twist, a local resident, Lewis Milestone, one of Howard’s first film directors, lived a block away. He was the first of the “rubbernecks” to reach the scene. Looking down at the pilot, he exclaimed “My God! Do you know who this man is? It’s Howard Hughes. Or what’s left of him.” He looked at the shirtless marine. “Did you pull him from the cockpit?”

“No,” Durkin said, “he’d already freed himself.”

“Then he’ll live,” Milestone predicted. “He’s got a history of walking away from airplane crashes and surviving. He’s God!”



Los Angeles, 1946

On Thursday before the crash of the XF-11, Howard had made a false promise to Lana Turner. He told her that he would not test the spy plane alone but would take along Gene Blandford as his co-pilot.

“I always had this incredible intuition,” she later recalled. “I smell trouble before it’s about to happen to me. I just knew that that damn XF-11 was heading for disaster. When I heard the news over the radio, broadcast as a bulletin out of Hollywood, I knew my nightmare had come true.”

Howard didn’t even tell another of his mistresses, Yvonne De Carlo, about the test flight. But she later said that she felt “that something bad was about to happen to Howard.”

At the Beverly Hills Emergency Ward, a gurney carrying the world-famous aviator rushed down the halls, heading for the operating room. Two tourists from Indiana, William Blakewell and Sally Jeffers, were moved aside to make way for this more important patient. Earlier, the car of these two sightseers, cruising around looking at homes of movie stars in Beverly Hills, had been struck by a speeding hit-and-run van and were seriously injured.

A blood transfusion was administered only ten minutes after Howard was admitted. The first of the attending physicians articulated the obvious. The patient was “in severe shock.” His heart had been “pushed” to one side of his chest cavity.

Applying his stethoscope to Howard’s damaged chest, the attending doctor felt that his patient’s lungs were rapidly filling with fluid. It was as if Howard were drowning in his own blood. “He had hours to live, if that,” the doctor told his medics. He ordered that the patient be transferred at once to the Good Samaritan Hospital which had a burn unit.

Its siren wailing, its red dome light flashing, Howard was rushed to the Good Samaritan Hospital on Wilshire Boulevard in downtown Los Angeles. He later told Odekirk that all he remembered was “a sea of white lights” and some medic speculating that the patient would arrive at the hospital as a DOA. Dr. Verne Mason had also arrived at the hospital in time to administer Howard’s second blood transfusion.

Delivered to the hospital on a stretcher, Howard regained consciousness for about twenty seconds—just enough time to tell the admitting nurse, “I’m Howard Hughes. You know, *The Aviator*!”

Dr. Mason spent four hours at Howard's bed before taking a break. In the corridor he told Odekirk, "It's doubtful if Howard will make it through the night."

The medical report was grim: nine broken ribs—two to the right, seven to the left; a broken left collarbone; third-degree burns on his left hand; his lung punctured in six places; a broken nose; a fractured skull; bad burns on his chest and left buttock. One medic claimed that "Hughes looked like he'd been French fried." There was a severe and deep gash on the left side of his face. Since the collapse of his left lung, which had filled with blood, 3,400 ccs. of fluid had to be drained from his chest cavity. His body was covered from head to toe with deep cuts and bruises. The bones protecting his lungs had been splintered. First damaged in a plane crash on the set of *Hell's Angels*, his chin had been splintered once again. An attending doctor compared it to "a bowl of jelly." When Dr. Mason was not in attendance with Howard, Dr. Lawrence Chaffin took over.

"All I could do," Dr. Mason said, at the end of the first day, "was to set his bones and shoot him with morphine. It was clear to me as I watched him being wheeled away that he was being sent back to his room to die."

Radio bulletins broadcast from Los Angeles alerted the world that one of its fabled figures might be dying. The Monday papers from coast to coast led off with Howard's plight. HOWARD HUGHES GRAVELY INJURED IN CRASH, announced the staid *New York Times*. In Los Angeles, the *Times* headlined its edition: MULTIMILLIONAIRE FLYER GIVEN 50-50 CHANCE. In the days and weeks ahead, newspapers carried follow-up stories, as the world waited to see if a genuine hero was going to make it.

In Houston the editors of both the *Post* and the *Chronicle* were preparing obituaries on their hometown boy. The *Chronicle* was planning to run its largest headline in type so bold and big that it was reserved only for the announcement of the "Second Coming." Even in London, *The Times* was preparing an edition usually reserved for the death of a king of the British empire. During the first forty hours after the accident, radio stations throughout America issued bulletins almost every hour. Police in Houston made plans for what they envisioned as the largest funeral ever held in the State of Texas.

As the deathwatch for Howard began, thousands of letters of condolence poured in from around the world, even from the king of England and the newly installed man in the White House, Harry S Truman, who as vice president had assumed power following the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Truman also shipped him a Congressional medal that the Senate and House had previously awarded Howard for his around-the-world flight. He'd refused to go to the White House to accept it from Roosevelt. The new President told reporters that he thought the medal "would cheer Hughes up."

The mayor of New York, William O'Dwyer, sent Howard a telegram: "Give 'em hell!"

More than fifty cameramen and news reporters milled about the hospital lobby day and night, each eager to be the first to report to the world the death of one of the most famous men ever to grace the 20th century with his presence.

Odekirk recalled Howard's first night in the hospital. He'd taken the room to the immediate left of Howard, and his personal secretary "and guardian at the palace door," Nadine Henley, occupied the room on the right. Against doctor's orders, Odekirk slipped into Howard's bedroom because the door between their rooms was left unlocked. "I remember holding his hand and weeping for about an hour, as Howard silently slept in an oxygen tent. He'd been more than my boss for fifteen years, my comrade in flight. I loved Howard, and if I didn't know that before, I knew it then. Ours was not a sexual relationship, although once or twice on some lonely nights we spent together it almost came to that. Ours was a love affair stronger than any bond he ever had with Katharine Hepburn or Ava Gardner." He confessed that he would have spent the night if the attending nurse hadn't come in and demanded that he return to his own bed next door.

To relieve Howard of his suffering and excruciating pain, Dr. Mason, along with the attending doctor, Lawrence Chaffin, made a decision that would affect Howard for the rest of his life. At any sign of discomfort, he would inject him with morphine.

Glenn Odekirk later said, "Howard and morphine began an affair that would last until the end of his days."

Later, to wean him from morphine, Dr. Mason switched the drug to codeine. In time, Howard would consume both morphine and codeine as fast as his sometimes girlfriend, Marilyn Monroe, swallowed pills.

Hundreds of autograph collectors congregated at the entrance to the hospital and had to be restrained by the police. Lana Turner and Linda Darnell were recognized, of course. Of those visitors whose identities were uncertain, autograph hounds held out notepads asking, "Are you somebody?"

Arriving at the hospital was a parade of international film celebrities of the 1940s. These included Jane Russell, a legitimate friend, but also Joan Crawford, attired in mink and wearing wide sunglasses, presumably to mask her tear-streaked eyes. This was only a show for the press. In private she denounced Howard, claiming to her friend, Billy Haines, that "Howard Hughes would fuck a tree."

Errol Flynn showed up at the hospital but was turned away by Odekirk. Even Ginger Rogers, from whom Howard was estranged, made an appearance at the hospital, as did former girlfriend, Olivia de Havilland. Such unlikely figures showed up as James Cagney, David O. Selznick, and Danny Kaye. Lana Turner came dressed in black, as did Jean Peters, his future wife.

It was Linda Darnell who garnered the most press. In a black mourning dress, she was photographed fingering her rosary. The next morning, the *Hollywood Citizen-News* ran this blaring headline: LINDA DARNELL REFUSED PERMISSION TO SEE HUGHES.

Odekirk had instructions to turn all these notables away, especially acquaintances such as comedian Harold Lloyd and Captain Eddie Rickenbacker, the country's leading fighter pilot of World War I. "Actually, I think Eddie showed up only to see if Howard were really dying," Odekirk claimed. "After all, he was the chief of Eastern Airlines."

Katharine Hepburn arrived and created such loud noise when refused entrance that the director of the hospital had to come down and threaten to call the police if she didn't leave the premises at once.

One of the most desperate-looking visitors was Jack Frye, president of TWA. He was obviously more in fear for the future of his airline than he was troubled by Howard's physical condition. Frye had plenty of reason for distress: TWA stock had slipped from \$71 a share to just \$2 following the loss of a "Connie" over Reading, Pennsylvania. After the Constellation went down, the airline's entire fleet of Constellations had been grounded by the FAA until the cause of the crash could be determined. TWA was losing \$ 16 million a year. Not only that, but the airline also faced a mounting debt of \$40 million, with interest rising daily. Frye desperately wanted to talk to Howard, seeking permission to issue two million additional shares of TWA stock—"that is," he added, "if there are any suckers out there who want to buy it." Odekirk refused to let him go in to talk business with Howard.

The glamour girls would have to wait. The only person Howard agreed to see was Cary Grant, who caused a flutter among female staff members at the hospital. Attired in a black suit, he was allowed to come in and hold Howard's hand. Still in the oxygen tent, Howard asked his longtime lover, "Do I look gorgeous?" Cary told him, "You're looking great considering the alternative."

By July 10, Howard's crushed left lung began to function properly again. That gave Dr. Mason enough courage to face the flashbulbs and the reporters. Surprisingly for a doctor's statement, he claimed, "Howard Hughes is a man of steel. He has literally defied death. In my opinion, no normal man could have survived a crash like that."

By July 11, the patient was able to sit up and eat solid food—a graham cracker. But on July 12 at 10:30pm, he suffered a relapse as his lung refilled

with fluid for the third time.

Dr. Mason was forced to change his words. At three o'clock that afternoon he announced that Howard had gone into "profound shock," which was another way of saying that he'd entered into a deep coma. Dr. Mason was forced to say that Howard's condition was no longer critical, but "severely critical."

That night, he called Dietrich at home. "He's not going to make it, Noah, and you should be the first to know. It'll be hell when Howard dies. You and Greg can expect millions of dollars of lawsuits." Dr. Mason was referring to Greg Bautzer, Howard's attorney.

Once again, Howard miraculously rebounded on the morning of July 13. After the latest relapse, he was out of the oxygen tent in twenty-four hours. But over the course of the stay, he had to undergo eight different blood transfusions.

To the amazement of, and later, despite the protests of the hospital staff, Howard began to conduct business again.

Odekirk told him that the first order of business involved dealing with his aunt, Annette Lummis, who'd arrived by train from Houston with her husband, Dr. Fred Lummis, a well-known physician in Texas. Annette was demanding to see her nephew at once, and Dr. Lummis wanted to personally examine the patient. Dietrich accompanied them to the hospital but was turned away himself. Howard had already sent his chief a note instructing him "to carry on-business as usual."

At the hospital, Dietrich wrote a note to Howard, pleading with him to give Dr. and Mrs. Lummis an audience. Almost immediately Odekirk delivered the note back to Dietrich with a large "NO!" written across it. Before departing on the train back to Houston that day, Annette blamed Dietrich "for coming between Howard and his family." The charge was false.

While in Los Angeles, Annette had demanded to see a copy of Howard's will. She did not believe Dietrich when he said he couldn't produce one. Over the years Howard had attempted to dictate several wills but had never completed or signed one. His last known will was from 1938, but no copy of it had turned up in months. Dietrich suspected that Howard might have destroyed the will.

If he died without a will, Annette knew that the bulk of his estate might go to her, along with her sister and Howard's other aunt, Martha Gano Houstoun. Martha too had rushed to be at Howard's side, but had also been refused admittance. "When a rich man dies," Howard told Odekirk, "all the vultures fly in, even from as faraway as Texas, or especially from as faraway as Texas."

Howard issued another resounding "NO!" to his doctors, who wanted him to submit to surgery to correct the web-shaped scars caused by the severe burns on his left hand. Because of his refusal, he would never fully regain the use of his hand and would be forced to give up one of his most cherished passions—golf.

Since the slightest shift in his movement caused excruciating pain, Howard even designed a special bed for himself. He gave the plans to Odekirk, instructing the engineers at Hughes Aviation to come up with a bed, which was never used because he'd checked out of the hospital before it could be designed and manufactured. His motorized hospital bed had push buttons and even hot and cold running water with a toilet that could be flushed. He hated the ritual of the dreaded bedpan brought to him throughout the day, considering it undignified for a man of his stature.

For his second order of business, Howard ordered Odekirk to find his fedora if it still existed. "Put ten men on the job, twelve even, maybe a hundred," Howard instructed. "Cost is no object." Directing a crew of men at the site of the wreckage, Odekirk had the men search through debris and mud. Surprisingly, in five hours they located the battered fedora. Howard's "good luck piece" had survived the crash of the XF-11. The *Hollywood Citizen-News* ran the banner headline: FLYING FEDORA RECOVERED AT CRASH SITE.

It identified the hat as of the snap-brim type, made of gray-brown felt, and measuring a size of 7 ½. On hearing the news, Howard ordered the hat reblocked. He feared if he couldn't wear it out of the hospital, he'd never get out alive.

Near the end of his hospital stay, when he finally allowed Jean Peters to come into his room, he told her, "If I'd been wearing my fedora at the time, all this wouldn't have happened to me."

The next morning, he summoned Nadine Henley to his bed. Still in his oxygen tent, he dictated a memo to her. He wanted to leave written testimony for the army about why the XF-11 failed. Above all, he told Nadine, he didn't want the world to think the plane crashed because of pilot error.

Dr. Mason later read his memo to reporters assembled outside the hospital:

"The four front blades of the propeller were trying to pull the airplane ahead while the rear four blades were trying equally as hard to pull it backward. To make matters worse, these eight large propeller blades fighting one another created a dead drag on the right-hand side of the plane equal to that of a steel disc, seventeen feet in diameter, turned broadside to the wind at several hundred miles an hour. This disc destroyed the flow of air over the right wing and created a tremendous loss of lift. It felt as if some giant had the right wing in his hand and was pushing it back and down."

Unknown to the press, Howard underwent plastic surgery while in the hospital. When the bandages came off, he allowed Cary Grant to witness the unveiling, claiming that he was the only friend he could trust for an honest opinion. Howard was mortified when Cary held up a mirror to his face. "I've become James Whale's Frankenstein...a monster!" The ugly scar on his upper lip could not be erased. Cary suggested that from now on, he wear a mustache.

During the final days of Howard's stay, Cary dropped in for one of his many visits. Cary had left the room for no more than ten minutes before Ava Gardner barged in. She'd been denied access long enough and was determined to see Howard.

Her pathway was blocked by Nadine Henley, whom Ava suspected was secretly in love with Howard. "There is no way, Miss Gardner, that Mr. Hughes can see you now—doctor's orders."



Jean Peters

Ava shoved her out of her way and entered Howard's room anyway. Seeing who it was, he called out to Nadine to let her in.

Unlike all his friends who had been showing up in black, once he'd agreed to have Odekirk admit them, Ava chose a sexy, low-cut dress in toreador red, with black hosiery and high heels.

By his bedside, he reached out to her with his good hand. She gently rubbed his wounded face, perhaps noticing the enormous change in his looks. But she said nothing. As Howard later confided to Odekirk, "God damn it, the Tarheel bitch was giving me a hard-on. I thought I was too medicated, maybe impotent for life."

As Nadine later claimed, and as future mistress Terry Moore reported in her memoirs, Ava was discovered going down on Howard. She'd lowered the top of her dress so he could see and fondle her breasts. Alerted by the noises emanating from the room next door, like a lioness protecting her cub, Nadine screamed at Ava, shouting, "You brazen whore, you. You'll kill him."

It was too late. He was already experiencing his climax as Nadine entered the room to "kick out that little hussy." With an effect that was equivalent to a flood of icy water on a frigid morning in the Arctic, Nadine stridently summoned the doctor to see if Howard had suffered a heart attack from this exertion. Pulling up her dress, Ava stormed out of the hospital room. She later told friends, including Lana Turner, "that was the first time that Howard and I had a scene together that might actually be called a sex act. Before that, it had been just heavy petting. But I felt he deserved some sort of reward for having survived that plane crash."

Ava claimed that, in spite of Howard's pleadings in the future, she would never perform fellatio on him ever again or give in to his demands for sexual intercourse.

But it was to Jean Peters—not Ava—to whom he was giving his heart. He'd liked the way she attended to him in the hospital, telling Odekirk that Jean reminded him of his mother. He also claimed that he found "something virginal" about her, and had practically demanded a signed affidavit from her that she'd never gone to bed with Audie Murphy, who would soon emerge as an action hero in films.

On August 12, 1946, Howard checked himself out of the hospital and went to recover at the home of his beloved Cary. Dr. Mason pleaded with him to remain in the hospital for another six months.

Howard told Odekirk that "fresh orange juice did the trick." He had demanded that succulent blood-red oranges be squeezed into juice right in front of him three times a day. He felt that if the juice were allowed to sit, all its nutrients would vanish into the air. "If they don't do it my way, it'd be about as beneficial as drinking a glass of piss."

In his memoirs, Dietrich wrote that Howard passed through this critical stage of recovery "the hard way—no sleeping pills, no opiates of any kind." In direct contradiction, Cary noted that from the premises of his rented villa, Howard was continuing to take both morphine and codeine.

To Cary, Howard complained of "a constant ringing inside my head." Only the drugs could cure that. Otherwise, he expressed a fear that he might be driven crazy. Within six months, he'd developed a deep and ongoing addiction.

Despite his weakened condition, Howard began to contemplate his next sexual conquest, interpreting his renewed sexual fantasies as a symbol of his return to life. He ordered Johnny Meyer to buy an emerald engagement ring, supposedly to present to Jean Peters on her twenty-first birthday on October 12, 1946. It wasn't clear to Meyer that Howard actually planned to marry Jean.

Simultaneous with his demand for the ring, Howard told Meyer to arrange a rendezvous with what Howard defined as "the reigning goddess of Hollywood—more beautiful than Ava Gardner and Lana Turner combined."

Meyer knew that his boss could be talking about only one woman: Rita Hayworth.

Howard also called Henry Willson, telling him how pleased he was with Guy Madison, whom he'd continued to see. "When I'm well again, I want to meet more guys from your stable. But only the best and the hottest. I've got no more time in my life for runners-up. I want the next Guy Madison, stuff like that."

"Your wish, my command," Willson told his boss.

Cary was usually indulgent about Howard’s outside sexual activities. He was more concerned about Howard’s health. “Will you ever fly again?” he asked one night.

“In Texas, when you’re teaching a boy to ride a horse and he falls off, you pick him up and put him back on again. In no time at all, I’m going to be flying all over this country. For starters, I’m taking you on a vacation to Mexico. And, yes, I’ll be your pilot. I’ve paid my dues to Lady Luck. Now the skies belong to me.”

Cary gleefully reported this news to his friends and associates. “He’s a new man,” Cary told Kate Hepburn, George Cukor, and others. “Except don’t be surprised when you see him again. He looks a little different.”

Los Angeles, 1962

Whatever became of the marine sergeant, William Lloyd Durkin?

Ever since 1946, when this temporary national hero pulled Howard to safety from the burning wreckage of the XF-11, he’d continued to serve in the Marine Corps. Howard had specifically urged him to complete his tour of duty. Only then, he promised, would he set him up in a business that would give him a trouble-free retirement.

Eighteen years after his rescue of Howard back in 1946, he had drawn \$200 a month from Toolco as compensation for saving the aviator’s life. In addition, during his hospital convalescence, Howard had “guaranteed” that he would provide the funding for any line of business that Durkin wanted to launch.

In 1962, in Los Angeles after his retirement from the Marine Corps, Durkin called on an aging Noah Dietrich to remind him of that long-ago oral agreement. He told Dietrich that the \$200 a month “had been just great,” but that the money had been spent and that he now needed to discuss setting up that business.

The sergeant informed Dietrich that he’d already made several attempts to get in touch with Howard, but that each of his attempts to speak to Howard had been rejected by some secretary.

In his memoirs, in which Dietrich called the marine “Durkan,” he describes his meeting with the troubled sergeant. He later said in an interview, “if it weren’t for Durkin, Howard wouldn’t be on this earth. It would have been so easy for Howard to settle fifty thousand on the marine to help him set up a business somewhere. But there was nothing I could do for the bewildered man. I had to tell Durkin the painful truth: I no longer worked for Howard Hughes.”

On May 12, 1957, over a battle about stock options, Howard had fired “his most faithful servant.”

Durkin, alas, never received the funding for his business. And shortly thereafter, his monthly stipend dried up as well.

Los Angeles/Ohio/Washington, 1946-47

By the third week of his convalescence in Cary’s rented villa, Howard was growing restless. It was time to relaunch himself into the business world. Without Cary’s permission, he ordered the installation of extra telephone lines and asked Nadine Henley to hire three extra women—“brunettes only”—for secretarial services.

“I protested,” Dr. Mason said. “He had not recovered and needed rest. But it was very hard for a mere doctor to stand up to Howard Hughes.” Dr. Mason had cut off his supply of codeine and morphine after he left the hospital, but he knew that Howard was getting drugs through some other source, no doubt Johnny Meyer, whose contacts for anything illegal were virtually unlimited.

Barred from seeing Howard in the hospital, Dietrich made daily visits to the villa. At one point he told Howard that “your fortune has gone beyond the half billion dollar mark—it’s hard to quote exact figures.”

Lying on the sofa, Howard frowned but didn’t say anything for a long while, as if mulling over something. Finally he told Dietrich, “Make it an even billion, Noah, and be quick about it, you hear now?”

He had no other instructions that day, but continued to listen to Dinah Shore on the radio and to drink freshly squeezed juice from blood-red oranges. Dietrich also noted a dozen oatmeal cookies on an adjoining table. During his recuperation, Howard had decided that oatmeal cookies would be his only food source.

Night after night Howard was troubled by the crash of the XF-11, considering his own role in it “blameless.” Summoning Greg Bautzer to the villa, he ordered his attorney to file a lawsuit against Hamilton-Standard Division, the manufacturers of the malfunctioning right-wing propeller. Within two weeks, and fearing a public scandal and loss of confidence in their products, the company settled out of court for a reported \$200,000, though that amount might have been slightly less. The settlement was for personal injury to Howard, not a reimbursement to Hughes Aviation. Howard was delighted that he could pocket the money himself. He also felt that Hamilton-Standard, by admitting its error, had absolved him of blame as the pilot.

When Howard crashed the XF-11, he was technically on government business. All crashes of government planes mandated an investigation by the Air Force. While Howard recovered at Cary’s house, the military conducted a thorough probe of the downed XF-11, concluding that the plane crashed “because of pilot error.”

The report was severely critical of Howard’s test flight, noting, among other attacks, that he’d failed to use a special radio frequency assigned to the craft. He’d also violated several other regulations, including those for retracting the landing gear. The board further concluded that Howard had waited too long to make an emergency landing. Not only that, but he’d violated the time limit for test flights, which was forty-five minutes. Air Force investigators concluded that there would have been no crash if Howard had landed within the proper time frame. The conclusion was that, “Hughes not only risked his own life, but endangered a heavily populated residential community by flying over it instead of using testing grounds in the Mojave Desert.”

Getting it completely wrong in his dubious memoirs, Dietrich claimed that the personal injury settlement “ended Howard’s interest in the XF-11... I never heard him mention the XF-11 ever again.”

In truth, Howard, as part of his compulsive disorder obsession, focused almost entirely on launching a new version of the XF-11. “It became his passion—day and night,” Odekirk said. “Those calls at four o’clock in the morning!”

On one of his frantic early morning calls to Odekirk, Howard decided that for the new XF-11 prototype, he would no longer use the innovative conter-rotating props. “I can’t trust ‘em,” he told Odekirk. “The fucking things nearly killed me. As it is, I’ll suffer for the rest of my life with ailments stemming out of that crash.” He ordered single props on each of the XF-11’s two engines.

Even before he’d fully recovered, Howard was eager to fly again. He flew his converted B-23 bomber to Ohio where he met with the Air Force brass at Wright Field. Officials there had contacted Hughes Aviation in Culver City, asking them to “furnish the name of a test pilot other than Mr. H.R. Hughes.”

Howard protested their decision, demanding that he be the pilot of the next prototype of the XF-11. He was brutally rejected.

Not taking defeat easily, he flew at once to Washington for a private meeting at the home of Lt. General Ira C. Eaker, Deputy Commanding General of the U.S. Air Force. On that wintry Sunday early in 1947, he made an astonishing offer. He agreed to sign an affidavit to reimburse the government to the tune of five million dollars if the new XF-11 crashed when he was its pilot.

Eaker felt he didn’t have the authority to make such a decision and summoned General Carl Spaatz to his home to discuss the matter with Howard. Spaatz was the new Commanding General of the Air Force. After hearing Howard’s plea, and being somewhat awed by one of America’s genuine aviation heroes—and a rich one at that—Spaatz was easily won over by Howard’s facile charm. He said that the five million dollar guarantee would not be necessary and that he’d order Wright Field to rescind its order against Howard being the test pilot. Howard was elated as he flew his bomber back to the tarmac at Culver City.

On the morning of April 5, 1947, Howard, in spite of protests from Odekirk, once again stepped into the cockpit of an XF-11 for its maiden run. “The kinks are worked out,” he told Odekirk, promising to adhere strictly to Air Force regulations on this flight.

True to his word, Howard was airborne for only ninety minutes. Nothing went wrong this time. The XF-11 tested perfectly, all its equipment functioning properly. At long last and after a bitter five-year struggle and millions of dollars spent, the government-financed reconnaissance plane was ready.

Landing at Culver City, Howard emerged in his Texas boots, brown leather jacket, and lucky fedora to receive the applause of all 500 employees of Hughes Aviation.

“Today,” he boasted to Odekirk, “we have made a major breakthrough in aviation. We’re ready to manufacture those one hundred reconnaissance planes for the good ol’ U.S. of A.”

“Howard,” a puzzled Odekirk protested. “Have you forgotten? The government long ago canceled its orders for the XF-11 s. The war’s been over for nearly two years.”

Los Angeles, 1946

Before the crash, Howard’s old friend, the columnist, Louella Parsons, had written that “Howard Hughes is the most glamorous man in the world.” That was no longer true. In the hospital, he’d lost thirty pounds and was skeletally thin.

Continuing to ignore Faith Domergue, Howard had Johnny Meyer drive Linda Darnell over to Cary’s villa when he felt he could resume his seduction of beautiful women. But as Linda later recalled, it was not a romantic evening. She found her sometimes lover morbidly depressed.

“The first time I looked into a mirror after leaving the hospital, a stranger was staring back at me,” he told her. “It involves more than becoming middle aged. Life has drained from my face. My eyes are dead. There’s a look in them I haven’t seen before. It’s one of fear. Ball-busting fear, the kind that grabs a man in his gut. My gut feels like a giant fist is twisting my bowels. Squeezing the life force out of me.” He looked again in the mirror to study his face with its new mustache. “The press used to call me handsome. I don’t think they’ll be using that word for me any more.”

The next day he lamented to Meyer, “In the future it just won’t be Henry Willson’s hustlers demanding money from me. Beautiful women will also want cash up front. There might even come a day when cash won’t buy me what I want.”

“I assure you, boss,” Meyer said, “that day will never come no matter how old you get.”

When he finally got around to calling on her, Lana Turner also noted the remarkable change in Howard. “For starters, I hated his mustache, but I guess it was covering up something worse. After he got out of the hospital, he visited my house only once. I must admit that in those days I had a lot of mirrors. My fortune depended on my face, and I checked it frequently, maybe to see if it were still there and in working order. When he came to visit me, he was so thin and hadn’t purchased a new wardrobe. His neck seemed to have gotten lost somewhere in his collar. He’d rescued his old fedora, and the stinking thing was resting jauntily on his battered head. Before the evening was over, I felt that the old Howard Hughes had died. I wasn’t sure I liked the present reincarnation. Sitting across from me on my sofa was a tired old man. He could have been my father. But, even so, he was still *the* Howard Hughes. In those days, no one kicked *him* out!”

The reports of other girlfriends were equally damning. Gene Tierney felt that Howard’s once penetrating brown eyes “looked beady somehow—gray instead of brown. His face was a mask of anger. He seemed to want to get even with the world. Plastic surgery had altered his once perfect features.”

Having brought a potted plant to him at the hospital, Jane Greer was at first glad to see him until he came from the darkness of her foyer into the light of her living room. “He looked like an older man who’d just gotten off the train back from Hell,” she later said. “He looked like he’d also run a marathon race across continents. I felt he was on the verge of a total physical collapse. I told him that he should go and readmit himself into that hospital. His cheeks looked sunken, like they’d somehow caved in. It was only later that I learned he was massively consuming drugs.”

The still very young Faith Domergue, who’d been neglected by Howard so much, suddenly didn’t mind all the nights and even weeks he’d left her alone. “I still loved him...I guess. Sorta loved him. But I came to feel that a night with him was like visiting my grandfather. His attempt at lovemaking... well, let me put it this way. It was an attempt, and I’ll say no more.”

Los Angeles, 1946-51

Noah Dietrich once said, “*The Outlaw* should have been Howard’s last film. He was involved in nightmarish problems in 1946, mainly with undelivered aircraft and TWA financial woes. He really didn’t need to buy RKO two years later, turn it into a whorehouse for himself, and make all those horrible movies that tarnished his reputation. His descent began with that turkey, *Vendetta*.”

For years, teenage Faith Domergue had been nagging Howard to launch her film career as an actress. “His little cutie wanted to be a fucking movie star,” Johnny Meyer said, “and Little Miss got her wish. After all, she’d been sharing her pussy and those luscious lips with Howard for years. I guess she was entitled. Preston Sturges himself admitted to me, she couldn’t act her way out of a paper bag. But that didn’t seem to matter. Besides, how does one act one’s way out of a paper bag?”

Howard had turned to Preston Sturges to adapt Prosper Mérimée’s novel, *Colomba*, for the screen. This murky yarn about revenge in 19th-century Corsica was immediately retitled *Vendetta* by Sturges.

Eager to relaunch himself into films after the long wartime years that followed the making of *The Outlaw*, Howard teamed up with this talented writer and director. He’d been impressed with his film scripts in the 1930s. He was even more impressed with films he’d directed in the 1940s.

Preston had become a master of screwball comedies: *The Lady Eve*, from 1941, with Barbara Stanwyck and Henry Fonda; *Sullivan’s Travels* with Joel McCrea and Veronica Lake, also from 1941; and the charming and funny *The Miracle of Morgan’s Creek*, (1944) with Eddie Bracken and Betty Hutton.

The end of the war found Preston sitting on top of the heap in Hollywood. In 1944 Paramount had offered him a guaranteed one million dollars to renew his contract. He turned the studio down, saying he wanted to produce his own films independently of any studio. He claimed, “I’m a One Man Band. I became an independent producer to get away from supervision.”

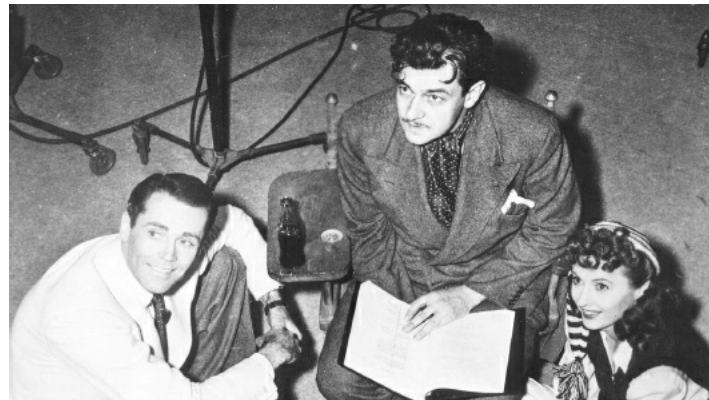
“For a director of such cockiness, teaming up with a control freak like Howard was a big mistake,” Dietrich claimed.

Reared amid wealth and social prestige in Chicago in 1898, and spending most of his teenaged years in Europe (his mother was an inseparable friend of the high priestess of modern dance, Isadora Duncan), Preston was not a typical studio hired hand. Although he would eventually lose them as part of a life fraught with epic melodrama, during the postwar years he owned two yachts—more than Howard—and a dinner theater, The Players, in Los Angeles. He also lived in a large mansion, had a brief marriage to one of the daughters of Marjorie Merriweather Post, and even owned a factory, Sturges Engineering Company, producing diesel engines for the War Department.

Having much in common, Howard and Preston initially bonded. “In a short time, the mixture of those two proved as harmonious as blending oil with water,” Dietrich said. Nonetheless, over his chief’s protests, Howard forged ahead and formed a new film studio with Preston. Launched in 1944 as California Pictures Corporation, its papers of incorporation left Howard in control of the majority of the shares, as Preston would soon painfully realize.

Before the filming of *Vendetta* was launched, however, Howard allowed Preston to talk him into bringing Harold Lloyd back to the screen for a nostalgic bout with the cinematic past. The silent screen star, during his heyday in the 1920s, had been one of the three great comedians of the Silent Era, ranking up there with Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton.

Entitled *The Sin of Harold Diddlebock*, and envisioned as a quick way to occupy California Pictures Corporation until the inaugural preparations for other, more important movies were finished, filming was launched late in 1945, with shooting continuing until March of 1946. After seeing Preston’s edited version of the corporation’s first film, Howard ordered it shelved for years, pending his input for a reedited final cut. But by the time he got around to reediting it, his partnership with Preston Sturges had collapsed. Retitled *Mad Wednesday*, the film was finally released in 1950, finding no real audience. By then, Harold Lloyd’s heyday was a distant memory of the past.



Preston Sturges (center) with Henry Fonda and Barbara Stanwyck

But before his partnership with Preston collapsed completely, Howard tried to bring what energy and enthusiasm he could to the launch of Faith Domergue’s career, but his heart clearly wasn’t in it. He believed that *Vendetta* would be the right property to showcase her talents—“or lack thereof,” as bitchy critics later wrote. At one point, he planned to bill her as “the next Jane Russell.” Preston pointed out that the first Jane Russell hadn’t yet been established as a film star.

Facing the cameras for the first time in a starring role, Faith had barely gotten over her lisp after endless diction lessons. Suddenly, the weight of this ill-fated melodrama rested on her creamy shoulders.

During the first six weeks of shooting, Preston either showed up in a drunken stupor on the set or else went horseback riding with his mistress. After those six weeks, one million dollars of Howard’s money had been spent with nothing to show for it.

In his weakened condition, Howard learned what was happening. “Instead of viewing it as the unsalvageable mess it was,” Dietrich said, “Howard forged ahead to save the picture from becoming a disaster. The task proved overwhelming even for him.”

Preston recalled, “When Mr. Hughes made suggestions with which I disagreed, as he has a perfect right to do, I rejected them. When I rejected the last one, he remembered that he had an option to take control of the company. He took over. I left!”

Howard even tried to direct the picture himself, after WR. Burnett had been brought in as a rewrite man. He named a new director, Stuart Heisler, but was dissatisfied with his work. Howard finally settled on a thirty-year-old actor, Mel Ferrer, who had no experience as a director. By 1954, Mel would

be known as “Mr. Audrey Hepburn.”

The film faced endless delays, just like *The Outlaw*. Years later, Faith recalled that making *Vendetta* was a “tortured, horrible experience. I once made 95 takes for one little short scene.”

Meyer later reported that “Howard seemed to be more turned on by one of the male costars of the film, Donald Buka, than he was with Faith. The extraordinarily handsome actor was playing Padrino the Bandit opposite Faith. Possessed of male charm and beauty, Buka thrilled Howard when he watched the rushes. Meyer warned him, however, that Buka was a bonafide heterosexual and wouldn’t be interested in any overtures from Howard.

“That’s what you said about Jack Buetel,” Howard pointed out to him. “And I had him for years.” Meyer remembered Howard sighing, eventually deciding that it might be humiliating to pursue Buka. “Maybe some dreams are best if only dreamed.”

Responding to Howard’s lack of interest, Faith married a musician, Teddy Stauffer in 1947. Stauffer would later marry one of Howard’s former girlfriends, Hedy Lamarr.

At the finish of *Vendetta* in 1948, Howard delayed its release, but continued to publicize the film. Faith was promoted as “one of the most exciting personalities to reach the screen.” She wasn’t.

Howard hoped that by holding back the release date, in a way that had worked successfully with *The Outlaw*, *Vendetta* would generate public anticipation. Its release eventually came in 1950 as an RKO film. Critics immediately dismissed it as a “costume bore,” and audiences stayed away in droves.

In spite of his disappointment in Faith as an actress, Howard cast her in another film, *Where Danger Lives*, in 1950. He felt that its star, Robert Mitchum, could carry the picture, even if Faith delivered a weak performance. That film in time would become somewhat of a *noir* classic. Even so, when filming ended, Howard did not renew Faith’s contract, letting it expire in 1951.

“Faith Domergue is history,” he told his friend, Robert Mitchum. “I’ve found someone better and more talented. Only thing is, she’s got a handsome boyfriend she’s going to marry.”

“And who is this talented beauty?” the laconic Mitchum asked. “And how do you propose to get rid of the boyfriend?”

“I can only answer the first question,” Howard said. “Eliminating the jock will take some thought. She’s British. It’s Jean Simmons.”

Los Angeles/Paris, 1947-49

Former husband Orson Welles once remarked: “Rita Hayworth one day may be remembered for only two things: the margarita cocktail and the fact that her face was glued onto the atomic bomb that devastated Hiroshima.” Before changing her name to Rita Hayworth, the screen goddess was known as Margarita Carmen Cansino when she danced in Tijuana night clubs with her father.

Following the worldwide success of *Gilda*, released in 1946 and co-starring Glenn Ford, Rita had become America’s love goddess long before Marilyn Monroe grabbed the title from her.

In his weakened condition following his plane crash, Howard revealed to Johnny Meyer that he planned to launch a campaign to seduce Rita, but not immediately. At no point did he reveal to his pimp whether or not he’d seduced a teenage Rita in Mexico years many years previously. Rita had been devastatingly beautiful and buxom since she was thirteen, and she was bound to catch Howard’s attention, looking as she did in all those Technicolor movies he’d seen of her.



Donald Buka and Faith Domergue in *Vendetta*

Like Howard, Rita had had an incestuous relationship with a parent. In her case, it was her Spanish father, Eduardo Cansino, a vaudeville dancer from Seville. Rita later confided that her father repeatedly had had sex with her. Eduardo was always flattered when members of the audience thought that he was the brother—not the father—of Rita when they danced as a team in night clubs.

Before calling on Rita, Howard had seen *Gilda* a total of ten times. He told Meyer that he found Rita vivacious, sexy, and desirable, and was especially attracted to that come-hither glint in her eyes. Long before Meyer actually arranged a rendezvous between the pair, Howard had begun his campaign to seduce Rita.

He’d followed details of her marriage to Edward C. Judson, which lasted from May 29, 1937 to May 24, 1943. Judson was more than just her husband: he was also her pimp. He arranged assignations where he forced his wife to sleep with any producer or director, even leading actor, who might advance her career.

Rita performed her duties as a prostitute at Judson’s urging. But she also showed a rebellious streak, refusing to sleep with two of the most powerful studio chiefs in Hollywood. She turned down Darryl F. Zanuck at Fox. She also refused to go to bed with Harry Cohn, who eventually became her boss at Columbia. He had developed an obsession for her and would unsuccessfully pursue his glamorous movie queen for years.

Rita's only comment to the press about the breakup of her first marriage was, "Basically, I'm a good and gentle person. But I'm attracted to mean personalities."

The divorce between Judson and Rita was bitter. She was his meal ticket, and he didn't want her to get away from him. He had stolen various copies of letters that his wife had foolishly written to her lovers. In these letters, the candid and outspoken Rita had revealed intimate sexual details of her affairs. He threatened to make them public unless she gave him all her money and possessions except for her car. So as not to destroy the career of his major star, Cohn paid \$30,000 to Rita's "hustler husband." She also agreed to pay her estranged husband \$12,000 in monthly installments of \$500. When she married Welles on September 7, 1943, she was bankrupt.

Through Johnny Meyer, Howard sent his pimp to approach Judson. He agreed to sell Howard copies of Rita's letters for ten thousand dollars. For his voyeuristic pleasure, Howard delighted in reading these sexually charged letters.

Normally a breast man, Howard was fascinated by her luscious auburn mane, finding it thick and silky. He liked the way it cascaded down over her creamy shoulders. He'd rerun *Gilda's* sexy and coquettish song and dance number, "Put the Blame on Mame" a total of fifty times. Meyer sat in on one of these screenings. He later claimed that Howard started to sing along with Rita on the screen. "You haven't lived until you've heard my boss sing. Like no sound I've ever heard." Meyer didn't want to spoil Howard's illusion by telling him that Rita's voice had been dubbed. He was actually listening to singer Anita Ellis.

Howard had initially been excited by Rita from tales told by Tyrone Power, who'd seduced her during their remake of *Blood and Sand*, the bullfight picture in which she'd played an exotic and erotic *femme fatale*.

He also learned of her other lovers and was especially disturbed to learn of her affair with Victor Mature. By that time in his life, he'd become particularly concerned with the penis sizes of his boudoir competitors. Having sampled Mature's legendary endowment himself, he was at first shy about presenting himself to Rita. "Victor is a tough act to follow," he told Meyer.

At first Howard launched his campaign to seduce Rita anonymously. He began by having Meyer send dozens of "California's most beautiful roses" every day to her home in Brentwood. Maybe she suspected who her secret admirer was—that's not known.

In Meyer's facetious words, "When Howard denuded Southern California of all its roses," he sent Rita, again anonymously, the most luxurious watch he could find at Cartier's. It was studded with diamonds. Meyer first called Rita and asked if it'd be all right if Howard called her. "I accepted that diamond watch," she told Meyer. "And all those roses. The least I can do is listen to what the man has to say." Granted that go-ahead sign, Howard began to bombard her with phone calls, sometimes at three o'clock in the morning. Finally, he told her, "I'm the man to fill the void in your life left by Orson Welles."

At the time, Rita's marriage to Orson was on the rocks. They were living apart and potentially heading for the divorce courts, even though they'd had a daughter, Rebecca Welles.

Howard told Rita that he'd watched her "Put the Blame on Mame" number fifty times. "But there's nothing like seeing the real thing," she responded. She agreed to meet him at her Brentwood home at one o'clock in the morning. She said that she'd borrow the Gilda gown from wardrobe at Columbia and would greet him at the door in it. He promised to bring along "some surprises, including a big surprise."

Before visiting Rita, Howard contacted Jean Louis, the famous couturier who'd designed Rita's black strapless gown and long gloves as worn in the film. For a hefty price, he ordered the designer to create twelve versions of the same gown, all in different colors.

In the back of his Chevy en route to Brentwood, Howard carried the gowns in colors that included lemon yellow, ivory white, emerald green, shocking pink, tulip red, sky blue, midnight blue, lavender, fuschia, royal purple, butter scotch, and russet. He also carried along two bottles of 1938 Dom Perignon in silver buckets purchased at Tiffany's in New York and flown to Los Angeles aboard a TWA plane. He also brought along a 78 rpm recording of "Put the Blame on Mame."

Laden down, he was nervous as he approached the front door of Rita's home. When she threw open the door, one of his wildest fantasies came true. Gilda herself was standing before him, looking exactly like she did in the 1946 film.

Unknown to him at the time, Rita had emerged only that afternoon from the bed of actor David Niven. As she later told her friend, Marlene Dietrich, she was "trying to comfort David" following the tragic death of his young wife.

Pouring the first of the champagne, Howard toasted her. "To Gilda."

"I'm not Gilda, Howard. I'm Rita. Let me make the toast. To Rita and Howard." After the toast, she gently kissed his scarred lips.

After the first bottle of champagne, even though Howard wasn't much of a drinker, he presented the gowns to Rita and made a strange request. He wanted her to put on each gown and perform the Mame number for him twelve times. Only then, he claimed, could he decide which gown showcased her body most flatteringly and sexily.

A bit tipsy, Rita gave in to this demand, although finding all those wardrobe changes annoying and exhausting. Nonetheless, she agreed to it. As Anita's voice came on in the recording, Rita disappeared behind a screen and slipped on each gown and performed the number for him. Surprisingly, he found that despite the staggering expense of the dozen Jean Louis gowns, he liked the original gown, borrowed from the wardrobe department at Columbia, best.

On the final number, Howard, as he confided in Meyer, "became so hot I whipped it out and showed it to her hard." At the end of her number, she pulled off one long glove and tossed it at his cock. Then she took off the other glove and tossed it at the same target. Within moments, that beautiful mane of auburn hair was bobbing up and down on Howard. "Her father, Judson, Welles, Mature, Spencer Tracy, James Stewart, Glenn Ford, Tony Martin, and Gilbert Roland had taught her well," Howard later told Meyer.



Rita Hayworth, Marlene Dietrich

“Only actor Peter Lawford had been displeased with her charms: “The worst lay in the world. She was always drunk and never stopped eating.”

When she’d swallowed Howard’s offering, she stood up in front of him, striking a pose from *Gilda* and borrowing a line from the movie: “I’m not very good with zippers. Could somebody help me?”

Howard immediately came to her rescue with shaky fingers. As he was to report to Meyer, “it was a night of bliss. My greatest moment was when the gown fell to the floor. She was wearing Juel Parks lingerie.” He later described the lingerie to Meyer as “gossamer.”

As he recalled to his trusted pimp, “I’ve seen bigger breasts but none as splendid as the pair on her. I couldn’t control myself. She screamed and tried to fight me off. But I bit into those nipples real hard. Her screams only goaded me on. I don’t know what came over me. I couldn’t control myself.” He also revealed that with his fingers in her and his teeth on her nipples, she experienced the first of several orgasms that night, in a style that evoked the self-described sexual receptiveness of Hedy Lamarr.

The next morning, Rita was relatively demure in her assessment, telling close friend Marlene Dietrich, “Howard went to bed with Gilda and woke up with me.”

In spite of his assault on her nipples, she continued to date him. At least part of their affair was conducted within the 64-room beachfront mansion of the fading screen diva, Marion Davies, in Santa Monica. The aging mistress of William Randolph Hearst and Howard’s longtime friend since his days as a teenager, she even redecorated Greta Garbo’s old suite for the illicit lovers. Chilled champagne always rested in a silver bucket. On chilly nights, logs burned in the marble fireplace that the press baron had imported from the châteaux country of France’s Loire Valley.



Rita Hayworth as Gilda

Recognizing the couple's need for privacy, Marion instructed her servants never to intrude. One night a new male attendant, who had not been informed, walked in on the couple with a stack of fluffy white towels. He found them lying nude on top of the quilts in a lavish four-poster bed that allegedly had once belonged to the estate of Queen Elizabeth I. Marion always claimed that "Sir Walter Raleigh fucked the good Queen Bess right in this bed." Seeing the intruder, Howard grabbed Rita's long hair and attempted to conceal her breasts, leaving her genitals exposed. "Don't look, you idiot!" he shouted at the startled servant. "Get out!"

Rita and Howard launched themselves into a tempestuous affair that was played out like a 1940s movie drama. One night as he confided to Meyer, Rita became hysterical at his refusal to commit to her. She raced from her Brentwood home, got into her car, and went on a dangerous drive along the curving roads of the Hollywood Hills. Before leaving, she threatened that she was going to kill herself.

In his battered Chevy, he chased after her. He finally caught up with her on a mountain summit. When she came to a screeching halt, he slammed on his brakes so as not to pile into her. He jumped out of his car and raced to hers, where he yanked her from behind the wheel. "You little fool!" He slapped her repeatedly until she fell on the ground at his feet—just like a Lana Turner movie. Picking her up, he forced her into the Chevy and drove her back to Brentwood, as she sobbed.

In a few months, she confronted him with some painful news. She was pregnant with his child, and wanted him to marry her as soon as her divorce from Welles came through.

"I detest kids!" he told her. "Harlow wanted to have my kid. We had it aborted. I don't want some boy coming out of your womb that will replace me. If I had a son, he'd inherit my fortune. He'd probably live every day wanting me to die young so he could take over. I've had those same feelings about my own father."

"But you'd have an heir," she said. "A fucking heir to your fortune. Howard Hughes III. He'd carry on your legacy."

Meyer later claimed this confrontation occurred in front of him at her Brentwood home. He interjected, "I bet the kid would look great. Howard Hughes for a daddy, Rita Hayworth for a mother. The prettiest baby on the planet."

"He'd probably turn out to be the biggest faggot on the planet," Howard said.

"How can you say that?" she protested. "Besides, it might be a girl."

"Then she'd be the biggest whore on the planet."

"You mean, just like her mother?" she shouted at him. "You bastard!" She ran from her living room and up the steps, bolting herself in.

The next day when she confronted Harry Cohn at Columbia with the bad news, he shouted at her. When he cooled down, he urged her to take Howard's advice and abort the child. "Send the rich Texas fucker the bill. He can afford it!" As a parting gesture, he told her, "If you'd given your pussy to me, you wouldn't have gotten pregnant. I know how to take precautions." He couldn't let her leave his office without warning her that if news of her pregnancy leaked out, the Legion of Decency and Women's Clubs all over America would boycott her films. "Your career will be over!"

It was a great dilemma for her. Her Catholic upbringing told her not to have an abortion. She truly wanted Howard's kid, even though he didn't want it.

Fearing her pregnancy might start to show, Howard urged her to take a four-month trip at his expense with a paid companion. She sailed for France. After her third night at the Hotel Crillon in Paris, she complained of severe pains in her abdomen. Rushed by ambulance to the American Hospital at Neuilly, she was extensively examined. Doctors told her that she was experiencing an ectopic pregnancy, meaning that a fertilized egg had been implanted outside the uterus and had settled into her fallopian tubes. The fetus had grown until it was pressing against her fallopian tubes. She was warned that the organ would burst if the child wasn't aborted immediately.

At that point there was no more debate within herself, as she knew that nature had decided the abortion issue for her. She underwent a surgical procedure.

Howard Hughes III would never enter the world to face a lavish life as the son of two of the 20th century's most gilded people.

Some reports claimed that Howard refused to pay any of her medical bills. But Noah Dietrich later said that he transferred \$15,000 of Howard's money to Rita in Paris.

Returning to Hollywood to resume her career, Rita learned that Orson Welles was having an affair with a beautiful blonde starlet. The same starlet was also having an affair with Howard. "Who's the competition?" Rita asked Marlene, who managed to keep up with such boudoir affairs. "A little tramp," Dietrich told her. "She'll never amount to... how do you Americans say it?...a hill of beans?"

"Who's the bimbo?" Rita asked.

"Marilyn Monroe."

Welles was having his spies report on Rita's affairs. Harry Cohn was still obsessed with her and had her bedroom bugged as well as her dressing room at Columbia. Unknown to Rita, Howard was also having her spied upon and her phone tapped. "She was the most bugged woman in Hollywood," Meyer later said.

It's been reported that Cohn wanted to obtain incriminating evidence against Rita, so he could evoke the morals clause in her contract. That is highly unlikely. Why would a studio boss want to suspend his chief money-maker?

Howard's sheer curiosity demanded that he be kept informed of Rita's affairs in the wake of her abortion. Although he didn't want her any more for himself, he was still fascinated by her nocturnal adventures. To his dismay, he learned that he'd been replaced by the international playboy, Prince Aly Khan, son of the Aga Khan, "direct descendant of the Prophet Mohammed" and hereditary Imam of the Shi'a Imami Ismaili community comprising 15 million cult followers in Asia and Africa. Apparently to judge from the bugging, the handsome, charming prince had learned the ancient art of *Imsak*, indefinite postponement of ejaculation (*coitus reservatus*), as an enhancement of sexual pleasure. It was later learned that the prince had been sent as a teenager to the bordellos of Cairo to develop his sexual technique.

To Howard's further surprise, he learned that Rita was also having an affair with Mahmud Pahlavi, the brother of the Shah of Iran. Later, to his increased dismay, he found out that she was also having an affair with the actual Shah of Iran, not just his brother. King Farouk, the fat and notoriously decadent king of Egypt, was also pursuing Rita, but to no avail.

Eventually it was Prince Aly Khan who won her hand, beating out the competition. As Cary Grant later said, "People forget that Rita, a Hollywood goddess, became a princess long before Grace Kelly."

Howard soon learned that Rita was pregnant again. The presumed father was Prince Aly Khan. Through foreign agents arranged by Meyer, Howard went so far as to compile a dossier on the Prince's sexual entanglements. He then flew this data to her before her marriage.

With the evidence he'd accumulated, he wrote a note, "You're marrying the most promiscuous man on the planet." Not that Howard could afford to talk. Ignoring his warning, Rita married her prince on May 27, 1949 on the French Riviera. The world press treated it like another "Second Coming."

Even though he'd let her go, and urged her to abort their child, Howard seemed insulted that the playboy prince had upstaged him with Rita. He bitterly remarked to Meyer, "Rita's famous red hair is known by everybody, I guess. But I happen to know for a fact that it's just as black as her pussy!"

Los Angeles, 1946-52

At Cary Grant's rented villa, Howard continued his recovery in the wake of his plane crash over Beverly Hills. He didn't like to read books, so Cary brought him the latest magazines every day.

Flipping through the magazines, the cover photograph of a young girl on *La%**%%**%ff%**%%**%%**%#* caught his attention. He noted her breasts, golden hair falling to her shoulders, and what he later told Johnny Meyer was "the smile of an innocent child." The picture had been snapped by David Conover, an army photographer who sold pictures to men's magazines. Howard immediately called Meyer and ordered him to contact Conover. Perhaps he still knew the girl's address. "Get to her at once and sign her up to an exclusive seven-year contract. We've got to get her before some other jackal does."

The girl's name was Norma Jeane Dougherty. She'd changed the name "Jean" to "Jeane" because she thought it was sexier. Fortunately, she hadn't changed her address since the shoot, and Meyer was able to locate her.

He found her living "below the poverty level," with a handsome but struggling actor, Ted Jordan, who was talked about as "the next Tyrone Power." From what he gathered, Norma Jeane worked as a prostitute during long intervals between modeling assignments. A date was arranged. Without Howard's knowledge, Meyer employed Norma Jeane in her role as a prostitute. "I wanted to test her skills in bed before wasting my boss's time," Meyer said. "She was a great cocksucker even then. She left me so drained I never got around to number two. I set up a date with Howard and her, even though I didn't think he was in any condition to take on a vixen like Norma Jeane."

Over the course of many years, Norma Jeane told friends and confidants about her early days in Hollywood. She revealed to author Truman Capote that she did not take money for her favors when she was a streetwalker prowling the side streets off Sunset Boulevard. "Depending on the time of day, I'd negotiate for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Anyone who knows me knows how I love to eat."

Her first agent, Harry Lipton, warned her that Howard was notorious for signing starlets and then "letting them dangle on the vine." He also said that Howard had signed Harlow and did nothing for her after *Hell's Angels*. Instead of immediately signing with Howard, he said he could use the producer's interest in her to drum up excitement at other studios such as Fox.

Norma Jeane knew who Howard Hughes was, but wasn't certain as to his status, other than being aware he was some very big and important person in Hollywood. She was eager to meet him when Meyer presented the deal and told her of Howard's interest. "I think Norma Jeane assumed from the very first that she'd be sleeping with Howard as part of the deal," Meyer said. "From the look of things, she didn't have the slightest objection to that."

Even before her meeting with Howard, Lipton planted an item which ran on July 29, 1946 in Hedda Hopper's syndicated column: *Howard Hughes is on the mend. Picking up a magazine, he was attracted by the cover girl and promptly instructed an aide to sign her for pictures. She's Norma Jeane Dougherty a model.*

Lipton then used this bait to get Norma Jeane a meeting with Ben Lyon, then working as casting director at Fox. He called Ben and announced, "I've found the next Jean Harlow. She has a fantastic quality—it's an electricity she turns on. She brings out the desire in people to help her, to protect her, to mother and father her. It's not a sex thing at all. She's playing a role—this sex thing."

It was Hollywood irony that Ben, Howard's former lover and the star of *Hell's Angels*, thought of himself as the discoverer of the original Jean Harlow. He seemed anxious to become the discoverer of the next Jean Harlow. He ordered Lipton to bring her over that very afternoon. "The name's got to go, however," he said. "I can't see Dougherty on a theater marquee."

Upon meeting Norma Jeane for the first time, Ben was impressed. Every day beautiful girls hoping to get a Fox contract were paraded before him. None had impressed him like Norma Jeane. He immediately decided she wasn't a Harlow, though, but someone else, someone original. Without getting studio chief Zanuck's permission, he ordered a screen test, hoping to come up with a new discovery to enhance his position at Fox.

He ordered cameraman Leon Shamroy to conduct the test, the same man who'd photograph her in the 1954 *There sNo Business Like Show Business*. He remembered Norma Jeane showing up in a gold sequined gown and Joan Crawford fuck-me high heels. He assured Ben that "Norma Jeane projects sex on the screen just like Harlow did."

Upon seeing her test, Zanuck signed her on as a contract player for \$75 a week. Howard was furious at Meyer for not moving faster to sign her up with him.

Not liking her name, Ben changed it to Carole Lind. One night he took her out on a secret date when his wife, Bebe Daniels, was out of town. He suddenly came up with an idea. "You're Marilyn!" He practically shouted the name at her, which he'd stolen from another beautiful actress, Marilyn Miller. Norma Jeane—rechristened Marilyn—suggested the Monroe, borrowing the name from her grandmother.

"That's it!" Ben said. "It'll look great on a marqu e. To Miss Marilyn Monroe!"

Arriving at Cary's villa the following night, Marilyn was dressed in a skintight cotton dress and high heels. Howard looked enchanted to see her in the flesh.

"Oh, Mr. Hughes," she said to him. "I'm a little sticky. Been posing for a photographer all day. Hot lights, you know. Do you mind if I borrow your shower?"

Howard required a moment to take in this young girl with the dyed pale yellow hair and the sexy petulant mouth. "She looked like a tramp," he later told Meyer.

Clad in a bathrobe and lying on the sofa in the living room, he ordered the maid to show her to his bedroom upstairs. Normally, he would never have let anyone use his bathroom, but for her he agreed. He could tell through her thin dress that she wasn't wearing a bra. He suspected she wasn't wearing any other underwear either. Still in those high heels, Marilyn giggled as she followed the maid upstairs.

She must have been in that bathroom for an hour. Growing impatient, he rose from the sofa. It was difficult for him to walk, but even so he climbed the stairs. Without knocking at his bathroom door, he entered.

Once inside the steamy room, he found Marilyn floating around in a bubble bath. Suddenly, she sat up, revealing near perfect breasts. "May I make a request, Mr. Hughes?" she asked. "I noticed that Mr. Grant's bath towels are white. Could you call down to your maid and have her bring me pink towels. I know there must be pink towels somewhere in the linen closet. I like to dry myself only with pink towels, never white."

Perhaps he was taken back by her request, but he quickly called down for pink towels. Marilyn was right. There were pink towels in the linen closet.

Standing up, she showed off her nude figure and showered before him, washing the soap off her luscious body. When she finished, she turned to him and giggled. “Mr. Hughes, I like a man to dry me off all over. Don’t miss any spot.” As he moved toward her, she coyly stepped back. “I have to warn you. When I feel masculine hands on any part of my body, I’m quickly aroused.”

He related the events of the previous night to Meyer. Howard found Marilyn “an excellent cocksucker—a really incredible mouth.” Meyer later said that he felt Howard was too weak at the time to engage in regular intercourse—“he was still pretty beat up.”

In the days and weeks ahead, Howard saw Marilyn on a number of occasions, at least according to Meyer. He remembered Howard taking her on his plane to some unknown destination. The two lovers had a picnic somewhere. Howard mentioned to Meyer that he’d been charmed by Marilyn without makeup lying in a field of grass with wildflowers growing around her. “She looked like a fresh-faced schoolgirl,” he said. “She could pass for fourteen. I didn’t eat much picnic that day but I found plenty to devour.”

No longer the sexual athlete that he was, Howard engaged in oral sex with Marilyn, according to Meyer. “I think Marilyn was the first woman who’d ever gone around the world with Howard. My boss man loved that. He’d tried to get other women to do that to him. Some of them would refuse. But he’d always find a willing prostitute.”

It was late in 1946 that Howard wanted to make a pornographic film with Marilyn, similar to the one he’d made with Porfirio Rubirosa in Santo Domingo years earlier. He didn’t think he’d have trouble convincing her. He had already learned that she’d posed nude for the lens of her lover, Ted Jordan. Howard wanted to write and direct the script himself. Meyer “under secret oath” arranged it.

At first Marilyn refused, Meyer later claimed. She feared that her appearance in a blue movie would wreck her career. “When Howard promised that he would not allow her face to be revealed, she readily agreed, especially when she learned that the work in the film, which would be shot in only one night, carried a pay check often thousand dollars.

For the male lead, Howard wanted Jack Buetel. Although he’d agreed to allow Howard to film his nude buttocks during sexual intercourse on the set of *The Outlaw*, he absolutely refused to allow his erection to be depicted, even with Howard’s guarantee that his face would not be shown in the blue movie.

Rejecting Buetel as a candidate, Howard then turned to another lover, Guy Madison. Henry Willson made the deal. At first Guy refused until he learned that his face wouldn’t be shown. “If that’s the case,” Guy told Willson, “I’d love to get paid ten thousand dollars to fuck Marilyn Monroe. I’ve seen pictures of her.”

Meyer was on the set when the film was shot one night at 7000 Romaine. “Howard’s script for the shoot went out the window when Guy and Marilyn got together,” Meyer said. “Completely nude, she looked like the most beautiful creature I’d ever seen. Those soon-to-be-famous breasts were plump and firm. Ripe fruit. My boss had picked the right tomato. If anyone thought Guy had a gay streak in him, he didn’t show it that night. He was really turned on by Marilyn. When Guy stripped off his pants and presented Marilyn with a long, straight, thick tool, she squealed with delight and went to work polishing it. Even better than Faye Emerson. Her darting tongue continued to lubricate it. Those two turned me on. Guy banged the hell out of her. They were sucking, lapping, kissing, stroking each other. It was like they were worshipping each other’s bodies.”

“I had to practically pull Guy off her when Howard called cut,” Meyer said. “I think that sailor boy wanted to go for his third climax without taking it out of her.”

Meyer said that he never saw the developed film. There were rumors that it was shown at Hollywood smokers in the late 1940s, some of which were attended by women.

If a copy exists today, it can be presumed to rest somewhere in a hidden vault. Meyer revealed another tantalizing note. For the shoot, Howard had demanded that Marilyn dye her “black pussy platinum—just like Harlow’s.” She willingly obliged.

She’d spend the rest of her life dyeing down below, and it would be blonde hairs on the vagina that she’d present to a future U.S. president and his attorney general.

Howard would go for months without seeing Marilyn. Sometimes he’d be in the mood for that breathy little girl voice, that exaggerated sexuality she put on for him, and he’d call her. Often he didn’t even bother to take her to his living quarters, wherever they were at the time, but drove her high into the Hollywood Hills. “Mainly Howard wanted blow-jobs from Marilyn,” Johnny Meyer claimed. “At least that’s what he told me. I don’t know if he ever did it with her in the missionary position.”

Sometimes Howard would drive her to a scenic outlook. While he took in the view of Los Angeles at night, Marilyn expertly worked him over. One of those blow-jobs was related to his mistress at the time, actress Terry Moore. She provided descriptive details in her book, *The Passions of Howard Hughes*.

Ms. Moore wrote this:

Unbuckling his belt and unzipping his pants, she let out a squeal when she saw he wasn’t wearing any underwear. Taking his cock in her hand, she slowly stroked it up and down, making it even harder than he thought was possible. With his legs extended up onto the dashboard of the Chevy, Howard felt like a contortionist trying to reach for her breasts as she moved her face between his legs. Looking directly up at him, she kept her eyes locked on his as she guided him expertly into her mouth. Howard felt himself start to tremble and then, suddenly, in less than ten seconds, he exploded.

Even when he wasn’t with Marilyn, he still monitored her nocturnal activities. Over the years, he tape-recorded many of her scenes of passion with a sometimes startling parade of figures: two of the world’s most super endowed personalities, Milton Berle and Porfirio Rubirosa, plus a host of others—George Sanders, Bugsy Siegel, Frank Sinatra, Franchot Tone, Orson Welles, Darryl F. Zanuck, Walter Winchell, Damon Runyon, Dean Martin, Clifford Odets, Mickey Rooney, Tony Curtis, George Jessel, John Huston, Sammy Davis Jr., Harry Cohn, Yul Brynner, Marlon Brando, and, yes, even Albert Einstein.

Howard also learned that Marilyn was having affairs with women, including Joan Crawford. Instead of being jealous, he found that amusing. During the time Marilyn was living and having an affair with her Russian-born drama coach, Natasha Lytees, Howard often invited both of them out for dinner. But he took them to remote, out-of-the-way bistros so they’d be relatively protected from the press.

Natasha once claimed that she was having her morning coffee when Marilyn arrived from an all-night rendezvous with Howard. “Her pink face

looked raw, like she'd developed a rash," Natasha said. "Marilyn just looked at me with that bubble-headed innocent gaze. 'Mr. Hughes hasn't shaved in three days,' she said before wiggling off to bed like the Serpent of the Nile."

One time, according to Natasha, Marilyn showed her a pin Howard had presented to her. The next day she took it to have it appraised at a pawnshop on Hollywood Boulevard, where she was told that the value of the gem was five-hundred dollars. "I had expected something much more valuable," a disappointed Marilyn told Natasha. Even more helpful than jewelry, Howard paid for Marilyn's acting lessons with Natasha.

Marilyn used a battered car to drive around from studio to studio, hoping to be cast in any film. In 1949 when Howard hadn't called for a long time, her car was in danger of being repossessed. For some time, Tom Kelley, who had once photographed Jane Russell, had been begging her to pose in the nude for a calendar. In desperation she called him and agreed to the session for fifty dollars. He posed her naked and stretched out on rumpled red velvet which evoked the inside of a Tiffany jewel box.

Kelley took the pictures on May 25, 1949 at his studio at 736 North Seward in Los Angeles. The photographer sold the rights for \$500 to the Baumgarth Calendar Company. When Howard learned of the calendar, he lamented to Noah Dietrich that he should have acquired the rights to the calendar. "I bet it'll sell fifteen million copies." He had a different question for Meyer. "Get me a copy of that god damn calendar—and does Marilyn show pubic hair?"

When Meyer delivered a copy of the calendar to Howard, he studied it very carefully. "Now I know why it's called the Calendar of Golden Dreams."

When Howard was in charge at RKO in 1952, he wanted to cast Marilyn as the fourth lead in *Clash by Night*, an adaptation of the play by Clifford Odets, the sometimes lover of his sometimes lover, Cary Grant. Howard demanded an all-star cast: Barbara Stanwyck, Paul Douglas, and Robert Ryan. Also cast was male heartthrob Keith Andes, playing a minor role in the film as Marilyn's young husband. Regarding Marilyn, Jerry Wald then RKO assistant production chief, warned "She's a cross between an antelope and a cobra."

As director, Howard hired the famous Viennese eccentric Fritz Lang, who habitually wore a monocle. As part of the deal Lang agreed to direct a second film as well, *Rancho Notorious* with Marlene Dietrich.

In the middle of shooting *Clash by Night*, Fritz Lang accidentally walked into Barbara Stanwyck's dressing room, catching Robert Taylor's former wife enjoying the sexual charms of Marilyn. As Marilyn later told Lang, "I let Joan Crawford. Why not Barbara Stanwyck?"

Lang enjoyed sharing this tidbit of gossip with another switch-hitter star, Marlene Dietrich. Howard found the news "delectable," as he told Lang.

In an impulsive move, and as a means of gaining publicity for *Clash by Night*, Howard called Meyer, a pimp who was now categorized as one of the film's publicists, into his office. Howard had decided to break the story to the news media that Marilyn was the model who had posed nude for what had already become a famous calendar. Aficionados of "Golden Dreams" had not yet associated the voluptuous nude in the calendar with the rising young star.

Months before, Howard had been impressed with a story that Aline Mosby, at Keith Andes and Marilyn Monroe in *Clash* the time a reporter for the United Press WireService, had written about Marilyn and her troubled childhood. "Mosby is a bitch," Howard told Meyer, "but she was nice to Marilyn in print."



Keith Andes and Marilyn Monroe in *Clash by Night*

Meyer was ordered to contact Mosby and relay the information, as an exclusive scoop, that Marilyn had posed for the nude calendar.

When the story broke, it became frontpage news across the country. Harry Brand, head of publicity at Fox, angrily confronted Marilyn. "This could ruin your career before it even gets started," he told her. He also called her "a little fool." He urged her to deny the story. At Howard's urging, she refused, agreeing to "tell the truth" instead.

Howard was right. The public remained loyal to her. As *Clash by Night* opened across the nation, theater owners, hoping to cash in on the publicity, often billed it as "starring Marilyn Monroe" instead of Barbara Stanwyck. Back in Hollywood, Barbara was in a rage, denouncing Marilyn as a "cheap tramp," even though at one time she'd befriended her co-star and had even made love to her.

Zanuck threatened to exercise the morals clause in Marilyn's contract until he saw the receipts piling up for Howard's *Clash by Night*. Instead of firing Marilyn, he went on to cast her in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, borrowing Jane Russell from Howard to play Marilyn's "sidekick."

Marilyn was hailed as "The Naked Venus," receiving additional exposure in the first-ever issue of Hugh Hefner's *Playboy*.

Howard is credited with inventing the expression "celebrity skin." He told Meyer: "Soon well-stacked actresses in Hollywood will routinely be taking off all their clothes before the camera. That day will come, Johnny. Mark my words."

Elizabeth Jean Peters—later shortened to Jean Peters for movie marquees—would have been a forgotten or obscure film figure of the late 40s and early 50s were it not for one fact: she became the second Mrs. Howard Hughes.

Born in Canton, Ohio, on October 15, 1926, Jean grew up with a dream of becoming an English teacher and in later life would try to revive that long-ago schoolgirl hope. Her roommate, Arlen Hurwitz, shelled out four dollars and sent Jean's picture, taken by a campus photographer, to the Miss Ohio State beauty contest.

Although at the time she thought that it was a waste of money, Jean emerged as the contest's winner. Part of the prize was a Hollywood screen test. Jean, only at the urging of Arlen, headed for Hollywood, protesting, "I can't act." Nonetheless, she was picked out of 13,000 competitors by the head of the agency himself to become a John Powers model.

Before she could be signed on, however, an agent for 20th Century Fox spotted her and was attracted by her charm and fresh-faced beauty. After some tests at Fox, she was signed to a six-month contract at \$150 a week. By the early 1950s that figure would be raised to \$6,000 a week.

One day on the set of Fox, Darryl F. Zanuck, the studio's chief, spotted Jean posing for some Fourth of July publicity pictures. He told his aides that he thought she could be turned into a sex symbol. More tests led to her being cast as the co-star in *Captain from Castile*, opposite Tyrone Power, who still maintained strong emotional links to Howard Hughes.

The first mention of Jean in Louella Parsons's column was not flattering. The gossip maven claimed that she's "not a beauty at all" and that she "was much like an average coed in appearance, with greenish-gray eyes." Louella got it wrong.

Virtually no other member of the press agreed with Louella about the twenty-one-year-old beauty contest winner. One columnist wrote of her "flawless and creamy skin," and still others compared her figure to that of a Greek goddess. One reporter claimed that "God designed Jean Peters to wear revealing bathing suits."

Although she didn't think of herself as the "sex symbol" envisioned by her boss Zanuck, she was a stunning natural beauty. Unpretentious and low-key, she often went out onto the streets of Los Angeles without makeup, wearing blue jeans, a cotton blouse she'd made herself, and sandals. Zanuck ordered her to stop doing this, since some tourist was likely to take her picture.

In spite of Louella's unflattering appraisal, young men of Hollywood took notice of the "new girl on the block," some of them hoping to be among the first to seduce her. As rumor had it, Jean was "the only virgin in Hollywood."

The honor of deflowering the Ohio-born beauty eventually went to Audie Murphy, who was the first to call her for a date.

The most decorated GI of World War II, Audie (pronounced *A W-dee*) Leon Murphy, born near Greenville, Texas, in 1924, was the widely publicized recipient of twenty-four medals for valor from the U.S., three from France, and one from Belgium.

During World War II, Audie had fought bravely (some say obsessively) in North Africa and Sicily before invading the beaches of Anzio. Fighting on the outskirts of Rome, he pushed his way into France and across the border into Nazi Germany itself. He was most famous for an episode near Colmar, France, in January of 1945, when Nazi forces attacked his unit. Jumping atop a burning tank destroyer, he used his machine gun to kill about 50 enemy troops. In another exploit, he single-handedly destroyed a German tank and held off a fleet of six others in a gun battle. Before V-E day, he'd killed maybe as many as 250 Nazi soldiers (he wasn't sure).

At the time, Audie was living in a guest cottage on the grounds of the house inhabited by James Cagney. The screen's tough guy had taken such a personal interest in the war hero that Hollywood gossips claimed that the relationship bordered on the homosexual.

Don Graham, Audie's biographer, claimed that Audie would have made Rambo look like a "pumped up, aerobicized celluloid palooka," and that Audie would have had Sylvester Stallone for breakfast. In military uniform, and wearing some of his decorations, Audie had appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine on July 16, 1945. After that, he'd been lured to Hollywood by James Cagney, who felt Audie might break into pictures. "Every little gal in America wanted that doughboy from Texas," Cagney said.

A sinewy and somewhat small man, the young warrior was eagerly sought out by starlets as well as by Hollywood moguls eager to cash in on his status as a war hero. He'd met Jean while being shown around Fox studios, and he decided he wanted her.

Audie had become close pals of William (Bill) Cagney, brother of James Cagney. Audie told his friend that he'd climaxed in Jean a total of nine times on their first date.

Howard, too, was aware of the charms of Jean Peters. Meyer related to Howard the story that Audie was spreading about Jean.

"Nine times?" Howard looked both puzzled and skeptical. "Do you think that's humanly possible?"

"I've heard of such things," Meyer said, not wanting to offend a boss known for periodic bouts of impotence.

"These days," Howard confided, "I'm having a hard enough time getting it up for one fuck a night."

Howard asked Meyer to arrange an invitation to any social gathering where he might meet Jean casually. Such an occasion occurred when Bill Cagney gave a boating party that began at his brother's house in Newport Beach. The guests were to assemble at the Cagneys, then sail by yacht to Catalina. Meyer called Bill, who was only too happy to include an illustrious guest like Howard Hughes, even though he'd brutally rejected his brother for the role of *Scarface* back in the 1930s.

He concealed it, but Howard was contemptuous of (and perhaps threatened by) Audie the first moment he spoke to the boyishly handsome twenty-two-year-old, a Texan like himself. Privately, and with sarcasm, Howard said to Bill, "I'm surprised Murphy isn't wearing his Congressional Medal of Honor. I have honors myself."

In his attempts to get close to Jean Peters, Audie seemed to be guarding her, territorially, as if he anticipated another Nazi attack. Eventually Howard decided that if he wanted to break through to Jean, he first had to win Audie over to his side. He spent more than an hour talking about the hero's wartime exploits. "If you could imagine such a thing, Howard was listening like a lovesick schoolgirl to Audie's heroic exploits," Bill Cagney later claimed. "That conquering hero was one cocky little kid in those days."



Audie Murphy, 1946

After the cruise, despite his basic mistrust and perhaps a sense of competition, Audie reluctantly agreed to let Howard fly Jean and him back to the California mainland from Catalina Island. As pilot, Howard asked Jean to sit with him in the cockpit. Audie was relegated to a rear seat with Johnny Meyer.

Taking advantage of his proximity to Jean, Howard deliberately extended the flight time, taking them on a scenic aerial tour over Southern California and the Palos Verdes peninsula, and asking questions about the progress of her career.

When he suggested the possibility of a personal contract, she said that Zanuck was on the verge of signing her to a seven-year contract at Fox. Howard frowned. "Every day around one o'clock that horny bastard orders a starlet to come to his office so he can fuck her. Fox practically shuts down at that time every day. Watch out that that doesn't happen to you."

She assured him that she could take care of herself.

As a means of luring Jean away from Audie, Howard adopted the persona of a sympathetic, well-intentioned father to the both of them. That's why he invited both Audie and Jean to watch his ill-fated test of the XF-11 that fateful Sunday morning on July 7, 1946.

Unknown to Audie, Jean was one of the first women allowed to visit Howard in the hospital during his recovery from the Beverly Hills crash. "He let Jean in and he hardly knew her." One day, Jean encountered Cary Grant, who was just leaving the hospital room as she was coming in. She was impressed at meeting the handsome, big-time star.

When she'd left that day, Howard summoned Johnny Meyer. "I think I'm in love with the girl," he claimed. "That Jean Peters—she's amazing. She's a combination of my mother and Ella Rice. Looks just like them."

When Dietrich was finally allowed to visit Howard, he told his chief, "I've found the girl of my dreams."

Dietrich said that if that were so, then Howard should marry her and settle down. "It'll be a lot cheaper keeping one woman instead of fifty."

"I won't get married until I'm fifty," Howard said.

"Why fifty? If you're crazy about her, marry her now before Audie Murphy gets her."

"I can't bring myself to marry," Howard said. "I just can't. I have to share myself with others. I'm split into too many different pieces to share all of those parts with just one woman."

Howard literally swept Jean off her feet, according to Meyer, although he was dating Terry Moore and others at the time. "He promised Jean all the money, glitter, and glamour in the world," Meyer later said. "Even big movie stardom. It was too much for a little farm gal from Ohio who still walked around in cotton dresses she'd sewed herself. What could Audie offer her? War medals?"

Until the end of her life, Jean Peters tended to be secretive about her relationship with Howard. Her only known confidante was fellow actress Jeanne Crain. Much of what is known today about the strange Hughes/Peters liaison comes from Fox's "sweet young thing," Jeanne Crain. The actress is remembered for such memorable roles as *A Letter to Three Wives* and *Pinky*, the latter casting her as a light-skinned black girl passing for white.

"Jean dreaded confronting Audie to tell him that she was leaving him," Jeanne Crain recalled. "She'd already experienced his horrible temper. Audie throughout his life was such a hothead. When Jean finally told him it was all over between them, he struck her, knocking her to the floor. He claimed that if she left him, he was going to kill her."

Jean immediately called Howard, who ordered a 24-hour security guard for the starlet. Somehow, and only the war hero knows for sure and he never told, Audie decided that Jean was "all greed and ambition" and that she wasn't to blame for their breakup. He placed all the blame on Howard Hughes.

Bill Cagney didn't learn until later what Audie planned to do. He borrowed \$2,500 from his patron, James Cagney, claiming that he wanted to buy himself a good car and promising to pay Cagney back at one-hundred dollars per month.

With that money, Audie planned to bribe the Mormon guards surrounding Howard at the Town House Hotel where he occupied the top-floor suite. Concealing an army rifle he'd brought back from Germany, Audie drove to the Town House.

The story will never be clear, and there are conflicting versions. But Audie, in a surprise move, managed to bribe at least four of the guards, giving each of them a five-hundred dollar bill. He wanted to gain entrance to Howard's suite and "mow him down," like he'd done the Nazis.

The underpaid guards foolishly accepted the money from Audie and let him pass. The only guard who balked was the one who stood right outside Howard's door. The guard immediately pressed a button alerting the security force's headquarters. He then stalled Audie, pretending to engage him in negotiations, during the time it took for three of the house detectives to arrive and subdue the ex-soldier.

This loyal guard then alerted Howard about what Audie had attempted to do and asked if he could call the police. Fearing headlines, Howard refused to allow that. He immediately fired his other guards and called for reinforcements. He was very concerned that his security shield had not proven effective against a bribe, and immediately inaugurated a plan that would discourage an equivalent incident in the future.

He called Noah Dietrich and woke him up at four o'clock in the morning. Dietrich promised to double the security guards and get rid of all Mormons on the staff.

"No, keep the Mormons!" Howard commanded. "Just throw out the bad apples."

“I know I urged you to marry Jean, but after this incident I’m not so sure,” Dietrich said. “Murphy may start stalking her. He might even lay in wait for you on the rooftop of a building, and gun you down as you’re coming and going.”

“I know a way to stop that,” Howard said. “Every man has deep secrets. I’m going to find out what Murphy’s are. I’ve heard rumors. If those secrets are deep and dark enough, and if he wants a career in Hollywood, I think I can blackmail him into staying out of my way.”

“What if he’s just a good, clean-living boy from Texas?” Dietrich asked.

“I already know he isn’t,” Howard said. “I have my spies out there. Murphy would kill himself if word leaks out that I know what really goes on when he disappears on weekends and isn’t chasing after pussy.”

“You mean. . . .”

“Let’s not talk about it over the phone,” Howard cautioned. “J. Edgar Hoover is probably listening right now.”

“Audie Murphy? Dietrich sounded puzzled. I’d never thought it of him.”

“Would you have thought it of Robert Taylor, Cary Grant, Errol Flynn, and Tyrone Power?” Howard asked.

“In those cases, my answer is yes,” Dietrich said.

“Let’s drop the subject,” Howard said, growing impatient. “But after I tell Jean what Audie tried to do to me, she’s all but mine!” He put down the phone.

Later in his tragic life, Audie called himself “the poor man’s Howard Hughes.” The soldier/movie star’s biographer, Don Graham, speculated as to the nature of that comparison—“insomniac, secretive, suspicious, paranoid, a tireless pursuer of women, a man in touch with the dark side of America.”

Los Angeles, 1947-56

While still living with Cary Grant in his rented villa, Howard also moved in with Jean, sharing a king-sized bed placed in the master bedroom at her house on Veteran Drive in Westwood. He commuted back and forth between his two lovers. Details about the strange goings-on within this living arrangement were later articulated by Jean’s maid, Mary Todd.

Mary claimed that Howard always arrived at Jean’s back door, hoping to avoid photographers. “He was still limping from his plane crash.” She said that he would usually spend the night and stay until after lunch on the afternoon of the following day. Then he’d return to Cary’s rented villa.

Mary quickly grew resentful of Howard’s bossing her around, even giving her elaborate instructions how she was to clean the telephone. If he wanted a door opened, he’d call for Mary. If she were not available, he’d place Kleenex over the doorknob and open it that way.

She didn’t like Howard’s “strange ways,” but since the money was good she agreed to houseclean at Cary’s house four days a week, and then spend the other three days housecleaning for Jean. She confirmed the fact that Howard slept in the same bed with Cary. Cary always appeared either in a bathrobe or fully dressed. But she was startled to learn soon after her debut on the job that Howard usually walked around nude all day. Sometimes when she came into a room where he was sitting in a chair, he covered his genitals with a Kleenex.

To carry on his other affairs, he continued to maintain two bungalows at the Beverly Hills Hotel, plus two separate apartments in the Town House in Los Angeles. He also had a secret apartment at 10000 Sunset Boulevard plus a hideaway in the San Fernando Valley. He could also retreat to a rented villa in Palm Springs and a relatively modest house in Las Vegas.

Some of the scenes from *Captain from Castile*, Jean’s first starring picture, released in 1947, were shot outside Mexico City. Howard flew there to join Jean on the set and to have a reunion with Tyrone Power. Meyer went with him.

His pimp claimed that his boss divided his time at El Reforma Hotel between visitations to Tyrone’s suite and other nights spent with Jean.

Even at this early stage of their relationship, he brought up the subject of marriage, claiming that he’d leave Jean a vast fortune upon his death. He warned her that if she didn’t agree to marry him, he’d give his millions to medical research. She told him, perhaps inaccurately, that she wasn’t interested in his money but in himself as a lover and a future husband—“that is, Howard when you become old enough.” She was mocking his oft-stated vow that he’d never marry until he was fifty.

He made his intent to marry her much more obvious in Palm Springs in 1949 when he offered her a large sapphire-and-diamond engagement ring. Jeanne Crain later described the ring as “too splendid even for the Queen of England.”

Jean agreed to marry Howard, but noted that no date was set for the wedding. In her embarrassment, she tried to explain it: “We’re serious about one another, but we want to be sure before we actually get married,” she told best pal Crain. “Howard says that when he marries for the second time, it will be forever.”

By the early 50s, Jean Peters became a household word in America. She’d be cast as the star of several CinemaScope hits. By 1952 *Viva Zapata!* was playing on movie screens across the nation. Jean had moved into the big-time, co-starring on that film opposite A-list star Marlon Brando.

As supervisor of his private security force, Howard hired Jeff Chouinard, a former private eye and ex-fighter pilot, allocating an annual budget of two million dollars. Among a long list of other duties, Chouinard was assigned the task of spying on Jean 24 hours a day.

Fearing sexual competition from Brando, Chouinard paid some of the extras on the set of *Viva Zapata!* to report on Jean’s activities, especially as they regarded her relationship with Brando.

Within his first dossier, the security chief wrote that, “Brando has the sweet mind of a four-year-old and has no interest in chasing women.” But despite Chouinard’s report, the much neglected Jean was indeed having a torrid but brief affair with Brando, a liaison that ended before the completion of the film.

When Jean was cast in *Niagara* with Joseph Cotten in 1953, Howard was much more intrigued with Jean’s co-star, Marilyn Monroe, than with Jean herself. He confided to Johnny Meyer that “my all time sexual fantasy involves crawling into bed with both Jean and Marilyn at the same time.”

By 1954, Jean called Jeanne Crain to say that “forever is just too long to wait for Howard.” She announced her upcoming marriage to the very handsome Stuart Cramer III, a Lockheed executive and grandson of the legendary industrialist, Stuart Warren Cramer (1868-1940), founder of eleven textile mills. She’d met Cramer in Rome while filming *Three Coins in the Fountain*.

Catching Howard by surprise, Louella Parsons called him for his reaction to her bombshell about Jean’s upcoming marriage.

Howard’s chief aide at the time, the Mormon, Bill Gay, claimed that his boss’s reaction to the news was subdued. That evening he drove over to the Tudor-style home of Kathryn Grayson, MGM’s singing sensation. There he formally proposed to her in her rose garden, and she accepted. Their

marriage was to take place on the Memorial Day weekend in Las Vegas. “This was Howard’s way of getting back at Jean,” Gay claimed.

Howard had been secretly dating Kathryn Grayson for some months before his proposal of marriage. Apparently, he planned to go through with this wedding. Unexpectedly, it was Grayson who balked at the last minute. Howard was already at Culver City preparing a private plane to fly the singing star to Las Vegas for the wedding.

Frantically, she called him, claiming that she couldn’t marry him because she’d had a premonition that morning that something tragic was about to unfold. She feared it might concern her daughter. A spiritualist, she firmly believed in premonitions.



Newlyweds: Jean Peters and Stuart Cramer

He tried to dismiss her concerns, claiming that it was “just the jitters before a wedding.” But she held firm to her position, saying that there was no way she was going to marry him. He was forced to give up after a long argument. Later that day, she learned that her nephew, Timmy, while playing in her brother’s pool, had drowned.

She would never marry Howard.

Jean, however, on May 29, 1954, in Washington, D.C., followed through on her plans to marry Cramer. Jean walked to the altar on the same golden carpet where Queen Elizabeth II’s feet had trod on her Coronation Day.

From the beginning of their marriage, Howard ordered spies to report on the activities of the newlyweds. After their wedding, Cramer and his new bride settled in Washington, where they quickly became part of that city’s social scene.

Demanding the hottest private eye in the business, Howard was led to FBI veteran Robert A. Maheu, who supervised Jean’s physical surveillance in the wake of Howard’s instructions to dig up all the dirt. Howard particularly wanted to know if Cramer had been a CIA operative. In time, Maheu would take over the role of Noah Dietrich in Howard’s life.

Within ten days, Maheu submitted a detailed dossier on Cramer, including his links to the CIA as a Lockheed executive.

Maheu had even spied on Cramer as he stripped down to seduce Jean on the living room floor of their townhouse in Washington.

Back in Los Angeles, Howard found that story especially compelling. He wanted to know everything about Cramer’s love-making, including his sexual dimensions. He also wanted to know if Jean appeared to have experienced an orgasm during their sex act. Maheu reported that it “seemed that she did.”



Howard Hughes, 1952. Last Known Picture.

So impressed was Howard with the dossier that he formed a fifteen-year business relationship with Maheu, thereby filling the void that would appear after he fired Noah Dietrich. The Maheu/Hughes liaison would eventually end in bitterness and lawsuits, however.

Unknown to Cramer, Howard was in constant touch with Jean. It is not known what exactly happened, but suddenly Jean turned up in Miami, discreetly filing for a divorce from Cramer, although there would be delays and complications. Howard was also reported to be in Miami at the time, assisting Jean in her divorce. Simultaneously, but unknown to Jean, Howard was paying for a suite for Ava Gardner in another part of town, still obsessed with the idea of seducing her. The more Ava fended him off, the more he desired her.

Howard summoned Cramer to Beverly Hills, arranging for his transport to California from Washington in a private plane. Picked up by Johnny Meyer at the Los Angeles airport, Cramer was delivered immediately to Howard’s offices at 7000 Romaine Street. “At first I thought I was being kidnapped. There were two Mormon guards in the back seat,” Cramer later said.

Brought face to face with Howard, Cramer quoted him as saying, “I’m in love with your wife and have been for so many, many years. And she is

completely in love with me. Now, if she’ll confirm this, will you give her an uncontested divorce?”

Cramer protested, claiming that he was devoted to his wife. He begged Howard not to interfere in their marriage.

The scenario grows thin here. Apparently, Jean received a “marital promissory note,” from Howard. With that paper in hand, she agreed to divorce her husband and marry Howard.

There was a final ironic twist in the life of Stuart Cramer. Having allowed Jean Peters to divorce him, he went on in 1959 to marry Howard’s longtime mistress: Terry Moore.

Reconciled with Howard in Los Angeles, and now more or less engaged to marry him, Jean was moved into a bungalow near his at the Beverly Hills Hotel. In her divorce petition against Cramer, she charged him with mental cruelty, claiming that their marriage was short lived, although admittedly consummated. Howard at first had wanted her to testify that there had never been any sexual intercourse between Jean and her husband, but she refused.

In the weeks leading up to his marriage to Jean, Howard continued to have affairs with Susan Hayward, Kathryn Grayson (even though she’d refused to marry him), Terry Moore, Debra Paget, Mitzi Gaynor, and starlet Yvonne Shubert, among others.

Los Angeles, 1956

Regardless of whether Dietrich was plotting against him, Howard thought that he was—and that was what mattered. By 1956 their business relationship had deteriorated to such a point that Howard was hardly talking to his chief officer.

On May 12, 1957, when Dietrich pressed for long overdue stock options in a telephone exchange from room to room at the Beverly Hills Hotel, Howard balked. He was already paying Dietrich half-a-million dollars a year, and apparently he felt that that was enough. “You’re holding a gun to my head, Noah,” he said.

Dietrich held his ground, demanding the stock options. Both men hung up the phone at the same time. Within minutes, Howard called Bill Gay to go at once to 7000 Romaine Street and padlock the doors to Dietrich. A thirty-two year relationship had abruptly ended.

The Mormon, Bill Gay, had become an increasingly important figure in Howard’s life. Originally, he’d plan to teach at a university until hired by Howard as his Administrative Equipment Assistant. Rather good looking and somewhat lanky like Gary Cooper, or even Howard himself, Gay was instructed to hire only Mormons as Howard’s assistants. The new recruits servicing Howard were forbidden to smoke or drink. Privately Howard told Gay that he preferred the men on his staff to dislike “kikes and niggers.”

Designated for many years as a trusted keeper of the secrets, Dietrich in later years spoke bitterly about Howard and recalled the night he was fired. “I never saw Howard Hughes again. I was free to live my life—no more calls at three o’clock in the morning. I should define that better. I was prepared to live my life—what was left of it after he’d sucked me dry.”

Dietrich later speculated about the real reason Howard married Jean Peters. “She may have loved him, but he was in love with Howard Hughes, not Jean Peters. It wasn’t true, but Howard began suspecting that I was in cohorts with the boys in Houston. He felt that we were plotting to have him declared mentally incompetent, sent away to an asylum, while we took over his empire and divided the loot among ourselves. Howard knew that if he had a legitimate wife, she would have to commit him. He’d secured Jean’s promise that she would never do that to him, and he believed her. Allegedly she’d told Howard, ‘I will never be a party to any betrayal of you.’ Love or not, I always felt it was a marriage of convenience on Howard’s part.”

Dietrich might have been lying about his role in a potential palace coup. There was indeed a plot afoot to have Howard declared mentally incompetent. Prompted by Toolco, lawyers in Houston were already working on such a possibility, and Dietrich had been informed of what was happening. Perhaps he lent his cooperation. He was accused of at least discussing the possibility with attorney Raymond Cook. He also conferred with Howard’s doctor, Verne Mason, on his boss’s mental condition.

Dietrich once tried to explain Howard’s fascination for Jean. “She was thefirst one who wasn’t interested in him for his status, his money, and his fame.” He was perhaps overlooking Ava Gardner in this assessment.

Dietrich continued, “She [meaning Jean] saw him as an average man, an average man she fell in love with. It was as if all that other stuff never existed. But I also feel that his confrontation with death after the XF-11 made him take stock of his life. And when he did, he was amazed by its emptiness.”

Tonopah, Nevada/Beverly Hills, 1957

At the dawn of the 20th century, Tonopah, Nevada, a dusty and makeshift desert outpost strung along the road between Las Vegas and Reno, was known as the Silver Queen of the West. During its heyday, its mines produced \$200 million of silver.

Decades before Howard Hughes, Jr. arrived there in January of 1957 with his bride-to-be, Tonopah had attracted young schemers like Howard Hughes Sr. Long before his drill bit made him a fortune, he had hoped to strike it rich in the silver mines here. That dream never happened.

Where his father had failed, Howard Jr. hoped to succeed. He’d heard rumors that although most of the mines had already been shut down, there were still mother lodes of silver waiting to be discovered. Perhaps haunted by an ongoing competitiveness with his long-dead father, he wanted to tap into these unexcavated riches to become the "Silver King of America."

It's ironic that Howard, who could have afforded a wedding in any of the most ostentatious and glamorous spots in the world, chose such a forbidding landscape, and such unromantic circumstances, for his second marriage. And it's perhaps a sign of his basic alienation that during the days preceding his wedding, when a more conventional man might have been at least trying to relate to his young bride-to-be, he super-charged his schedule with business meetings associated with his growing investments there. As it turned out, the circumstances and logistics associated with the Hughes-Peters union became almost surreal.

In January of 1957, from Los Angeles, after a sweaty transfer in Las Vegas, Howard flew Jean to an abandoned U.S. Army air base outside Tonopah. In this remote outpost, he was met by James Arditto, an attorney from Los Angeles who had been his advance man, arranging the wedding. In this barren desert, Howard hoped to escape the media frenzy that his marriage would set off. Through a landscape believed to have been radioactively polluted by

nuclear testing in the area, Arditto drove the about-to-be-married couple to the dilapidated Mizpah Hotel.

There they were introduced to the Nye County judge, William (Bill) Beko, who married them in a brief civil ceremony on January 12, 1957, thereby ending three decades of bachelorhood for Howard.

In those days, Nevada law allowed couples to wed under assumed names. Jean opted for the pseudonym of Marian Evans, Howard selecting the name G.A. Johnson. He was 51 years old, but listed his age at 46. A voluptuous 30, she claimed to be 29.

The newlyweds remained in Tonopah for only three hours before flying back to Las Vegas, where they boarded a larger plane for the flight back to Los Angeles. Before leaving Tonopah, in a way that seemed to redefine the trip as one primarily concerned with business, Howard ordered Arditto to acquire 750 more deeds to abandoned silver mines. At the time, he already owned 100 such deeds. Before his pursuit of mother lodes of silver ended, he would shell out twelve million dollars, which he would never recoup. In all, he would purchase as much as 14,500 acres of land in Nye County, some of the barren tracts spilling over into other counties.

The townspeople of Tonopah were thrilled to have Howard buying up deserted mines. A barmaid, Patricia Naylor, summed up the local feeling. "With a man like Hughes behind us, we could be put on the map again." But like the dream of a successful marriage to Jean Peters, it was not to be realized.

Flying back to Los Angeles, Howard slept with his bride a total of five nights before insisting that he needed privacy. At the Beverly Hills Hotel, he remained in his "bachelor quarters" at bungalow 4, ordering that she be evicted into a separate bungalow, #19.

The world didn't learn of the Hughes/Peters marriage until March 15, 1957 when columnist Florabel Muir announced that Jean and Howard had been wed on March 12, 1957. That false date still appears in biographies and other articles about the life of Howard Hughes, and is directly attributed to the misinformation once printed in the *Los Angeles Herald & Express*.

Exiled within just a few days of her marriage to a lonely bungalow for one, Jean called her best friend Jeanne Crain to report, "I've been banished from his bed. Welcome to marriage to Howard Hughes."

Days and nights much worse were yet to come.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Washington, 1947

The year had begun badly.

Francis D. Flanagan, the chief investigator for a U.S. Senate probe and a former administrative assistant to FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover, accompanied with six highly aggressive auditors, had arrived at 7000 Romaine Street in Hollywood to seize the accounting records of Hughes Aviation. The investigators were reviewing the company's up-to-now secret books, on a mission to prove that Howard had squandered millions of taxpayers' dollars in his ill-fated development of reconnaissance planes and the Spruce Goose during World War II. The erroneous accusation was that Howard had transferred a huge slush fund of government money into his personal bank accounts.

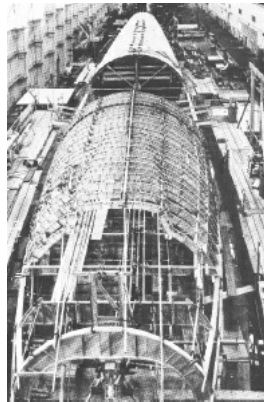
It wasn't true: Howard had actually invested twelve million dollars of his own money into financing the prototypes for both the Hercules and the XF-11 reconnaissance plane. In addition, he had collected only \$40 million of the \$90 million that had originally been proposed during wartime for his aircraft development. Regrettably, and much to his and everyone else's chagrin, none of his widely publicized prototype planes had been successfully tested. As a result, the investigating committee sent to his offices in California was instructed to find "financial irregularities."

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Senator Ferguson (seated, left, gesticulating with his hands);
Senator Brewster (standing in background, with open jacket),
and Howard Hughes (standing, right).

Even before the arrival of the government auditors in Los Angeles, Howard had been tipped off by Elliott Roosevelt that the probe was underway. (One can only wonder about the records that Howard might have Jordered destroyed in the immediate wake of 4fElliott's warning.) Elliott, who had been deeply JWinvolved in influence-peddling during his Ifather's wartime regime in the White House, had been specifically targeted for investigation by members of the now-hostile Republican-dominated Senate. With an eye toward winning the upcoming 1948 elections, the Republican party was aggressively working to discredit the Democratic regime of the late Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had died in April of 1945, about 18 months previously. Many of the Republicans' accusations were based on the involvement of Elliott in the controversial assignment to Howard of several multi-million dollar defense contracts for airplanes that literally never got off the ground.



Flying Lumberyard: The
Spruce Goose
under construction.

To complicate matters, the committee looking into Howard's government contracts was headed by the arch conservative senator from Maine, Ralph Owen Brewster, and the equally conservative senator from Michigan, Homer Ferguson. Howard's own spies had already learned that Brewster was "in the pocket" of Juan Trippe, president of Pan American Airways, TWA's major rival.

Juan Trippe had been born on June 27, 1899 in Sea Bright, New Jersey, and entered Yale University in 1917. Although he never saw combat, he

became a Navy pilot after America entered World War I. Graduating from Yale, he worked briefly on Wall Street as a bond salesman, soon after realizing that it was aviation that genuinely interested him. By 1927, he had launched Pan American, almost single handedly building it into a world class airline. As the pioneer and advocate of an inaugural class of efficient and large-scale “flying boats,” the Pan Am Flying Clippers, he opened up dozens of global routes across both the Pacific and the Atlantic. Believing that “the average man,” and not just the wealthy, should be allowed to fly at affordable prices, he virtually invented the concept of the airline industry’s “tourist class.”

Independent of his friendship with Trippe, Brewster had his own, highly subjective and ambitious, political agenda. He wanted to be the Republican nominee for vice president in 1948. He already functioned as the powerful chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program. That office already held many important precedents: During the FDR regime, when Harry Truman had held that job, he had been propelled to national prominence, opening doors that eventually led to Truman’s designation as Vice President and, after the untimely death of FDR in April of 1945, to his role as President of the United States. Brewster felt he too could use the post as a stepping stone to greater political power, especially if he could bag “big game” like Howard Hughes.

Hoping to block the Senate probe, Howard had traveled to Washington for a private meeting with Brewster in February of 1947. Meeting in the senator’s suite at the Mayflower Hotel, Howard came face to face with his archenemy. Writer Charles Barton once described Brewster as “not a handsome man. The forepart of his head was billiard-bald. His meaty upper lip protruded slightly as though stuffed with chewing tobacco.”

Brewster didn’t like wasting time in small talk. Over lunch, he got quickly to the point. His words were blunt. He told Howard that there would be no Senate investigation if he would relinquish the coveted transatlantic air routes that the Civil Aeronautics Board had granted to TWA in the spring of 1945. TWA had begun flying between the US and Europe in 1946.

The senator went one step further, informing Howard that it would be in his best interest if TWA actually merged with Pan Am. “It’ll be a sweeter deal for all of us,” the senator said. “Cash money in all our bank accounts, including yours.” Brewster went on to say that if Howard would cooperate with Congress’s designation of Pan Am as the exclusive and official national airline of the United States, “You’ll be out of the stew pot.”

Drew Pearson was the most famous political columnist of his day. His muckraking column, *Washington Merry-Go-Around*, which appeared in newspapers that included *The Washington Post* and *The Miami Herald*, was read each morning by the President of the United States and millions of others. The columnist detested both Senator Brewster and Juan Trippe of Pan Am. In one column, siding with Howard, Pearson called Brewster “the kept boy of Pan Am.”

Before his lunch with Howard at the Mayflower, Brewster had introduced the Community Airline Bill, which would, if passed through Congress, grant Pan Am exclusive dominance of the air routes between North America and Europe, cutting out TWA. A roughly equivalent bill, introduced earlier, had already failed in the Senate. Prior to their luncheon, Howard had already publicly denounced Brewster’s latest bill “as the same baby in a different set of diapers.”

Adding to Howard’s contempt and fury was a fact unearthed by his spies: Attorneys for Pan Am had crafted the actual wording and phraseology of the Senate bill as sponsored by Brewster.

Although he’d remained calm throughout the luncheon, neither accepting nor rejecting Brewster’s deal, Howard called Noah Dietrich when he’d returned to his hotel. “His fury was equivalent to the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima,” Dietrich later said.

Howard ordered Dietrich to launch, through Johnny Meyer, investigations of both Juan Trippe and Senator Brewster. “Money is no object,” he assured Dietrich. “These shitasses are trying to destroy me.” Charles Lindbergh had been replaced in the ranks of Howard’s leading rivals: Clearly Juan Trippe was now the enemy seeking to destroy Howard.

Meyer was sent to South America to investigate Brewster’s “freeloading” and his acceptance of frequent and lush Pan Am “hospitality” offered by Trippe.

By July of 1947 a particularly muggy summer had descended over the Potomac. The Senate probe of Howard was scheduled to open later that month. In front of Dietrich, Howard had threatened to “take on the entire fucking government if I have to.” But first Howard had to be served with a subpoena, and no server could find him.

The “super snooper,” George Rossinni, a Federal marshal, had been sent to Los Angeles to serve Howard with a warrant. Facing the press at the Los Angeles airport, Rossinni assured journalists that he’d track Howard down—and soon. “After all,” he boasted, “I’m the man who brought in Al Capone.”

Unknown to the Senate-appointed investigators hot on his trail, Howard was hiding out at Cary Grant’s private villa. When not with Cary, he was housed by Jean Peters in a small apartment in the western section of Los Angeles. When not with Peters, he was slipping around in his battered car on rendezvous with Cyd Charisse, the lovely dancing star at MGM. Although Howard proposed marriage to her, almost simultaneously with his proposals of marriage to Jean Peters, Cyd ultimately gave her heart to singer Tony Martin.

One afternoon as Rossinni and his men were enjoying lunch at Hughes Aviation, Howard, Cary Grant, and co-pilot Earl Martyn slipped onto the tarmac at Culver City and boarded Howard’s converted B-23 bomber. The plane was airborne before Rossinni and his men discovered what was happening. The process server ran out of the main building at Hughes Aviation and onto the tarmac, shaking his fist at the departing Howard in the sky.

Only the night before, he’d made the decision that he could not evade the Federal marshals indefinitely. But he didn’t want to face the humiliation of being served papers by Rossinni. He thought it would look better if he arrived in Washington in his own plane. He planned to immediately announce that he’d willingly flown in and had freely volunteered to appear before the Senate committee as if he had nothing to hide.



Cyd Charisse

Weeks before his arrival at the hearings, he and Senator Brewster had been waging their battle in the press. Threatening Howard and in reference to the fact that none of his Senate emissaries had yet been able to serve him with a subpoena, the senator told the press that, “I’ll personally drag this millionaire playboy by the ear across the entire continental United States if that’s the only way I’ll get him to Washington.” Smiling with an ominous leer, he said, “I want to see the whites of his lies.”



Howard Hughes at the Senate Testimony

Even though Howard had managed to evade U.S. marshals for more than a month, he, too, privately contacted the press. “I’m a loyal American,” he protested. “I’m getting screwed by special interest groups on the payroll of Pan Am.” He also claimed that Juan Trippe, “working through crooked senators,” was trying to destroy TWA as a means of giving Pan Am “ownership of the skies—and no one owns the skies but God himself.”

Ironically, Howard was one of the richest men in the world at the time, with Toolco profits “reaching celestial figures,” in the words of Dietrich. Even so, Howard managed to portray himself as “a little dog” (TWA), fighting “a big dog” (Pan Am).

Howard’s old friend, William Randolph Hearst, had opened the columns of his newspapers for Howard’s counterattack against Senator Brewster and Juan Trippe.

Other representatives of the press were not always favorable, however. Another popular columnist of his day, Westbrook Pegler, claimed that Howard had given parties for Elliott Roosevelt in which “semi-nude lovelies swam in a mirrored pool at the Hughes mansion.”

In anticipation of their grilling of Howard in front of their committee in Washington, the FBI and investigators commissioned by the Senate had prepared a 2,000-page dossier. But despite its ongoing probes, the dossier contained many false accusations. One report claimed that Elliott had accepted a \$75,000 bribe from Howard to win his approval of government contracts. Privately, Brewster read a long and detailed report of Howard’s love life, much of which was wrong, superficial, or misguided.

Agents, for example, did not uncover any of Howard’s homosexual activities and also mistakenly assumed that he was having a hot, torrid romance with Ava Gardner, the kind of affair she’d ultimately have with another famous man: Frank Sinatra.

They did uncover some incriminating evidence, as documented in their report #62-3541. Howard had hired Hollywood starlets to entertain and/or seduce military brass, who were at the time responsible for eventually awarding government contracts to Hughes Aviation.

Just prior to his appearance in front of the committee, Howard arranged bookings for himself and for Cary Grant within different suites at Washington, D.C.’s Carlton Hotel. When they arrived, and throughout the course of the hearings, they slipped in and out through the hotel’s back entrance. Noah Dietrich was housed at the Mayfair Hotel across from the Carlton.

Howard suspected, and rightly so, that his suite had been bugged. Both of the suites on either side of his housed FBI agents listening in on his private conversations. “They could hear every time I went to take a piss,” he told Dietrich. The surveillance of Howard was carried out by Lt. Joseph WW Shimon, who was hailed as the FBI’s greatest eavesdropper.

By this time in his life, Howard was something of a master “bugger” himself. He ordered men from the Schindler Detective Agency to bug Senator Brewster’s room at the Mayflower Hotel.

Members of the 80th Congress smelled blood when they called Howard to appear before them. The Republicans, who had been exiled, figuratively speaking, to Siberia during the four terms of the Roosevelt presidency, were eager for power again. Members of the Republican-dominated Senate probe

planned to use Howard to discredit the Roosevelts, especially Elliott.

Just before the hearings, Cary commissioned some of the best stylists and tailors in Hollywood for Howard’s complete cosmetic makeover. The immaculately groomed actor ordered that two hair stylists give Howard “the latest CEO look” in hair cuts. Two tailors were summoned to outfit Howard with double-breasted dove gray suits with black and blue pinstripes.

In Washington, Howard was coached by Jack Anderson, at the time a “leg man” for the columnist Drew Pearson. With Cary Grant sitting in on the “rehearsals,” Howard was repeatedly tossed the kinds of hostile questions likely to be asked by his interrogators. Cary rehearsed him in body posture and what the world media would one day call “sound bites.”

But before facing the senators, Howard had to sit glued to his radio, listening to Johnny Meyer’s Senate testimony being broadcast across the nation: “He’s the greatest pimp in Hollywood, but I don’t know if he can hold up under the heat,” he told Dietrich.

Nervous, but concealing it from Howard, Dietrich had spent many weeks personally coaching Meyer. The practice sessions had not gone well—despite Dietrich’s prolonged coaching, Meyer did not make a convincing witness.

“Do you think Johnny’s going to come through this?” Howard asked. “Or will he fuck this up royally?”

“We’ll have to wait and see,” Dietrich told his boss. “Johnny operates behind the scenes. He’s not used to having his fat ass hauled out before movie cameras.”

Facing what Dietrich called “head-hunters after Howard,” Johnny Meyer made his appearance on the world stage. Up to then, most of his life had been spent in the back alleys and parking lots of Hollywood. Although he was inordinately skilled at arranging liaisons in the boudoirs of Hollywood, he’d prove disastrous within a Senate caucus room. Pale, pallid, and fidgety, the pudgy pimp made an unprepossessing witness amid the glare of klieg lights and microphones.

During his interrogation, Senators Ferguson and Brewster took delight in going over a ledger where Meyer had written off about \$170,000 in expenses charged to Hughes Aviation. A number of often incongruous items were grouped under the general heading of “entertainment.” Probers were especially intrigued as to why the name of Colonel Elliott Roosevelt appeared so frequently, along with that of the then-starlet, Faye Emerson, whom the president’s son later married.

Meyer had to face questions as to why \$132 worth of hard-to-get nylon stockings were written off as an expense, though presented as a gift to Emerson. He was also quizzed about twenty dollars provided to her and also written off. He claimed that the twenty dollars was for her “to travel home.”

The questions were probing, his answers vague and unconvincing.

Brewster:	Can you tell me why you were charging up to Hughes Aircraft Company \$132 for nylon hose for Miss Emerson and \$20 to go home?
Meyer:	Because she had been very charming.
Brewster:	Very charming?
Meyer:	Girls are very pleasant.
Brewster:	What has that to do with aircraft production?
Meyer:	They just went along. Every company in the business did it. We were no different.

The hearings were going badly for Howard. Millions of Americans were getting the impression that Hughes Aviation was just a sleazy Hollywood operation which used call girls and in some cases, movie stars, to seduce contracts out of military officers.

Meyer was questioned about \$220 worth of champagne spent on the wedding party when Elliott married Faye Emerson. Foolishly, Meyer had charged expenses to Hughes Aviation that raised eyebrows, including car rentals and tips to policemen for security for three of FDR’s daughters-in-law who attended the president’s funeral on April 13, 1945.

Under threat of perjury, Meyer continued to deliver incriminating testimony against Howard.

Eventually, Elliott himself was called before the committee. To save himself, he attacked Meyer. In a loud and angry voice, Elliott claimed, “I deny with all my heart and soul that Johnny Meyer ever got me a girl!”

Not only that, he claimed that Meyer’s expense accounts were “very largely inaccurate,” citing examples that he was out of the country when many expenses written off for his entertainment were levied by Meyer.

At the end of Meyer’s appearance, Senator Ferguson denounced him as “diabolical, an influence peddler the likes of which the world has never seen.” Even Howard’s enemies had to admit that that was gross exaggeration. The world had witnessed far greater influence peddlers than Howard’s private pimp.

At one point Senator Brewster proposed calling to the witness stand some of the greatest beauties of Hollywood in the 40s, secretly telling members of the press “to get your pads ready and get film in your cameras.” He claimed he was considering summoning “at least fifty Hollywood stars.” Among those listed as potential witnesses were Rita Hayworth, Faith Domergue, Jane Russell, Lana Turner, Ava Gardner, Jane Greer, Jean Peters, Susan Hayward, Katharine Hepburn, Ginger Rogers, Fay Wray, and Bette Davis. Brewster said that he also planned to call Errol Flynn and Cary Grant.

Then, in one of the great mysteries surrounding this Senate probe, both Ferguson and Brewster received phone calls.

It was from some power figure in the Republican Party, warning them not to pursue the above-mentioned plan.

Speculation continues to this day about who that figure was. To his dying day, Noah Dietrich claimed that it was New York State Governor and Presidential hopeful Thomas Dewey, who at the time was planning a second attempt to win back the White House from the Democrats. He’d run unsuccessfully on the Republican ticket against Franklin Roosevelt in 1944 And as events turned out, he’d eventually be nominated to run against Democratic candidate President Truman, again unsuccessfully, in 1948.

When Dietrich told Howard that he thought it was Dewey who called off “the witch hunt,” presumably as a means of avoiding a major public circus

and scandal, Howard had an unusual reaction.

“Guess I’ll owe one to this guy who resembles the figure of the groom placed on top of a wedding cake.”

In his later years, Dietrich speculated that Howard had blackmail evidence on the three-time governor of New York (1943-55). Speculation in some quarters today claims that insofar as the Howard Hughes investigation went, Dewey switched “from racketbuster to racketbacker.”

Gangster Lucky Luciano maintained in *The Last Testament of Lucky Luciano* that Dewey was “a man on the take,” demanding “big bucks as campaign contributions.”

Dietrich always suspected that Howard through his gangster connections, including both Luciano and Bugsy Siegel, somehow got to Dewey and demanded that, in reference to Ferguson and Brewster, “cut off their balls.”

At this point it’s unlikely if the truth will ever be known.

July 28, 1947 dawned hotter than most summer days in the Old Senate Office Building, selected as the venue of the hearings. In the future, this caucus room would also be the site of the McCarthy-Army hearings in 1954 and the Senate Watergate investigation in 1973 that would lead to the downfall of then-President Richard Nixon.

Howard kept the senators waiting nearly an hour before making his appearance at 2:42pm. Already an American legend, his striking appearance before an estimated 1,500 spectators was greeted with loud applause. Writing in *Look* magazine, reporter Stephen White said that Howard was treated “like a dream-boat film star.”

The Republican senator, Homer Ferguson, of Michigan, pounded the gavel to restore order in the senatorial hearing room. In his confrontation of powerful government interests, Howard struck many as evocative of the hero of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, that Frank Capra movie from 1939 that had starred James Stewart as a lone voice standing up to powerful senators.

“I think everyone in America had turned on their radio, even President Truman, to hear Howard face the nation,” Dietrich said. He accompanied Howard to the hearings, along with one of Howard’s personal lawyers, Thomas A. Slack.

After being sworn in, Howard took the defensive, denouncing the committee as “illegitimate.” Even so, he was forced to sit through questions that suggested that he’d “squandered” millions of dollars of government money through his gross mismanagement of Hughes Aviation.



Spruce Goose ready for assembly

As the hearings progressed, Howard turned the tables on his inquisitor. He traded insults with Senator Brewster, charging him with accepting bribes from Pan Am. Despite the pounding of the gavel by Senator Ferguson, Howard was putting Brewster on trial. One Washington reporter wrote that the hearings had “turned into a lie-passing contest.”

On the second day of the hearings, Howard called Brewster “one of the greatest trick-shot artists in Washington.” He later said, “I have been called capricious, a playboy, an eccentric, but I don’t believe I have the reputation of a liar.”

Carefully observing the hearing, perhaps soaking up precedents for anti-Communist Senate investigations that he would spearhead less than five years later, was a little-known and newly elected senator from Wisconsin, Republican Joseph R. McCarthy.

Shortly after the debut of the hearings, the custodian of Howard’s wardrobe, Cary Grant, had to fly to New York. Without his taste-setting friend, Howard appeared in court on the third day less well dressed than he had been on the previous days. A reporter for *Fortune* magazine described his appearance as “an enormously rich Huckleberry Finn, tie-less and hatless, in a soiled shirt and rumpled sports jacket borrowed from his butler-valet, with his long, thin wrists protruding from sleeves that were inches too short.”

Howard vigorously defended the Hercules (Spruce Goose), admitting that his only mistake had been in supervising “each portion of it in too much detail.” He also maintained that the Hercules project had “broken me down physically—I do not know how anybody could have worked harder than I did.” He did not mention his mysterious and months-long disappearance and abandonment of the project midway through its development.

Before millions of Americans out there in radio land, Howard made an astonishing vow. He claimed that if the Hercules didn’t fly, “I will probably leave this country and never come back.”

At the conclusion of the hearing that day, Howard faced a barrage of reporters. He predicted, “The Hercules will fly by the end of the year, and the XF-11 reconnaissance plane is the finest ever built.”

In defiance of the Senate committee, and in an amazing show of strength, Howard refused to bring Meyer back for more questions. After Meyer’s damaging testimony, Howard had shipped his pimp off to Europe, although he maintained before the Senate committee that he didn’t know where his assistant was. When Ferguson demanded that Howard produce Meyer by two o’clock that afternoon, Howard arrogantly countered, and at the risk of going to jail, “No, I don’t think I will.” The spectators were stunned.

Under pressure from other Republicans, Ferguson was forced to recess the hearings. Howard was clearly winning the day. The probe so far had been

a fiasco for the Republicans.

Howard immediately flew back to Culver City, announcing that he'd been vindicated, his reputation emerging intact after the "vicious smear campaign."

Pan Am, under the leadership of Juan Trippe, had been painted as an evil and corrupted manipulator. In the months ahead, TWA planes would continue to fly to Europe, offering Americans a choice of two different competitors for passage across the Atlantic.

Senate hearings would resume on November 5. By that time, Howard had successfully flown the Spruce Goose. The committee had failed to "destroy Howard Hughes," as he put it. The final session that autumn was anticlimactic.

After the first Senate hearing on August 6, 1947, Hughes for President Clubs had been established across the nation, beginning with a Brooklyn branch that eventually attracted five hundred members. After the second hearing in November, the number of such clubs increased, many backers wanting him as the Democratic nominee during the upcoming Presidential elections of 1948.

Senator Ferguson closed the second batch of hearings on November 22, 1947. In its aftermath, the Republican members of the probe issued a highly critical report of both Howard and Hughes Aviation. But their charges fell on deaf ears to a nation who viewed Howard as a genuine aviation hero in the tradition of Charles Lindbergh.

Despite speculation in some quarters that a mortal blow had been struck to both his reputation and to Hughes Aviation, Howard clearly emerged from the hearings as the triumphant winner. Hughes Aviation survived as well, going on to become the major supplier of electronic products to the U.S. Air Force as the Cold War deepened.

Howard had to wait patiently for five years before inflicting his revenge upon Senator Brewster. In 1952, when Brewster ran again for the Senate as the Republican nominee from Maine, Howard put up "whatever money it takes" to back Brewster's rival, Frederick Payne, a local newspaper publisher. Since Maine had such a small population at the time, it took only \$60,000 to defeat Brewster. Radio commercials and billboards throughout the state, many of them funded by Howard, relentlessly promoted Payne.



Spruce Goose in Drydock at Long Beach

As time went by, Brewster lamented the "poisoned arrows shot at me," blaming Howard for all his setbacks in the years following the Senate hearings. The ambitious politician who had dreamed of higher office went down in flames on Election Day.

As Howard later told Dietrich, "Brewster, with all his power, had made himself out to be a giant. He turned out to be a pygmy."

Long Beach, California, 1947

In June of 1946, Howard had determined that his flying boat was ready to be moved from its cradle in Culver City to Terminal Island in Long Beach Harbor. It was a massive undertaking. Instead of barging it by sea, Howard ordered an overland trucking. The Star House Movers of Long Beach took on the project for \$80,000.

It was a daunting challenge, as 2,300 overhead electrical and telephone wires would have to be cut. These wires belonged to twenty-one separate utility companies of Southern California. Each would have to be negotiated with and paid off.

Schools were let out that day so children could view "history in the making." Some 100,000 spectators lined the route as the Hercules made its 28-mile journey. Prior to the move, the plane had to be disassembled. Riding motorcycles, dozens of police officers from ten different municipalities helped escort the fuselage along city streets, as rubbernecks looked at the mammoth craft—the largest ever made—with awe. A workforce of one hundred and fifty tree trimmers had already helped cleared the route of potentially problematical trees and tree limbs.

Terminal Island, immediately adjacent to the vast but sheltered expanses of Long Beach Harbor, had been selected as the launching pad for the Hercules. At Terminal Island, crews worked night and day reassembling the "giant bird" into which Howard had, in his own words, "put the sweat of my life."

Stung by the accusations that had been thrown at him during the first Senate probe, Howard was determined to prove that the Hercules could fly.

He paid around-the-clock engineering crews to get the Hercules ready for its test run. High winds and rough seas hit the coast of Long Beach on Saturday morning, November 1, 1947, the day Howard had publicly scheduled for the plane's "taxi tests," giving no indication that the notorious Spruce Goose would actually become airborne. In fact, Howard had pointedly told the press that "no flight test will be attempted until April" (of 1948.) Ominously, strong winds had already begun whipping up whitecaps in Long Beach's harbor.

Despite Howard's statement about this being merely a "taxi run," reporters had flocked to Long Beach, many of them flown in at Howard's expense, and many of them stationed aboard a luxurious private yacht, *Vanities*, which Hughes Aviation had rented from showman Earl Carroll. With a looming Senate investigation scheduled to reopen in fewer than five months, the press suspected that Howard might be planning some public displays of the Hercules's airworthiness. As the world looked on, ready and waiting for a show, Howard carefully assessed the weather and his chances of a test run,

finally deciding that preparations for the launch would continue.

Cary Grant had driven down from Hollywood to witness the event from the decks of a separate private yacht that tossed its passengers and crew from side to side on the choppy waters. Beside him, at Howard's request, was Jean Peters.

In nervous anticipation of an improvement in the weather, Howard ordered the activation of the initial steps for freeing the Hercules from its drydock. Inlet valves were opened in the drydock structure, flooding its ballast tanks with sea-water and lowering its bulk to the point where the Hercules could be, pending an improvement in the weather, maneuvered into open water. But after the inaugural fuss, it was determined that the flight would have to be postponed until weather conditions improved.

The press was hugely disappointed, but decided to hang out in Long Beach anyway, drinking in the taverns all Saturday night, hoping for some action as Sunday morning dawned on November 2.

Glenn Odekirk assured Howard, as he drove him to Terminal Island on that fateful morning, that the weather had improved, "It's not good, but it's better."

In front of cameras and a gaggle of reporters, Howard strode onto the tarmac. Looking tired and a bit nervous, he was photographed wearing his trademark lucky fedora. Heading for the Hercules, he quickly disappeared into its vast bowels like Jonah getting lost in the belly of a whale.

Already aboard were eighteen crewmen, nine invited guests, mostly from the press, and Joe Petrali, with whom Howard had disappeared for many months three years previously. Invitations to journalists had been based on the results of a lottery. Howard denied requests from both Jean Peters and Cary Grant to fly aboard the maiden flight, asserting that he was concerned for their safety.



Spruce Goose before launch of first taxi run

In the cockpit, balanced about thirty feet above the water, Howard placed his fedora by his side and put on his earphones to make final checks of the aircraft. One by one he fired up each of the eight mammoth engines, very gradually opening the throttles. The Hercules taxied slowly across the surface of the harbor, skimming on its pontoons at a leisurely thirty-five miles per hour before Howard brought it back to its point of origin for some adjustments to the hydro-pneumatic throttle linkage.

Once that was done, Howard returned to the cockpit and the pilot's seat. He taxied off again, picking up speed. Soon, the pontoons supporting the largest aircraft in the history of aviation were slicing neatly through the surface of the waves lashing in from the Pacific. After a few moments, Howard eased back on the throttles of the giant boat-plane, settling its enormous bulk back into the water. When it came to a complete stop, he went back to greet the reporters as they disembarked. After assuring them that the Hercules would not fly that day, he bid them good-bye. Most of them were eager to file their stories in time to meet their deadlines. He had arranged for a P.T. boat to pick them up and ferry them back to shore.

Remaining behind were six reporters from magazines that didn't have imminent deadlines. One of these journalists was about to become famous: James C. McNamara from radio station KLAC in Los Angeles.

Asserting to the crew and to the remaining members of the press that he wanted to attempt a final test run of the plane's taxiing abilities, Howard returned to the cockpit. After fidgeting with the controls, he then fired each of the eight 3,000 horsepower Pratt and Whitney engines once again. Sitting beside him, David Grant knew better, especially when his boss called for "fifteen degrees flap."

Although he occupied the co-pilot's seat, Grant was not a pilot but a hydraulic engineer. Joe Petrali later speculated that Howard wanted the world to know that he—and he alone—piloted the giant craft. That's why, according to Joe, he didn't want another pilot in the cockpit with him at the time, fearing that he might get some of the credit.

Straining beneath his heavy recording devices, McNamara was allowed to stand behind Howard in the cockpit to broadcast the news to the anxiously awaiting world. As the flaps were lowered, Howard steered the mammoth bird toward the western end of the harbor, pointing it in the direction of San Pedro and opening the throttles as he did so.

The radio announcer's broadcast would later be played across the world. "This is James McNamara speaking to you from aboard the Howard Hughes two-hundred ton flying boat, the world's largest aircraft. At this moment as we speak to you from the spacious flight deck, this mighty monster of the skies is slowly cruising along a northwest course in the outer Los Angeles harbor."

In his broadcast, McNamara referred to Howard as "The Thin Man from Culver City." He even got Howard to speak into the microphone. Rather anti-climactically, Howard told the radio audience, "The wind is changeable. It's been changing all day. But it's not too serious."

From the rear, Joe Petrali notified Howard that the Hercules was "All set!"

Glancing over his shoulder at McNamara, Howard shouted over the noise: "Hang on!"

At that moment a powerboat filled with drunken, waving well-wishers raced across the path of the Hercules, forcing Howard to swerve dangerously. He cursed the revelers, as he began to accelerate.

For his listeners, McNamara called out the rising speeds. "It's fifty! It's fifty over a choppy sea! It's fifty-five! It's fifty-five—more throttle! Now it's sixty—about sixty five! It's seventy!" Before he could announce a speed of seventy-five, the plane seemed to take off, seemingly on its own volition, and became airborne. "It's off!" shouted McNamara into his mike. "We are airborne," he shouted. "We are airborne, ladies and gentlemen. I don't believe that Howard Hughes meant for this to be."

At that very moment, aviation history was being made. No aircraft of this size had ever left the surface of the earth before.

Denounced as a "flying lumberyard" by Senator Brewster, the Spruce Goose flew smoothly for one mile, reaching a maximum speed of ninety miles per hour at an altitude of only seventy feet. The historic multimillion-dollar flight—the most expensive in the history of the world—lasted for only one minute.

Taxiing the craft back to its home berth at Terminal Island, Howard came to a smooth stop. The much ridiculed Spruce Goose had proven it could fly. Even before he could disembark, the world was once again hailing Howard as a true aviation hero.

After landing the plane, Howard was greeted first by Joe Petrali, who had emerged from the rear of the craft. Petrali later recalled that his pilot “was grinning, talking a lot—almost jumping up and down like a little kid.”

McNamara concluded his broadcast. “At one time, Hughes said that if this big ship didn’t fly he’d leave the country. Well, it certainly looks at this moment that Howard Hughes will be around the United States for quite some time to come.”

Before disembarking, Howard, once again wearing his lucky fedora, told the crew, “She sure jumped off easy.” With that remark, he was lowered by cable into a waiting P.T. boat.

Only McNamara rode with Howard aboard the first of the P.T. boat’s runs to shore. Asking if the broadcaster were hungry and being told that he was, Howard opened a brown paper bag and handed him his sandwich. Biting into it, McNamara discovered it was just peanut butter—nothing more.

On shore before disappearing, Howard told reporters, “I think the airplane is going to be fairly successful. I sort of hoped it would fly but didn’t want to predict it would and make people disappointed.”

Earlier, Howard had turned down an invitation for dinner at the Beverly Hills Hotel with Jean Peters and Cary Grant. Howard left his two lovers to fend for themselves.

Driving away alone in an old Chevy, he headed for a secret dinner date in the remote hinterlands of the San Fernando Valley.

Once he got there, he discovered one of the leading love goddesses of the modern age waiting for him. Behind dark sunglasses, and elegantly dressed in tones of midnight blue and black, Ava Gardner was already into her third drink as Howard came in the door, seeking her out at the back of a darkened room at the most remote table.

Los Angeles, 1947-53

Although Howard had announced to the press that he would retest his flying cargo boat at an undetermined date in the springtime, the day would never come. The spring of 1948 turned into December and 1949 passed by as a war-torn decade came to an end. During this time dozens of highly skilled and paid engineers struggled to make the Spruce Goose airworthy. Almost every week Howard sent in new changes and suggestions. He often visited the Hercules at Long Beach, sometimes in the company of Jean Peters, and would spend hours going over blueprints for a project that had become a dinosaur amid the rapid technological developments of the post-war era.

Hughes Aviation invested nearly two million dollars on the construction of a climate-controlled hangar, nestled within the confines of a drydock, several feet below sea level, at Long Beach for this giant bird. Hercules was kept on a thirty-day standby alert for its test run by Howard. But he never showed up for any of these test flights.

He tried to interest the Air Force in buying Hercules, but was meet with total indifference. The Air Force brass knew that the Spruce Goose was hopelessly obsolete. Yet Howard stubbornly kept the plane in mint condition, spending more than a million and a half dollars annually to preserve and maintain it. At one point, he even ordered his engineers to design an even more grandiose HFB-2, a metal flying cargo boat larger than the Hercules that would be powered by turbo-prop engines. There was no market for such a mammoth aircraft.

Finally, faced with mounting expenses, Dietrich had to go to Howard for a confrontation with reality. “Let’s face it!” Dietrich told his boss. “Hercules is history. Have it dismantled and hauled away. Or else turn it into a museum of your achievement.”



Howard Hughes in Spruce Goose cockpit

Howard was so angered by Dietrich’s suggestions that he didn’t speak to his chief officer for the next five weeks. Dietrich had confronted him at a bad time. Howard had learned that his other grand dream of the war, the XF-11, was about to be “authorized for reclamation.” That meant it was going to be cut up for scrap. He had turned the prototype of his reconnaissance plane over to the Air Force late in 1947, but the military had little use for the plane. “Other planes have been designed superior to this one, and the XF-11 came to us too late,” an official at Wright Field told Dietrich, who was already well aware of that fact.

Always contemptuous of the Hercules, Dietrich dismissed it as a “plywood white elephant.” As time went by, he watched its maintenance bills mount to three million dollars a year. By that time he was comparing the Spruce Goose to a “leviathan Model T Ford.”

On September 17, 1953, Dietrich saw a face-saving way out of this costly dilemma. A barge being pulled past the drydock that held the Spruce Goose broke loose, smashed down part of the drydock, and seawater poured in, severely—perhaps fatally—damaging Hercules. The supervisor of the hangar called Dietrich with the bad news. “The hull, the stabilizers, the ailerons, the wings, and the tail are crushed.” He also reported that the hangar

had been flooded, and that mud was now standing five feet deep. Headlines the next day screamed: GIANT HUGHES PLANE TOTAL LOSS.

Once again, Dietrich urged Howard to junk the Spruce Goose. Stubbornly, Howard refused and ordered that it be repaired and returned to mint condition. He claimed that his beloved Hercules was “a milestone” in aircraft design, and that future generations would acknowledge that.

The press speculated that Howard was going to use the Spruce Goose in some film he was producing for RKO.

During the Senate investigation, Senator Brewster had asked Howard, “Have you contemplated using Hercules in your movie production business?” Responding with anger, Howard countered, “Senator, that is rather an absurd suggestion.”

Actually the Senator was on to something. It was later revealed that Howard had indeed discussed with Cary Grant the idea of casting him in a movie where he would play a suave and debonair secret British agent in the tradition of James Bond. Flying the mammoth aircraft around the world, the Hercules would be transport used by the agent—similar to 007—“to make wrong right again.”

In his memoirs, Dietrich indulged in some speculation, writing that Howard “was so frightened that the plane was so unsafe that it would prove to be his own coffin. So he kept the whole thing in limbo, neither terminating the project, which would have been an admission of defeat and denial of his vow to leave the country, nor trying to complete it, which might mean his own demise.”

Los Angeles/Mexico, 1946-59

In September of 1946, Howard was stunned when Johnny Meyer reported to him that two of his sometimes lovers, Lana Turner and Tyrone Power, had fallen in love. Howard ordered that both of the stunningly beautiful stars be put under 24-hour surveillance. “I want to know everything,” he instructed Meyer.

At the time, Tyrone was still married to French actress Annabella. They were separated but not divorced. The Lana Turner/Tyrone Power romance would become a national event, evocative of the interest that once swirled around the heads of Katharine Hepburn and Howard Hughes.

“From the very beginning, Howard wanted in on the affair,” Meyer claimed. “He felt left out. He wanted to be a part of the action too. It was almost like, ‘How dare you fall in love without getting my permission first?’”

In Mexico, Tyrone was filming *Captain from Castile* which, coincidentally, starred Jean Peters. Howard had already warned Tyrone to stay away from Jean. Apparently, however, Howard had issued no such warning to stay away from Lana. Impetuously Lana flew to Mexico for a secret rendezvous with Tyrone. Because of bad weather, she couldn’t get back to Los Angeles in time, causing thousands of dollars worth of delays on her production of *Green Dolphin Street*, which earned her the ire of Louis B. Mayer.

In spite of the difficulties of travel, both Lana and Tyrone fell madly in love with Mexico. “The next time,” Howard assured each of them, “let *me* make the travel arrangements.”

And so he did, flying both lovebirds to Acapulco in the spring of 1947. When they got there, their designated host was Teddy Stauffer, a visionary Swiss-born big band leader whose tireless promotion of the emerging resort had earned him the name “Mr. Acapulco.” Fleeing from the Nazis in the 1940s, and having settled in Mexico, he had been a successful leader of a big band that had introduced American-style Swing music to pre-War Europe. He was also a hotelier, a night club owner, a sometimes actor, and something of a playboy. Even though Teddy was a world-class seducer, Howard apparently wasn’t jealous, and they’d become friends. Sometimes they shared the same lovers. Howard only had affairs with Hedy Lamarr and Faith Domergue. Teddy actually married each of these actresses at various times.

Howard had shared other lovers with Teddy, notably Rita Hayworth and Barbara Hutton. When Howard, Lana, and Tyrone arrived at a luxurious villa Teddy had arranged for them, they were greeted with the sounds of his 1937 hit recording of “Goody-goody.”

In Acapulco, Howard took Lana and Tyrone on a sailing expedition aboard a luxury yacht he’d rented through Teddy. The press was unaware of the trip. Later, Lana displayed a 210-pound swordfish over the mantel of her Beverly Hills home. “Ty and I caught it together,” she told her friends, not mentioning Howard.

In a private interview in 1985 Teddy revealed, “I was in on Howard’s plan from the beginning. He wanted a three-way with Lana and Tyrone. I set the whole thing up for him. Howard planned to make a grand entrance in the nude when Lana and Ty were already in bed together and also nude. I told him I thought Ty would be very accommodating. Seducing him in those days was as easy as pie. I warned Howard that Lana might hesitate. Even though sleeping with every Tom, Dick, and Harry, she made cooing sounds from time to time that she was still a lady.”

“Howard left the lovebirds alone for their first night in Acapulco,” Teddy claimed. “On the second night he made his move. Stripping down in front of me, he headed for their suite. I stayed nearby in case there was any trouble. Like he said he would, Howard went inside their room, taking the lovers by surprise. I heard loud voices at first, then everything seemed to quiet down. I realized Howard’s dream had come true. He’d come between the two lovers, and they went along with it.”



Lana Turner and Tyrone Power

“The next morning over break fast, I personally squeezed Howard’s drink from blood-red oranges,” Stauffer said. “He always insisted it be done in front of him. He reported to me that the night had been a success, claiming that he’d gone down on both Lana and Ty. He also said that before the rooster crowed, he’d fucked Ty while the actor was fucking Lana. In other words, Ty was Lucky Pierre in the middle of the sandwich. ‘It was one of the best orgasms I’ve ever had,’ Howard told me.”

In her memoirs, *Lana: The Lady, The Legend, The Truth*, she admitted that she’d heard rumors of a homosexual element in Tyrone’s nature, “but I never saw it.” When Teddy Stauffer read that, he said, “Oh, that Lana!”

After the Acapulco trip, Howard told Johnny Meyer that he didn’t think the love affair between Lana and Tyrone would last. “Lana’s too possessive of him, and Ty’s a real flirt,” Howard said. “He doesn’t like to be owned by anyone, but likes to share his charms. I don’t think Lana’s in love with him anyway—she just thinks she is. She’s fallen for a male version of herself.” Many other Hollywood insiders shared Howard’s point of view about the lovers.

Their affair survived until August of 1947. For about a week, Howard disappeared with Tyrone to an undisclosed location. The actor didn’t tell Lana where he was going. Johnny Meyer knew nearly all of Howard’s movements, but this time Howard didn’t even inform his pimp where he was. Meyer suspected that the two illicit lovers were in a villa somewhere in Malibu.

Apparently over “pillow talk,” Tyrone informed Howard that he was going on a three-month good will tour, arranged by his studio. The jaunt would take him to Africa, South America, and some European capitals such as Paris and London. Meyer suspected that Tyrone told Howard that he was doing this just as a means of breaking up with Lana. Instead of an outright break, Tyrone was going to let time and distance work to end the relationship.

During the course of Tyrone’s absence, as the weeks went by, Lana grew more and more anxious to hear from him. Communications between them were few and far between, and then not very satisfying to Lana.

One night at his Beverly Hills bungalow, after Jean Peters had left his bedroom, Howard received a desperate call from Lana. “I’m pregnant!” she blurted out.

“Is it Ty?” he asked. “Or someone else. Some others?”

“It’s Ty’s kid,” Lana claimed. “The only *other* would be Howard Hughes himself.”

Lana feared scandal. Even though Tyrone was separated from Annabella, they were still married. As Lana would later write, “In those days you didn’t make babies just because you were deeply in love.” She also said, “I’d be publicly branded a whore, and I’d probably never work again.”

When Tyrone learned of the pregnancy, he said that he was going to leave the decision up to Lana. Howard made that decision for Lana. Although she claimed in her memoirs that she went alone to a woman doctor—“not to a butcher”—she was actually driven there by her longtime friend, Johnny Meyer. Howard had ordered Meyer to tend to Lana’s every need and to stick with her in case something went wrong. Nothing did go wrong. The son or daughter of two of the world’s most beautiful people was successfully aborted.

Lana later confessed that “the abortion took more than a fetus from me. It took some part of my heart, a living symbol of the happiest time of my life.”

Tyrone would return to Hollywood after his goodwill tour but not to Lana. She was heartbroken. In Rome he had met bit actress Linda Christian and planned to marry her after the finalization of his divorce from Annabella. Ironically, Linda had played a maid in Lana’s *Green Dolphin Street*. Errol Flynn’s reaction to the marriage was one of wonder, surprise, and dismay. All he said was, “Ty married *her*?”

By December of 1947, a publicist at MGM released the news that “Lana Turner and Tyrone Power have called it quits.”

After their breakup, it is believed that Howard never came together intimately with either of the two lovers ever again. “By that time, Howard had other fish to fry,” Meyer later said. “Lana resumed her feverish lifestyle, giving her charms away to many men. Ty, as was his way, also continued to give his charms away to many men and women in spite of his marriage to the Christian dame. He was ever so versatile. He even seduced both stars of *Pillow Talk*: Rock Hudson and Doris Day.”

Although his involvement with Lana and Tyrone ended, Howard ordered Meyer to continue to have them spied upon.

“I remember when Lana got involved with the Argentine actor, Fernando Lamas,” Meyer said. “Howard wanted to know how Lamas was hung. He wanted exact measurements and details, even demanding to know how long Lamas remained in the saddle. For some bizarre reason, he also wanted to know if Lamas were cut or uncut. Since Lamas was screwing dozens of women in Hollywood—not just Lana—it was easy for me to come up with pretty accurate measurements for my boss man. And, yes, before you even ask me the next question, Lamas was very well endowed.”

On the night of April 4, 1958, in his bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel, Howard received an urgent phone call from Johnny Meyer. In blunt language, Meyer told his boss that Lana’s gangster lover, Johnny Stompanato, had been stabbed at her Beverly Hills mansion, following a violent quarrel, and that he was dead.

Although often stingy, Howard ordered Meyer and his squadron of spies to find out all the details of what really happened. Meyer later estimated that Howard spent nearly fifty thousand dollars to learn what happened on that infamous night.

Angered that Lana had not invited him to accompany her to the Oscar presentations, Stompanato had threatened to “carve up” Lana’s beautiful face if she ever left him out again. In a “state of madness,” she ran down to the kitchen and picked up an eight-inch knife. Returning to her pink satin bedroom, she stabbed Stompanato in his stomach. He lived for another fifteen minutes. Also in the house that fatal night was fourteen-year-old Cheryl Crane, Lana’s daughter with husband Stephen Crane.

In typical Hollywood fashion, everybody was called except the police. Even Lana’s mother, Mildred, was summoned. A private physician, “Dr. McDonald,” arrived at the scene. Remaining remarkably cool, Lana also called Howard’s friend, attorney Jerry Geisler, who had defended Errol Flynn during his trial on a charge of statutory rape.

If a star wanted off on a murder rap in those days, the call went out: “Get Jerry Geisler.”

In two hours—some reports claimed five hours—a plan was concocted. To avoid Lana having to go to jail, Geisler decided to claim that Cheryl went to the kitchen, got the butcher knife, entered the upstairs bedroom, and stabbed Stompanato.

The belief was that Cheryl as a juvenile would get a light sentence, if one at all, whereas a jury might “throw the book at Lana.” Frank Sinatra was also said to have arrived at the scene, and the singer agreed that Geisler’s plan was the way to go. “Let Cheryl take the fall.”

At long last the police were called after all the participants had been rehearsed in their respective stories. By that time, Stompanato was long dead. Clinton B. Anderson, police chief of Beverly Hills, arrived at the scene of the crime and began to question Lana and her daughter in separate rooms. Both of their stories, in the policeman’s words, “were a perfect match.” The killing was later ruled as “justifiable homicide.”

“In the Johnny Stompanato murder case,” Meyer later said, “Lana gave the greatest performance of her career.”

In the wake of the gigolo’s murder, Lana feared for her safety and not only welcomed but accepted Howard’s offer of a 24-hour security guard. Both Howard and Lana felt that the mob would seek revenge on Lana for killing one of its own. Stompanato’s friend, gangster Mickey Cohen, was known to

take revenge when angered.

During what became Hollywood's most notorious scandal of the 1950s, Howard generously had Lana guarded for eight months until fear of mob reprisal died down.

The following year, in 1959, Tyrone flew to Spain to film *Solomon and Sheba*. Concurrently, in Acapulco, Lana launched a torrid affair with Teddy Stauffer. "Mr. Acapulco" was in his hotel bar when the news came over the radio. Tyrone had been the victim of a sudden heart attack and was dead. On hearing the news back in Hollywood, Henry Fonda cynically remarked, "The death was caused by Ty's co-star, George Sanders. George probably wore him out in the sack." Like Tyrone, George was a notorious bisexual.

Teddy called Lana's villa with the news. "Oh, my God, you don't know," he said to her. "Oh, God, that I should have to be the one to tell you. Ty is dead!"

She later recalled that the "news shocked my very soul." She claimed that she nearly fainted, her body having gone numb all over. "I realized that the man who broke my heart was dead, and there was no more hope we'd ever get back together. My dream of Ty was all over!"

There was nothing that Lana could do at this point. But at 7000 Romaine Street, there was something that Howard could do. As a final gesture to a long-ago lover, he ordered that a special TWA plane be sent to Barajas Airport in Madrid. The plane was made available to fly the body of the dead actor back to Hollywood.

On reflection, Howard told Meyer, "Of all the men I've known—Errol, Robert, Guy, Jack—Ty was the kindest and the most accommodating in bed. Whatever my request, regardless of how bizarre, he always came through for me. I felt I owed him his final plane ride."

Hollywood, 1949-55

In 1948, Howard summoned Noah Dietrich from Houston to Hollywood to tell him what Dietrich considered some very bad news: Howard wanted to purchase a major film studio. Since MGM and 20th Century Fox weren't for sale, Howard had focused on RKO, which Dietrich regarded as "the sickest of all the big studios." At the time Howard was trying to buy into RKO, the film studio's profits had been shrinking and expenses doubling.

For many years, Howard had maintained an on-again, off-again friendship and business relationship with Floyd Odlum, CEO of the \$70 million Atlas Corporation, an investment firm and conglomerate. Years before, Odlum had married Jacqueline Cochran, the century's greatest female aviator, with whom Howard (prior to her marriage with Odlum) had had a brief affair and whose airplane he had leased and then rebuilt during one of his youthful aviation adventures.

Since 1935, Atlas had exercised controlling interest over RKO thanks to its ownership of 929,000 of RKO's four million outstanding shares. A businessman, Odlum was neither star struck nor had any interest in movie-making. Sensing that the Golden Age of Hollywood was coming to an end, Odlum was eager to sell his company's ownership of RKO.

Unknown to Dietrich, as part of his negotiations, Howard had flown on five different occasions to the Odlums's sprawling ranch in the Coachella Desert, outside Indio, near Palm Springs. Odlum never got the price he wanted. He wanted \$10½ per share, but Howard was willing to pay only \$9½ per share. In the end, Howard purchased all the Atlas shares for \$8,825,000. Overnight, as its major stockholder, he'd become the head of RKO. With characteristic lack of charm, he informed Dietrich, "I'll be the only non-kike running a studio in Hollywood."

Facing Dietrich fresh off the plane from Houston, Howard told his chief of operations that he needed to borrow ten million dollars from a bank, since he didn't want to use Toolco money. Dietrich immediately contacted the Mellon Bank of Pittsburgh, of which Toolco was the major depositor. The ten million loan was granted that very day.

News of the sale of RKO spread rapidly through the 24 sound stages of RKO between Hollywood and Culver City.

Howard's penchant for delaying production and interfering in every aspect of film-making were all too well known in Hollywood. "He had a reputation for firing anybody who disagreed with him," said N. Peter Rathvon, president of RKO. With the purchase of the studio, Howard also acquired 124 movie theaters across the nation.

At the time of the takeover, Howard's business prospects drew mixed reviews. Toolco had increased its net worth to two hundred million dollars. In contrast, TWA had lost eight million dollars in 1947. To save his troubled airline, Howard had borrowed ten million dollars from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, using the money to purchase a dozen Lockheed Constellations. With these Connies, he was able to add more attractive routes, picking up new customers.

Howard chose a difficult moment to take over RKO. The anti-Communist scare hung over Hollywood like a poisonous cloud. A congressional committee had already labeled RKO "a hotbed of Red subversion."

Not only that, but government anti-trust laws were forcing studios to give up their profitable theater chains. Television loomed as an ever-growing threat to the future of all film studios.

The most valuable property RKO owned was its backlog of about a thousand films, including such classics as *Citizen Kane* and *King Kong*. RKO also owned the Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire musicals of the 1930s. In the 1930s, Katharine Hepburn had also worked for RKO, which owned an impressive collection of her films as well. Howard found himself in possession of such films as *Bringing Up Baby* starring his two lovers of yesterday, Cary and Katharine.

An inevitable clash was predicted between Howard and Dore Schary, who was in charge of production at RKO. Howard liked "tits and action" movies, the more liberal Schary preferring pictures with a message. Schary was also a Jew, and Howard was notorious for his anti-Semitism. To highlight the differences between the two men, Schary had made *Crossfire* in 1947, a film dealing with anti-Semitism. The film starred "the three Roberts": Young, Mitchum, and Ryan.

For some time, Howard had been suspicious of Schary. He told Dietrich, "I think Schary's a Commie."

The first encounter between Schary and Howard took place at Rathvon's home. *Fortune* magazine later reported their get-acquainted dialogue.

Howard:	I hear you don't like me.
Schary:	Well, I hear you don't like me, either. We can either talk in terms of gossip or talk business.
Howard:	You can run the studio. I don't have any time.

Schary later claimed that Howard evoked “Gary Cooper in a western.” He noted that his new boss did not shake his hand but stepped back two paces when Schary extended his own palm.

When Schary told Dietrich of Howard’s promises not to interfere, Dietrich was skeptical. “It was like turning a boy loose in a candystore and expecting him not to touch the merchandise.”

From the moment he took over, Howard began to interfere. The first film Schary pitched to Howard was *Battleground*, starring Van Johnson. “The public’s fed up with war,” he told an infuriated Schary. “They’d much rather see a romantic comedy. Drop it!”

Schary had great faith in *Battleground*. He would eventually take the film with him to MGM when he resigned from RKO and went to replace Louis B. Mayer as head of MGM. *Battleground* became MGM’s biggest hit in 1950, the studio having acquired the rights from Howard for only \$20,000.

Schary and Howard also conflicted over rising star Barbara Bel Geddes, a talented New York actress who was being acclaimed for her role in the 1948 film, *I Remember Mama*, for which she was nominated for an Academy Award. Schary had filmed *Caught* in 1949 with the star, but Howard saw it and was horrified, “Fire her!” he ordered Schary. “She’s not my type.” The producer later released the Bel Geddes film through MGM. Howard told Schary that the star of the film, James Mason, “was a sissy—no doubt a fag,” but he was impressed with the masculine charm of Robert Ryan and would use the actor again.

Bel Geddes was about to go before the cameras on a film called *Bed of Roses*. Schary was forced to cancel it.

The second meeting between Schary and Howard took place at Cary Grant’s villa. The actor was in Europe at the time. Ushered into the living room, Schary could see a nude Howard through an open door to a bedroom. He was helping a starlet put on her brassiere. “After that, I knew it was all over between Hughes and me.”

“Such contempt for convention,” Schary later said. “It was his fuck you to me.” Schary later told his friends that after the woman left, Howard invited him in to continue negotiations about the future of RKO while he sat for an hour on a toilet, complaining of constipation.

During that toilet meeting Howard also “pulled the plug” on *Malaya*, which starred James Stewart and Spencer Tracy. Howard claimed that he detested Tracy, blaming him for the breakup of his relationship with Kate Hepburn. To an astonished Schary, Howard said, “Did you know that when Tracy isn’t with Kate, he’s out sucking off teenage hustlers secured for him by George Cukor?” Schary later acquired *Malaya* for MGM, which released it in 1949.

Dietrich recalled that “Howard went into orbit” when he saw the final cut of the RKO film *The Boy With the Green Hair*, a film which Schary had produced. Howard said that the picture “is Commie inspired,” and ordered that many of its scenes be reshot. In Howard’s revised version, Dean Stockwell, aged twelve at the time, was instructed to utter a declaration of anti-Communist rhetoric personally written by Howard.

So much for not interfering in studio productions. Howard called a halt to production on more than three dozen films during the first three months of his dictatorship of RKO.

He didn’t, however, halt the release of *Every Girl Should Be Married*. It starred best friend Cary Grant appearing opposite Betsy Drake in a romantic comedy. The film was released in 1948, although Howard personally disliked Drake. Even so, he agreed to be best man when Cary married her on Christmas Day in 1949 in Phoenix, Arizona.

Even though Cary and Howard were still close, Cary did not remain at RKO to make pictures exclusively for Howard, although he was strongly encouraged to do so. Beginning in 1949, Cary freelanced his way through future films, beginning with *I Was a Male War Bride* in 1949, which was eventually released through 20th Century Fox. In it, Cary was directed by Howard Hawks, who had become a bitter enemy of Howard’s. Hawks later privately speculated that Cary “did not want to be under Hughes’s thumb.”

Schary left RKO on July 31, 1948. Peter Rathvon resigned shortly thereafter when Howard asked him to fire 700 employees and he refused. Although he had no knowledge of film production, Dietrich was put in charge as chairman of the RKO board.

Taking over after booting Schary, Howard ordered Dietrich to “send pink slips to everybody.” Dietrich finally persuaded him not to fire everybody but retain at least a skeletal crew.

The Hollywood Reporter claimed that after Howard’s takeover, “RKO became a ghost town.” The remaining staff at RKO came under heavy suspicion because of alleged Communist links. Howard hired a squadron of men, mostly ex-policemen, to investigate and spy on the studio’s staff. “My God,” Schary said when he learned of this, “Hughes is paranoid. He thinks he’s J. Edgar Hoover.”

“With Schary and Rathvon out of the way,” Johnny Meyer said, “the boss immediately set about using RKO as a giant casting couch. RKO became his personal harem. But, to be honest, he never fucked—or even saw—most of the starlet bimbos he had his boy, Walter Kane, put under contract. Just knowing that all those hot pussies were waiting out there for him, if he wanted them, seemed titillation enough for Howard.”

In 1948, the year Howard assumed control of RKO, twenty-eight films—most of them already completed or nearing completion by the time of his takeover—were released to the movie-going public. By 1949, production had slowed to a snail’s pace. Only one picture, *It’s Only Money*, was set for release. Howard never liked the titles studio writers came up with, finding his creations “better box office.” He changed *It’s Only Money* to *Double Dynamite*, which called attention to the two major assets of its star, Jane Russell. The film was advertised as “double delicious, double delightful, and double delirious.” The other star was Groucho Marx. Howard assigned Frank Sinatra third billing. Howard and Sinatra already hated each other because of their romantic conflict over Ava Gardner.

Howard never visited RKO during his entire tenure over the studio. He feared that with all the studio hands milling about, the place was germ-laden. He operated RKO from his rented offices at the Goldwyn Studio, two miles away. However, rumors in Hollywood persisted that Howard once walked through the studio without a word. At the conclusion of his tour, he allegedly said, “Paint it!” before getting into a battered Chevy and driving away.

Although Howard “had more starlets than a Roman emperor at his command,” he focused on an actress who proved unobtainable.

California-born Janet Leigh was blonde, bright, pretty, pert, and curvaceous. She won over American audiences as Meg in the 1949 version of *Little Women*.

He borrowed her from MGM for *Two Tickets to Broadway*, even though she wasn’t a dancer. The film was finally released in 1951.

Howard demanded that Janet’s dance rehearsals be staged at the Goldwyn Studios. He’d hired two of the most skilled experts in the musical theater business, Gower Champion (later choreographer of both *42nd Street* and *Hello, Dolly*) and Marge Champion, to teach Janet to dance. Studio hands

reported that Howard would sit for hours at a time watching Janet rehearse in her leotards. “He was mesmerized by her,” Meyer later claimed.

Many books and articles have claimed that Howard and Janet were a romantic duo. Until the day she died, Janet denied this. “I had absolutely no romantic inclination toward Howard—none—not even a flicker,” she once wrote. “In my eyes, he belonged more with my parents than he did with me.”

Janet was falling in love with an actor from New York, Tony Curtis. She found him “an irresistible personality with black unruly hair, large sensitive eyes fringed by long dark lashes, and a full sensuous mouth.” By 1951 she would marry him. Fan magazines would proclaim them as “Hollywood’s Perfect Young Couple,” even though they weren’t. Their troubled marriage would end in 1962.



Janet Leigh

Before Howard finally gave up his pursuit of Janet, surrendering her to Curtis, he cast her badly as the female co-star in *Jet Pilot*, playing the improbable role of a Russian spy whose seductive techniques were inspired by Mata Hari. Cary Grant had been Howard’s first choice for the male lead, but his friend turned him down because of other commitments. Howard cast John Wayne instead. That actor’s right-wing politics and anti-Communist stances appealed to Howard.

During the filming, Janet learned that Jules Furthman, her producer, had been instructed by Howard to urge her “to marry the boss.” Motivated by a sense of personal discretion, Furthman never carried out that command.

Howard wanted to create “a *Hell’s Angels* for the Jet Age.” But time and indecision would bog him down. *Jet Pilot*, on which he’d lose millions of dollars, would not be released until 1957 when movie audiences were stunned at how young John Wayne looked, and how old-fashioned the aircraft looked. Innovations in jet aircraft had made *Jet Pilot* “a historical document of aviation,” as one critic put it.

On a sad note, Howard had originally hired an aging Josef von Sternberg as director when actual production on *Jet Pilot* had begun right before Christmas in 1949. At the twilight of his career, von Sternberg was still famous for having directed Marlene Dietrich in *The Blue Angel*, but that film had entered the archives of Hollywood history. In a few short weeks, after endless conflicts with Howard, von Sternberg was off the picture. “What does he know about jet planes?” Marlene Dietrich, also working for Howard on *Rancho Notorious*, asked. “He knows about German decadence, cabarets, black hosiery—how to make me more beautiful than I already am.”

As another sad footnote, *Jet Pilot* would be the last film to bear the credit HOWARD HUGHES PRESENTS.

After manifesting his rights as the major stockholder of RKO for only two years, Howard told Dietrich, “I need RKO like I need to come down with the black plague.” On September 23, 1952, he sold it to a Chicago syndicate headed by financier Ralph Stolkin, who made a \$1,250,000 down payment on a projected total price of \$7,345,940, which it had been agreed would be due when the deal was finalized. Exposed by *The Wall Street Journal* for its links to organized crime, Stolkin’s financial cabal collapsed. Howard’s RKO stock was returned to him on February 10, 1953.

To save RKO, Howard brought in two top-flight producers, Jerry Wald and Norman Krasna, promising them fifty million dollars of seed money to launch various films of their own selection. One of these became highly successful. Released in 1951, the “weeper,” *The Blue Veil* starred Jane Wyman. Along with Wald and Krasna, Howard watched the film in which Jane played a children’s nurse. At the end of the screening, Howard stood up and confronted the producers. “I loathe it. Besides, I hate children. And who would want to fuck Jane Wyman? Maybe Ronald Reagan at one time, but he’s always been a nerd when it comes to women.” With those comments, he headed out of the studio.

The final showdown between the producers and Howard occurred when they were summoned to his bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel at three o’clock in the morning. After keeping them waiting for thirty minutes, Howard came out of the adjoining bedroom wearing only a pair of tennis shoes.

Embarrassed, all Wald could manage to say was, “Tennis, anyone?”

Without any negotiation, Howard welcomed them but excused himself, claiming that he had to make an urgent phone call. Neither Wald nor Krasna ever heard from him again. Through their attorneys the next day, they quickly sought their release from RKO, which Howard granted.

Under Howard’s direction, RKO continued to decline. Movie theaters were closing all over America. RKO’s misfortunes were also caused by problems other than Howard’s gross mismanagement. America’s tastes in media were changing, as television took over. Instead of going to the movies two or three nights a week, America was staying home and watching TV.

RKO stockholders filed countless lawsuits against Howard, charging him with mismanagement. At the time, Howard had contracted with actor Dick Powell to direct pictures for the studio. Confronting the press, Powell said, “RKO’s contract roster is down to three actors and 127 lawyers.”

Dietrich, by now, had been subjected to months of Howard’s complaints about the corrosive and ongoing effect of investor lawsuits. But despite Howard’s urging to dump RKO, Dietrich couldn’t find a buyer for Howard’s stock. On February 8, 1954, Howard impulsively purchased all the remaining RKO stock at \$6 per share, twice the market value. This maneuver left Howard in total charge of the studio, with no more stockholder lawsuits. To pay for it, through Dietrich, he had to raise \$23,489,478 in cash.

He would not retain ownership of the studio for long. On July 19, 1955, he'd sell all his shares to General Teleradio, a subsidiary of General Tire Company, for \$25 million. *The Hollywood Reporter* hailed this deal as "the largest cash transaction in film history." As it turned out, General Teleradio was far more interested in acquiring the studio's film library than the studio itself. The library of Golden Age films could be rented at a profit to television stations across the country.

Two years later, in 1957, Howard learned that the new owners of RKO had sold the studio to Desilu, which was jointly owned by Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, who were growing rich on the *I Love Lucy* TV series.

"Fitting justice," Howard told Johnny Meyer. "In the '30s RKO used Ball to entertain rich investors from back East. So, she ends up owning the joint. As for Desi, I agree with him. He once told Cesar Romero that men are better cock-suckers than women."

"During his tenure at RKO, Howard had been, in the word of Johnny Meyer, "mesmerized" by yet another performer. He was the broad-shouldered and droopy-eyed Robert Mitchum "with the bourbon voice." Howard had ordered the 1947 *Out of the Past* screened for him a dozen times. "He had developed a secret crush on the super cool actor," Meyer later claimed, "and it was going nowhere except driving boss man crazy with desire."

Los Angeles, 1946-1997

In spite of what one reviewer called his "lizard eyes and anteater nose," Robert Mitchum replaced Victor Mature as Howard's favorite actor. Ava Gardner remained his favorite actress, the North Carolina beauty having long ago replaced his former favorite, Katharine Hepburn. Now that an aging Kate was making films with Spencer Tracy, Howard could no longer tolerate looking at any of the films in which they appeared jointly.

Robert's costar from *Out of the Past*, and Howard's sometimes girlfriend Jane Greer, once speculated that the tall, broad-chested Mr. Robert Mitchum possessed the image of what Howard himself wanted to look like. "I think Bob was a fantasy alter ego for Howard. Howard always doubted his own masculinity, whereas Bob seemed completely assured of his. He could get women without buying them. They gravitated to him like bees to the sweet nectar of an aromatic flower. Deep down, Howard suspected that women came to him only because of his power and money, which was so often the case."

Actor Jim Backus shared somewhat the same sentiments as Jane. "Even though Hughes pretended to be upset by Robert's wild streak, it also appealed to him. It was as if Hughes were living vicariously through his biggest male star. Hughes used money as bait for women. Mitchum could have been a bum, and beautiful women would still have fallen head over heels in love with him. Hughes knew that. He admired Mitchum's super cool attitude toward women. I think Hughes was a bit jealous of Mitchum's power over women. Take Ava Gardner, for instance. Hughes had spent a fortune wooing her, offering her everything—gems, cars, trips around the world. All Mitchum had to do was appear on the scene, snap his fingers, and Ava came running."

A Yankee from Bridgeport, Connecticut, Robert had been a shoe clerk, a studio writer, an aircraft factory worker, professional boxer, and had even served time in jail as part of a Georgia chain gang, from which he'd escaped.

At the time he met Howard, his bad boy reputation was already established. Before anyone ever heard of Marlon Brando, he was filmdom's first hipster antihero. Once, on a job application, he'd listed his former profession as "petty criminal." Robert had been nominated as best supporting actor for his role in United Artists's *The Story of G.I. Joe.*, but had lost. That would be the only time he'd be nominated to receive an Oscar.

"There was something about Robert's gypsy-like childhood that appealed to Howard," Jane said. "As a hobo, Bob had hopped trains during the worst days of the depression. Howard dreamed of that kind of freedom. Bob had led a life fueled by liquor and drugs. As Howard himself faced life, which he was able to live only with the aid of drugs, he was drawn to Bob's existential detachment from this earth. Aware of Howard's dependence on drugs, Bob told his boss, 'We all need to live on Cloud 9. That way, we don't feel the pain of life.'"

From the beginning of his takeover of RKO, Howard planned to make Robert the studio's biggest star. But Robert remained indifferent to the roles Howard assigned him. "I was just a horseshit salesman to Howard," Robert said years later about his career at RKO.



Robert Mitchum

Almost before any of Howard's big plans for Robert could be realized, the actor's career was almost derailed, and might have been if such a powerful figure as Howard had not intervened. Johnny Meyer called Howard on September 1, 1948 to tell his boss that Robert had been arrested by the police on a drug raid at a private home on Ridpath Drive in Laurel Canyon. Robert had been arrested with friends, including actress Lila Leeds, described by columnist James Bacon as "one of the most beautiful women who ever landed in Hollywood-looks like Lana Turner, but cuter."

"Get him out of jail!" Howard shouted into the phone at Meyer. "Don't let him talk to anyone. And for god's sake, get Jerry Giesler." At the time Giesler was known his ability, as proven by his involvement with Lana Turner in the Johnny Stompanato affair, for helping any celebrity "beat the rap."

But Robert could not be rescued. The case had become too public for Howard's usual bribes. The news was already being carried on the wire services. The next day, headlines all over the nation were revealing the story. A typical banner proclaimed, BOB MITCHUM, 3 OTHERS JAILED AFTER DOPE RAID.

Even though he hardly knew Robert at the time, Howard stood by the star throughout his arrest, imprisonment, and release. The rest of savvy Hollywood was predicting the demise of the actor's career, which had just started to bloom. "It's just the beginning for Bob," Howard told Meyer.

As proof of his belief in the actor, he purchased the remaining half of Robert's contract from David O. Selznick for \$400,000. By standing by Robert, Howard snubbed his nose at the Hollywood elite.

Robert was sentenced to serve sixty days at the Wayside Honor Farm in Castaic, California, which was about 42 miles north of Los Angeles.

In a beat-up old sedan, Howard drove up to meet Robert at the prison farm, and even got the warden to vacate his office for this private session with one of his inmates. The warden later said that "Hughes, in spite of his money, looked like one of those bums routinely arrested on the streets for vagrancy."

Arriving at the prison farm with Johnny Meyer, Howard was horrified at "all the riff-raff he saw walking," Meyer said. "The ethnic mixture, especially the number of blacks, distressed Howard greatly. He feared he'd come down with something just by breathing the air." Howard also learned that day that several child molesters were serving time, including "Big Bill" Tilden, the century's most famous tennis player, who'd been convicted of molesting a sixteen-year-old boy.

Howard often expressed his loathing for child molesters. "My boss just didn't get it," Meyer later recalled. "He never saw himself that way, even though he'd seduced fifteen-year-olds like Ida Lupino and Faith Domergue."

Arriving with a bag containing both Hershey bars and vitamin pills, Howard warned Robert not to eat the prison food. He said that he was going to arrange for one big meal a day prepared by Dave Chasen, the famous Los Angeles restaurateur. During Robert's stay in prison, that meal would be personally delivered to him from Chasen's swank restaurant. Howard had hired a driver to make the daily deliveries during Robert's time at the prison farm.

During his talk with Robert, Howard assured the star that "the studio is in back of you one-hundred percent. You're going to emerge from this a bigger star than when you went in." To show his support, Howard informed Robert that he was rushing up the release of *Rachel and the Stranger*, in which the actor had appeared opposite Loretta Young. What Howard didn't say was that he wanted to capitalize off the publicity generated by Robert's imprisonment.

When Howard asked if he could do anything for Robert, the actor requested a loan of \$50,000 to help him pay his attorney and to buy a modest house for his family. Howard quickly agreed, saying he would charge only five percent interest. He also told Robert that he would continue to draw his \$3,500-a-week salary during his jail term.

Once released from prison, Robert was assigned a "babysitter," actually ex-policeman Kemp Niver. Howard wanted the actor trailed so that he wouldn't get into any more trouble. Robert resented being spied by "this ex-fuzz." He also knew that Howard had bugged his new home and also his dressing room at RKO. Robert bitterly resented that, his anger boiling over one day at the studio. Thinking there was a hidden microphone in the wall, Robert shouted up close into it. "Did you hear what I just said, Mr. Thin Man, you deaf fucker you!"

Howard conducted his future business with Robert as in a *film noir* spy drama. Meyer would pick up Robert at two or three o'clock in the morning and would drive him to some seedy motel in south Los Angeles. There Robert would wait for Howard to show up.

"Robert was too hip not to know that Howard was attracted to him," Meyer later claimed. "He took perverse pleasure in taunting Howard—call it prick-teasing. I remember one night at some sleazy motel, Howard came into the bedroom to find Robert buck-assed naked on the bed smoking a marijuana cigarette. He had this big erection, which he didn't bother to cover up when Howard walked in. 'Sorry, Mr. Phantom,' Robert said to Howard. 'But Old Faithful just does this from time to time.'"

Because of his mysterious appearances and disappearances, Howard was referred to as "Mr. Phantom" by Robert.

"Seeing Robert naked on the bed, Howard looked at him like he could eat him for dinner," Meyer claimed. "But instead of doing that, Howard sat down in a chair near the bed and pitched a new film script to Robert. He just lay there taunting Howard, who was really uncomfortable. Robert was perverse in the way he teased the boss man."

Howard, according to Meyer, attempted to conceal his attraction to Robert by feigning indifference or delivering a put-down. "You're just like a pay toilet," he told Robert. "You don't give a shit for nothing."

Even though Meyer felt that Howard desired Robert, the agent also believed that at no point in his relationship with the actor did Howard ever "put the make on Robert." However, he continued to taunt Howard, parading around naked in front of him, especially when they took saunas together at a private health club both men used to frequent.

Robert remained eternally grateful to Howard for standing by him and saving his career, although he was also very realistic in his appraisal of his studio boss. He'd been delighted when Howard immediately cast him in the 1949 *The Big Steal*. No major actress wanted to risk her reputation by appearing opposite "a jailbird." Jane Greer, however, seemed delighted to costar with her *Out of the Past* comrade.

"Howard could have thrown me to the bloodhounds," Robert later said, "but he proved to be a loyal friend." Even so, Robert was smart enough to know how inadequate Howard was in his management of RKO. "The studio became some perverse pleasure palace for Howard, even if he weren't fucking one-quarter of the gals he had under contract. Howard was no great producer like Louis B. Mayer. We turned out a lot of pulp trash in those days. Frankly, I didn't give a damn. I never pretended to be Marlon Brando."

"Mr. Phantom wanted cleavage in his films, especially Jane's breasts." He was, of course, referring to his sometimes costar, Jane Russell. "Howard also liked fistfights where two guys beat the shit out of each other," Robert also claimed. "Many RKO films at the time were just extensions of Howard's sexual fantasies. Maybe I was one of his sexual fantasies—who knows for sure?"

Even though Robert wasn't putting out for Howard, Meyer claimed that the two friends talked more about sex than RKO film scripts when they met. Howard wanted to know the most minute details about Robert's sex life. That became especially true when Howard cast his two favorite stars, Robert and Ava, in *My Forbidden Past*, released in 1951. Filming actually began in the closing weeks of 1949.

Robert was well aware that Howard lusted after Ava, who miraculously managed to keep him at a distance, though continuing the stormy relationship. After the first week of filming, Robert called Howard. "Ava has the hots for me—shall I fuck her or not? Or is she still your exclusive property?"

"She never let me get into her, but you might as well go for it," Howard advised Robert. "Otherwise, the guys at the studio will think you're a fag!"

Ava fell big for Robert. At one point, a drunken Ava even called Robert's wife, Dorothy, begging her to release her husband. "You've had the big

fucker for a decade, bitch,” Ava shouted. “Give the guy a chance to sample some other pussy.” Dorothy slammed down the phone on Ava.

Meyer claimed that Robert took delight in revealing to Howard the most intimate details of his love-making with Ava. “In front of me one day, Robert told Howard that Ava liked to get into a bathtub and have me piss all over her, aiming my dick at her beautiful face. Howard got particularly excited hearing this.”

But when Howard cast Robert in 1950 in *Where Danger Lives*, with Faith Domergue, he warned the actor, “Don’t move in on her!”

When Howard pitched the script to Robert, he told Howard that he didn’t have time to read the script. He wanted Howard to explain it to him.

It’s about the price you pay for sexual obsession... and lust,” Howard said.

“You mean, what you have for Ava Gardner?”

“The greatest tension between Robert and Howard was generated over a film script, not over women. Howard adamantly refused to lend Robert to Harry Cohn at Columbia to play the lead in *From Here to Eternity*. The part later went to Burt Lancaster. Howard tried to pacify an angered Robert. “You don’t want to go over there and work for all those Jews, do you?” Howard asked.

Robert’s exit from RKO was not glorious. His farewell appearance was in an alleged comedy called *She Couldn’t Say No*, released in 1954. Co-starring the beautiful and talented Jean Simmons, the film was a dud at the box office. Taking note of the two leads, Meyer later said with a sigh, “Jean Simmons and Robert Mitchum. Two stars Howard lusted for and never got into his bed.”



Ava Gardner and Robert Mitchum

Robert recalled his last meeting with Howard. It occurred some time in the late 60s, although the actor was uncertain of the exact year. In Las Vegas to gamble and see some shows at Howard’s Desert Inn, Robert was tapped on the shoulder by one of Howard’s white-gloved Mormon guards. The attendant told Robert that Howard was in residence on the top floor of the Desert Inn and would like to see him. Robert readily agreed to the unexpected meeting.

Taking a private elevator up, Robert was ushered immediately into Howard’s closely guarded suite. When Howard came into the living room of his suite, Robert was shocked at the appearance of his former boss. “He looked real emaciated and at least twenty-five years older than he actually was.”

“What’s up, Mr. Phantom?” Robert asked. “Ready to do another picture together? Ava and Jane are still around. This time Jane might actually wear the bra you designed for her.”

Robert claimed he was just blabbering to fill in the void since Howard didn’t say anything but kept looking at him very intently. “I got this strange feeling that he didn’t exactly know who I was, but my face must have looked familiar. I know I’d changed but I still looked a bit like my old self.”

Without greeting Robert, Howard finally spoke.

“I would have recognized that high-pitched voice anywhere. But it was weaker and much more frail than it had been. I feared Mr. Phantom was suffering some illness.”

“Would you excuse me?” Howard finally said to Robert. “I’ve got to make an urgent phone call.”

Robert remembered that Howard then disappeared into the bedroom. “I waited in the living room for over an hour for Howard to return, but he never came back. A guard tapped me on the shoulder and requested that I leave the suite. Maybe Howard wanted to see my ugly mug for one final time. I never saw him again.”

Robert confessed that years later, he was watching a TV show broadcast by NBC when a bulletin came across the screen, announcing that Howard Hughes had died on a plane flying him back to Houston from somewhere in Mexico. “I cried,” Robert said. “Bawled like a baby, and I’m not known for crying. It was a rough road Mr. Phantom and I traveled. We each had our demons. But there was some sort of love there that each of us had for the other. That love never really got acted upon, but it was there anyway. What the hell! I’ll soon be dying myself.”

Actually Robert would go on living until July 1, 1997. He would finally succumb to the cancer eating away at his body. The disease had long ago destroyed his good looks and macho charm.

Los Angeles, 1948/1952

Raised as a strict Mormon in Glendale, California, Terry Moore—born Helen Luella Koford—would, by the 1950s, find herself locked into a battle with Marilyn Monroe as to who was the sexiest Hollywood star. In that bout, Marilyn won the supernova crown, but Terry’s sexiness endured. In 1984, at the age of fifty-five, she became the oldest woman in history to pose nude for *Playboy*.

One *Celebrity* magazine columnist described Moore as having “a schoolgirl face mounted on an atomic chassis.” Such publicity inevitably attracted Howard’s attention. “He was always a sucker for some gal with big tits and a schoolgirl face,” Johnny Meyer said.

It wasn't Meyer who brought Howard together with Terry but another Johnny, his agent friend, Maschio. At the time, Terry was dating the handsome juvenile actor, Jerome Courtland (nicknamed "Cojo"). If Courtland is remembered at all today, it's for giving Shirley Temple her first screen kiss in *Kiss and Tell*, released in 1945.

In Meyer's view, "Howard set out to recapture his already lost youth when he launched his seduction scheme for Terry Moore, whom he always called by her original name of Helen. Throughout their entire relationship, he would have to maintain a delicate balance between Jean Peters and Terry and many others—both male and female."

Her critics called Terry "the perpetual starlet," but all that Howard could see was that the young star of Swedish ancestry "was beautifully stacked." Meyer later said, "Howard went for King Kong's love interest," a reference to Fay Wray, "why not a gorilla's?" In 1949 Terry starred in "the gorilla movie," *Mighty Joe Young*.

Like Faith Domergue, Terry was only fifteen years old when she caught Howard's interest based on a photograph of her in a bathing suit that had appeared in *Look* magazine. But before he could sign her for RKO, she'd been offered a contract at Columbia.

Lecherous Harry Cohn signed her to play opposite Glenn Ford in a film called *The Return of October*. Terry played an innocent, naïve girl who thought that her uncle had come back as a horse. Howard owned a copy of the film and watched it often.

According to Meyer, Howard became obsessed with Terry and ordered her stalked both day and night, especially during her dates with Cojo. Since Meyer didn't know this emerging starlet, Howard ordered his agent friend, Johnny Maschio, to show up at virtually every gathering where Terry went, especially if Cojo were her escort. Cojo towered six feet, five inches—taller even than Howard himself—so he was hard to miss.

Invited for drinks with Maschio at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, presumably to discuss business pertaining to her career, Terry finally met "a tall, slender man sitting alone against the wall" of the hotel's dining room. Maschio summoned the strange man over and introduced him first to Terry and then to Cojo as Howard Hughes. Maschio presented Terry as "Terrible Terry, the terror of Columbia." She found Howard's eyes haunting. He never took them off her, for the most part ignoring Cojo. In her view, Howard was "utterly repulsive."

A budding pilot, Cojo had avidly followed Howard's career. Even though Terry objected, Cojo accepted an invitation for the both of them to fly with Howard the next day to Palm Springs. In her memoirs, Terry remembered that Howard had practically undressed her with his eyes, and she "felt like I wanted to take a bath and rub myself with disinfectant."



Terry Moore

Terry and Cojo flew on several flights with Howard before the aviator came up with a scheme. Devising yet another airborne jaunt for the three of them, he called Cojo and told the actor to meet him at the Glendale Airport. He then called Terry, informing her that the flight would depart from the airport at Burbank.

At the Burbank airport, pretending that Cojo had stood them up, Howard flew Terry to Palm Springs and took her to a party at the desert vacation retreat of Darryl F. Zanuck. Beside his pool, the studio chief appeared in a tight-fitting bikini that deliberately revealed the outlines of his proudest achievement: his large penis. Clifton Webb was also there, hot in pursuit of Louis Jourdan, hailed at the time "as the world's handsomest man."

The French actor, also in a bikini, appeared to be extremely well hung.

Fleeing the party with Howard, Terry ended her evening with Howard at the Doll House Restaurant. A handsome young actor, Dale Robertson, came up to Howard and requested permission to "dance with your daughter." Howard was furious, ordering Robertson to "beat it!"

Terry's romance with Howard began as he stalked her, following her on a publicity tour for *The Return of October*, which took her to twenty-six cities. Sometimes he would just show up at an airport, perhaps in Indianapolis, and smile smugly at her from a distance, although not coming over to speak to her. He approached her unexpectedly, showing up in resort clothing in the chilling Arctic blasts of a Buffalo, New York, winter.

Finally, Howard wore her down, filling her house with fresh flowers day after day. She invited him to a family dinner to meet her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Koford. Terry's mother, Luella, was called "Mama Blue." She was known for cooking with garlic and onions, and Howard was known for dropping women from his stable if they even walked past an onion, much less consumed a clove of garlic. "It oozes out of their skin for months," he once told Meyer.

Howard never bonded with Terry's father, Mr. Koford, but found an ally in Mama Blue in spite of her cooking.

Eventually he started dating Terry, sometimes renting an entire restaurant just for the two of them. For entertainment, he hired out-of-work musicians who otherwise played for the studios.

Terry later admitted that it was a mere kiss on the hand from Howard that led to her becoming sexually aroused for the first time in her young life. Cojo had already faded into the background—their relationship had never gone beyond the heavy kissing stage. Like a teenage girl with a schoolgirl

crush, Terry came to realize that she was “hopelessly in love” with a man old enough to be her father.

Right at the beginning of their relationship, Terry faced two jolting truths about Howard. Cojo cited a long list of stars and starlets with whom Howard was supposed to be romantically involved. When she accidentally ran into Cojo one day in Hollywood, and Howard knew all about it within an hour, she knew that he was having her tailed. That would begin a pattern of private detectives stalking her day and night, even boarding the same plane carrying her to various destinations around the world, including Istanbul.

In the late summer of 1949, Howard entered into the first of his “marriages” to Terry. It was “under the stars” on top of Mulholland Drive where he’d taken other stars, including Jean Peters, to “marry” them as well.

Howard took Terry by the hand and knelt down with her to be married in the eyes of God. They exchanged vows, and he slipped an owl-shaped ring on her finger, studded with sapphires, rubies, and diamonds. Later that night when he tried to take her to the Beverly Hills Hotel—“a woman’s place is in bed with her husband”—she refused, and said that wouldn’t happen until they were legally married in a ceremony endorsed by the state. “It’s Mormon law, too,” she told him.

Instead of a night of bliss and the relinquishment of her virginity, Howard had to drive her back to Glendale where she insisted he sleep on the sofa in her parents’ living room so she could keep an eye on him.

Their so-called real marriage took place right before Thanksgiving in 1949. Flying her to San Diego, Howard boarded the yacht, *Hilda*, with her. The captain was Carl Flynn, who had previously commanded Howard’s yacht, the *Southern Cross*, before he sold it.

Privately he ordered Captain Flynn to take them beyond the five mile limit where another marriage ceremony between Terry and Howard took place. Like the first one, this ceremony wasn’t legal either. The “wedding” was followed by the opening of two dozen bottles of French champagne, which the crew and party consumed while surrounded by bushels of white gardenias which had been brought aboard.

Flynn himself performed the ceremony, which was followed by a wedding banquet of hot dogs flown in from Coney Island.

Around Terry’s beautiful neck, Howard placed a string of valuable pearls, claiming that they had belonged to his mother. Actually Johnny Meyer had purchased them at Cartier’s.

That night, in bed aboard the yacht, Howard claimed his prize.

Before dawn, Terry was a virgin no more.

The very day after his “marriage at sea,” Howard once again proposed marriage to Jean Peters. On the same afternoon, he called director Jules Furthman, once again urging him to get starlet Janet Leigh to marry him.

He also decided that he wanted Joan Fontaine after his failed attempt to win her years before. Hoping to entrap her at RKO, he offered her husband, producer William Dozier, the position of production chief at RKO if he’d agree to sign Joan to an exclusive contract with RKO. Recognizing what Howard had in mind, Dozier refused, although he later became head of production at RKO anyway, winning the job in spite of Howard.

When not wooing these stars, Howard was flying to San Francisco for rendezvous with a handsome young stockbroker by day, dancer by night. He was William Stoffler, once described as “more beautiful than Tyrone Power, more dashing than Errol Flynn.” Stoffler was also married to a very suspicious wife, Helen. Unknown to her, Stoffler tossed his business suit for the day in the closet and donned drag to appear as a dancer at the transvestite club, Finocchio’s. This was the same club where Howard had once taken Ava Gardner and where he had met Pussy-Katt, with whom he’d had a torrid affair following an operation that had removed her male genitals.

Stoffler’s wife followed her husband one night, thinking that he was seeing another woman. When she learned what he was really up to, she filed for divorce. In the following weeks, she hired a private investigator who had learned that Stoffler had a male lover and “patron,” who turned out to be Howard himself. She planned to name Howard in her divorce suit.

When Greg Bautzer in Hollywood learned of that, he flew at once to San Francisco where he settled fifteen-thousand dollars on Helen, getting her to change her charge against her husband to “mental cruelty.” Greg also met with the young man, learning that Howard had sodomized him on several occasions while he was still in heavy woman’s makeup.

To prevent Stoffler from selling his story to a magazine, Greg settled fifty thousand dollars on the handsome young man, which bought his silence. After that, fearing a possible involvement in scandal, Howard abruptly dropped Stoffler, returning to Jean Peters and Terry Moore, among others.

“That urge for a man kept cropping up from time to time,” Johnny Meyer claimed. “But Henry Willson knew far more about those dalliances than I did. I never liked to arrange boys for Howard or anyone else, and that included Chaplin and Errol Flynn. I disapproved of all this gay stuff, but did what I was called upon to do—it was just part of my job description.”

Terry lived for a time in a bungalow with Howard at the Beverly Hills Hotel. It was here that she learned from Mama Blue, who’d heard it from a close friend, that Howard might be taking heavy drugs. Mama Blue instructed her daughter to check Howard’s arms for any signs of needle marks.

Terry grew restless that Howard wouldn’t let her announce their marriage to the world, claiming it would harm both of their careers. She understood why being single would make her “available” in the eyes of thousands of her male fans but she didn’t understand what harm marriage would do to his career.

She was also hearing rumors almost daily about Howard’s involvement with other women, even reading items in gossip columns. To clear her mind, she moved back to her parents’ home to Glendale to try to make sense of her life. Meyer claimed that he felt Howard “was driving Terry crazy with his refusal to really commit to her. It was a sham of a marriage right from the beginning.”

Terry inadvertently provoked Howard’s seething jealousy when she was sent on location to Silver Springs, Florida, to appear in *The Barefoot Mailman*, which brought her together again with Cojo on an alligator farm. Jerome Courtland (“Cojo”) had been cast as her co-star.

While shooting the picture and swimming in a river with real ‘gators—their snouts wired shut—Terry became fascinated by these reptiles.

Ross Allen, owner of the farm and a wildlife expert, offered her a copy of his book, *The Sex Life of the Alligator*, and taught her to mimic the wheezing low roar that alligators make during their mating rituals. She perfected this call of the wild, and in time, in a spirit of fun, she taught Howard

how to imitate one of the ferocious male reptiles at mating season. During her tenure in Florida, Howard telephoned her at least once a night, sometimes talking for two or three hours. Within a few weeks, sounding off their prolonged dialogues with reciprocated “alligator love calls” became part of their nightly ritual.

Back in Hollywood, Terry moved back into a separate bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel, close to Howard’s own bungalow. One evening Howard called her at her bungalow, telling her that he might be tied up for a week in Culver City, working on the Hercules. “We have a glue problem,” he said.

After signing off with her sweetest ever alligator love call, she dropped the cradle of the phone. When she picked it up, she heard the operator say, “Are you through, Las Vegas?” She knew then that Howard wasn’t in Culver City but was calling her from Nevada.

Accompanied by her parents, supposedly for moral support, Terry flew to Las Vegas, where she learned that Howard was staying at the Desert Inn. Informed that he was due for lunch, she asked to be seated at a table in the corner as a means of spying on him, hiding behind a newspaper.

She remembered Howard coming into the dining room as if he owned the place. In a twist of irony, he would own the Desert Inn by March 31 of 1967, acquiring control as the first step of the building up of his Nevada empire.

Terry spotted Howard joining a table where RKO’s casting director, Walter Kane, was entertaining an eighteen-year-old starlet, whose name is not known, and her mother. Terry defined Howard’s latest attraction as “a tall string bean with an unhealthy pallor.” Rising to her feet, Terry crashed Howard’s table, much to his embarrassment. She was all charm and grace as she chatted with her rival. After a grandstand performance, Terry departed, not to see Howard for a very long time in spite of his repeated calls and the constant arrival of long-stemmed roses and white gardenias with their intoxicating smell.

For Terry, her love affair with her “husband,” whom she’d called “the most exciting man of the century,” had come to an end.

The gifted athlete Glenn Davis was the most famous football player in America, having won the Heisman Trophy in 1946. Unlike “Granddaddy Hughes,” his name for Howard, Glenn was handsome and athletic, a very virile young man and a highly visible member of the Los Angeles Rams.

Terry had known Glenn previous to her involvement with Howard, and had actually double-dated with him when he was escorting Elizabeth Taylor.

Beginning with a date where he escorted her to the Rose Bowl, Glenn pursued her like he played a football game—that is, with a determination to win. One date led to another, and soon Terry and Glenn were linked together as an item in the gossip columns, much to Howard’s displeasure.

He called Terry frequently and urged her to return to him, reminding her of their marriage at sea. Constant dating, however, led to her acceptance of a proposal of marriage from Glenn. Terry later felt that she “just stumbled” into the engagement and subsequent marriage.

Despite repeated calls from Howard, she refused to see him, calling him “a cheat, a liar, and an adulterer.”

Finally, she agreed to meet him one final time at his bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Once there, she expected him to reclaim her. Instead he presented her with tubes of vaginal jelly. He warned her that she could have her fling but cautioned against getting pregnant. “If you do,” he told her, “your nipples will get all brown instead of pretty pink and you’ll get stretch marks, and then I could never take you back.”

In her memoirs, Terry wrote: “Dr. Hughes had gone out and bought dozens of diaphragms in all sizes and spent an entire afternoon fitting me.”

Leaving the Beverly Hills Hotel in tears, Terry walked down the aisle of the Mormon Church in Glendale on February 9, 1951 to become the bride of a football hero who was hailed as “the greatest catch in America.” Even at the last minute, she expected to hear Howard’s familiar plane overhead, as he circled the chapel, landing on the lawn, and rushed into the church to object to the marriage. That fantasy never came true, and Terry found herself a reluctant bride.

If Terry had legally been married to Howard, then her subsequent marriage to Glenn would have made her a bigamist.

After the ceremony, she headed off on a honeymoon to Acapulco with two dozen diaphragms, each of them previously fitted onto her by “Dr. Hughes.”

After the honeymoon in Acapulco, Terry was dumped in Lubbock, Texas, where the movie star ended up scrubbing and baking. Their apartment had a Murphy bed and a Pullman kitchen.

Wanting her again, Howard called her and urged her to visit him at his office at Goldwyn Studios, telling her that he’d acquired the rights to a picture, *High Heels*, and that he wanted her to star in it. Glenn urged her to go because he’d come up with some get-rich-scheme in the oil business and needed Howard’s influence with Toolco to pitch his idea.

Terry flew back to Hollywood and appeared in a dress that Howard had designed himself. The sheer black matte jersey was so thin and revealing it might have been created by Howard for Jean Harlow. Terry remembered it as if “I were wearing nothing but a veil of water after a skinny dip.”

Meeting Howard for the first time after her marriage, he almost immediately determined that her nipples were still pink. Stripping her down, he made love to her on top of his desk. Their romance was quickly rekindled, something that Glenn soon discovered when Terry called him in Lubbock, asking for a divorce.

Glenn boarded the next plane to Los Angeles, arriving at the home of Terry’s parents in Glendale. The next day Howard also arrived at the Koford home for a showdown, man-toman talk with Glenn. Almost from the beginning, the confrontation turned into a disaster, with Glenn pleading with Howard not to take “my wife from me—she belongs back in Lubbock with her real husband.”



Elizabeth Taylor

From that point on, accounts differ. In her memoirs, Terry claimed that Glenn appeared as if he were about to shake Howard's hand, but didn't. The athlete took Howard's hand and shoved it backward, causing Howard to fall over an ottoman. Mama Blue, it was alleged, threw herself over Howard's body to prevent Glenn from kicking him once he'd fallen.

Jeff Couinard, the chief of Howard's spy network, recalled it quite differently. He claimed that the husky footballer "beat the shit out of Howard." In the aftermath, according to Couinard, Howard was flown in a private plane to a hospital in San Francisco as a means of avoiding reporters in Los Angeles. Once there, it was discovered that each of the ribs injured in the Beverly Hills plane crash had been rebroken. His left eye was puffy and swollen shut, and his much-battered chin was shattered for the third time in his life.

From his hospital bed in San Francisco, Howard called Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper, urging them to keep the story out of their columns. Reporters for *Confidential* magazine, however, learned of the incident, and their subsequent revelations were widely read and gossiped about throughout America.

As a result, Jean Peters learned that Howard was involved with Terry Moore once again. How Howard talked his way out of that dilemma with her isn't known.

Dietrich later recalled encountering Howard when he looked like he'd been severely beaten.

Even though he claimed he had at last learned "what type of woman I married," Glenn still stalled the divorce, demanding money. Terry borrowed seven thousand dollars from Howard, which he insisted that she pay back, and sent that to Glenn. He took the money but continued to delay the divorce.

Howard and Terry went into hiding. Members of the Los Angeles Rams were looking all over Los Angeles for Howard, planning "to beat the bastard to pulp."

In hiding himself, Howard sent Terry, along with her close friend and stand-in, Mary Jane Carey, for a discreet, unpublicized holiday at a dude ranch in Nevada.

It was during this period that Howard took Terry on a nighttime ride aboard a TWA Constellation. At one point, overcome with passion, he put the Connie on automatic pilot and carried Terry to the rear of the plane where he seduced her on a pile of mink coats.

"It was Terry's first airborne fuck," Meyer later recalled.

After a stay of several weeks at the ranch, Howard flew Terry and Mary Jane back to Los Angeles where he installed them in a house that felt like a mausoleum to Terry. Howard said it was "the house where Judy Garland slit her throat."

On some evenings in Garland's old mansion, Howard entertained Terry by showing her copies of the "blue movies" that Joan Crawford had made in New York in the mid-1920s.

At one point Howard came up with a scheme to get Glenn to grant the divorce and call off the hunt from the Los Angeles Rams. He had Cubby Broccoli fly to Utah with a script in hand. Glenn was in training there with the Rams. The script had been gathering dust on RKO shelves for years, but Cubby claimed that it was a hot property, eagerly sought by both Tony Curtis and Marlon Brando.

He pitched a contract to Glenn, claiming that Howard wanted to make him a movie star. "But you've got to grant Terry a divorce because Howard wants to turn you into a sex symbol. All the girls in America will dream of going to bed with you every night, but only if you're a bachelor—not a married man."

Surprisingly, Glenn fell for this, signing the divorce papers. To his dismay, neither the movie contract—nor the picture—ever came through. He'd been tricked.

Terry had also been tricked, learning later that Howard had sold the script for *High Heels*. He had merely used it as bait to get her back to Hollywood.

With no help from Howard, Hal Wallis wanted Terry for a key role in *Come Back, Little Sheba*, starring Burt Lancaster and veteran actress Shirley Booth. Marilyn Monroe had been tested for the role and was rejected. The part of the sexy teenager who drives Lancaster to distraction eventually won for Terry an Oscar nomination as Best Supporting Actress of 1952.

Howard assured her she'd win—she didn't—but wouldn't escort her to the awards presentation because of the publicity it would generate for their relationship.

After her divorce from Glenn was finalized, Terry discovered that Howard had been pursuing both Elizabeth Taylor and Jean Simmons at the same time. On learning that, Terry once again moved her things out of the Beverly Hills Hotel and went back to Glendale with her parents. To win her back, Howard, in the presence of Noah Dietrich, handed Terry a million-dollar check. She tore it up and threw it into Howard's face. She stormed out of his office.

Later she learned that Howard had tried to buy both Elizabeth Taylor and Ava Gardner with million-dollar checks and had in both cases been refused.

Terry began dating again. First, singer Johnnie Ray, even though he was gay. Then, Robert Evans, who would in time become head of Paramount. But her favorite was Nicky Hilton, son of hotel magnate Conrad Hilton. Nicky had survived a disastrous marriage to Elizabeth Taylor. Terry liked him the best, finding him "tall and gorgeous." He was "the kindest, sweetest human being I've ever known," she later wrote in her memoirs, leaving out the fact that he was a mean drunk.

When news of Terry's romance with Nicky Hilton reached Howard, he was furious. Both Nicky and Howard competed for the reputation of Leading Playboy of the Western World. Both had looks, money, and charm. And both of them had big dicks. But Nicky had something Howard no longer possessed: "the sweet bird of youth."

"I never knew what was happening back then," Meyer said. "First, I heard the boss man was back with Terry. Then they were apart. Then they were back with each other living together. It was important that I keep everything straight in my head because I often had to babysit with Jean Peters while Howard was pursuing Terry and so many others. I continued to keep Howard in women, and Henry Willson continued to supply the boys, even offering Howard Rock Hudson and Troy Donahue."

When he wasn't with Terry, Howard kept her under constant surveillance. He was particularly enraged when he discovered that in addition to her ongoing dates with Nicky Hilton, she was also seeing his own attorney, Greg Bautzer, as well. "I don't know why Howard didn't fire Greg for this betrayal, but he didn't," Meyer claimed. "I think Greg had too much shit on Howard to ever get fired. There had been too many cover-ups, and Greg knew where all the bodies were buried."

When an offer came in from director Elia Kazan for Terry to fly to Germany to film *Man on a Tightrope*, starring Fredric March and an aging Adolphe Menjou, Terry was bubbling with enthusiasm. Howard didn't want her to go, but she told him she wasn't going to miss out on an opportunity to "work with Gadge," Kazan's nickname.

Somehow Terry had managed to convince the director that she was a “female Brando.” At the time Kazan was celebrated for having directed Brando in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

On her flight to Germany, Terry did not know at the time that there was another passenger on board traveling with her: Howard’s child.

Munich, 1952

When she arrived in Munich to claim her baggage, Terry was greeted with bad news. Her pet boa constrictor, Midnight, which Elia Kazan had requested as a prop within the film he was making with Terry in Munich, had died en route, presumably because of the sudden changes in climate and altitude between California and Germany. Terry had fallen in love with this large boa constrictor during the filming of *The Barefoot Mailman* in Silver Springs, Florida, and considered it a treasured pet.

More bad news was on the way.

Back on the West Coast, Howard had profited from Terry’s absence to launch an abortive affair with the Paris-born star ballerina, Zizi Jeanmaire, a former figurehead at Les Ballets des Champs Elysées.

Her phenomenal success in *Carmen* led to a brief Hollywood career. Her musicals were choreographed by Roland Petit, who became her husband in 1954. Her long legs, brunette locks, and athletic body captivated Howard. Since the star did not speak English at the time, Howard asked his chef, Robert Poussin, to serve as an interpreter.

The so-called Hughes/Jeanmaire affair died a short death. In testimony he gave in 1977 during the battle over Howard’s estate, Poussin stated for the courts: “For him [a reference to Howard], sex was mostly to dance with his head on a star’s shoulder. He tried to have sex with Zizi Jeanmaire. She told me he was impotent with her.”

In Munich, Terry was deep into filming *Tightrope*, a psychological thriller.

Terry and her mother lodged in the Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten, which was only half functioning, as much of it had been bombed during the war. Next door resided Mrs. Herman Göring. Terry noted that the staff treated her like she was the Queen of Germany.

Filming went relatively well, with Fredric March making a grab for Terry’s breasts, as he did with many of his female stars.

As Munich deepened into September of 1952, Howard’s alligator love call was transmitted nightly over the transatlantic wires.

Although she was the victim of frequent dizzy spells, Terry insisted on doing her own stunts. She was repeatedly thrown from her pony in the circus act she was performing.

Her condition worsened as the crew moved from Munich to a former bordello in the Bavarian Alps close to the Austrian border. She wanted to keep her illness secret, fearing she might be replaced in the picture if word about it got out.

She noticed a weight gain often pounds as she went from a 32C to a 36D cup. From his location on America’s West Coast, Howard blamed it on German potatoes and told her to cut them out lest she turn into a “plump Fräulein.”

One late afternoon, after several days spent filming in the Alps, Terry traveled back to downtown Munich. She had taken a bad spill from her pony earlier in the day. Back at the Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten, she went to take a long, hot bath. She was gone for so long that Mama Blue went in to check on her. Seeing her daughter, she let out a blood-curdling scream heard down the corridor. Terry was unconscious, lying in a tub of blood-red water.

As Terry was rushed to the hospital, her water broke. Up to that point, she didn’t know she was pregnant. Mama Blue had gotten through on the phone to Howard, who was horrified at the news, dispatching Dr. Verne Mason on the next plane to Munich.



Zizi Jeanmaire

By the time Howard’s doctor arrived, Terry still hadn’t given birth. Instead of comforting her, Dr. Mason told her that “Mr. Hughes doesn’t want you to have the child. You’ll have to abort it.”

Terry became hysterical, refusing the abortion. After that, she seemed to have fainted. The next thing she remembered was the cry of a baby and then oblivion.

When she finally woke up, after a coma-like sleep, she didn’t know how many hours had passed. Dr. Mason was by her side, informing her that she’d given birth to a little baby girl—no larger than the size of a small rat. Since it was born prematurely, the doctor told her that her child with Howard lived for only twelve hours, dying of septicemia. “It was born too soon to live,” Dr. Mason told her.

Terry screamed for Howard. She was furious that he hadn’t flown to Munich to be with her. When he called that night, he warned her that news of this scandal would destroy her career if she didn’t quiet down.

“It was your child, too,” she said to him, hanging up before she’d done her alligator love call.

The next few days passed as if in a coma for her.

Thanks partly to the collaboration of Darryl F. Zanuck, Terry’s boss, the matter of the dead baby did not become known to the press.

Later, Terry became suspicious that the baby hadn’t died, and confronted Howard with her suspicions that their lovechild was still alive. When she revealed her fears, he told her, “I don’t want to discuss it.”

The rumor still persists that somewhere walking the globe is a woman who bears an amazing resemblance to both her father, Howard Hughes, and her mother, Terry Moore.

Los Angeles/Las Vegas, 1954

The tortured, troubled relationship between Howard and Terry continued. She was seen at Ciro’s with gay actor Laurence Harvey, and attending the opening of *Call Me Madam* with Nicky Hilton. The hotel heir seemed to be a special favorite. She was rumored to be planning to marry handsome young actor, Robert Wagner, after he broke off with the much older Barbara Stanwyck, but by Christmas of 1953 Terry and Robert had called it quits.

In 1954 she was escorted to premieres by the likes of Rock Hudson and James Dean. She opened as the headliner in a show at the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas, but was billed \$15,000 by Howard for her costumes, which was her entire profit on the live show.

After he cashed that check—she didn’t think he would—she announced to her parents, “It’s all over between Howard and me.”

He had promised to be with her during her Vegas performance, but he’d stashed both Ava Gardner and Jean Peters at Lake Tahoe, so he spent many evenings there instead. Both women were waiting out their mandatory residencies, required as a precondition to divorces in Nevada: Ava from Frank Sinatra (“the love of my life”), and Jean Peters from Stuart Warren Cramer III, who, ironically, would eventually wed Terry in June of 1959.

While Howard chased Ava from Nevada to Florida, from Mexico to Cuba, Terry fell ill and was admitted to the Good Samaritan Hospital in Los Angeles. Dr. Verne Mason was once again sent to examine her. Howard also came to her bedside, agreeing to pay all of her medical expenses and to arrange the best medical care. As she lay in her hospital bed, he promised her “a real marriage this time, one that won’t be in legal dispute.”

She didn’t learn that she was pregnant until she’d checked out of the hospital. Howard instructed her to fly from Los Angeles to Las Vegas, where he would meet her, and then fly with her to Tucson for the wedding.

But before leaving Los Angeles, she accepted a final date with Nicky Hilton for a meal at Trader Vic’s in the Beverly Hilton, which was owned by his father. Over dinner, she broke the sad news to the hotel heir that she planned to marry Howard. The rich playboy told her that he had thought that the two of them would eventually marry instead. But even though Terry admitted that she loved Nicky dearly, she had to let him go to marry Howard... again.

The next day, with her parents, she flew to Las Vegas, where Howard greeted them at the airport which was caught up in a dust storm. Even so, Howard attempted to fly them to Arizona but the control tower warned that all flights had been grounded. Driving them back into town, he checked them into the Desert Inn.

At dinner that night, an angry Howard confronted Terry, informing her that Nicky Hilton had arrived in Las Vegas and was making threats against his life.

Howard stormed off toward the casino. When Terry went looking for him, she stumbled not upon Howard but a drunken Nicky. “I’ll kill him!” Nicky called out to her. “Time for the bastard to die. He’s ruined enough lives!”

He then delivered a bombshell. On the plane to Las Vegas, he’d sat next to the mother of actress Debra Paget. Unaware of Howard’s involvement with Terry, the mother of the actress informed him rather proudly that her daughter was in Vegas and that Howard had proposed marriage to her.

The Colorado-born Debra, another of Howard’s brunette beauties, had been used by 20th-Century Fox as an “all-purpose ingénue.” Ironically, Debra had been cast as the wife of Louis Jourdan in *Anne of the Indies*, where she is kidnapped by none other than Jean Peters, playing a lady pirate.

That wasn’t all. Nicky told Terry that Howard also had actress Mitzi Gaynor stashed away in an accommodation at the nearby Sands Hotel, and that he had learned that he was flying in Jean Peters the following evening.

Terry quoted Nicky as shouting: “I’ll kill the son of a bitch, I swear, I’m gonna kill him!”

She informed her jilted lover that that pleasure belonged to her. At that point her parents entered the casino.

Howard also entered the room shortly thereafter and attempted to escort Terry out of the casino, telling her that the storm had subsided and planes were taking off again.

He grabbed her and tried to force her from the room until he was confronted by a drunken Nicky, who revealed that he knew about Debra and Mitzi.

Howard tried to talk him out of his anger, noting that he was drunk and should go to his suite to sober up. Nicky struck him in the face. Not fighting back, Howard shielded himself from the blows. Once again, Mama Blue hurled herself in front of Howard to protect him, as Terry’s father attempted to restrain Nicky and cool his violent rage.



Mitzi Gaynor

Terry left the casino on Nicky's arm. Howard called out to her, "if you leave with that drunken bastard, you'll never work in Hollywood ever again. I'll see to that!"

On the plane back to Los Angeles, Terry told Nicky that she was pregnant with Howard's child. He offered to marry her and give the baby the Hilton name.

Soon after her return to Hollywood, she was rehearsing for *Daddy Long Legs* with Fred Astaire and Leslie Caron. She suddenly came down with cramps. She was rushed to the hospital where Dr. Mason came to her rescue once again. The doctor had informed Howard of her condition, and he too flew in from Vegas, leaving his paramours, to join her.

Fearing that her condition was life-threatening, Dr. Mason advised that the child be aborted. Later, she learned that the aborted fetus was malformed. "The baby might have saved our marriage," Terry later said. "But it was not to be."

Two weeks later, Terry encountered Mitzi Gaynor, a singer dancer from Chicago who'd made *The I Don't Care Girl*, a bio picture of entertainer Eva Tanguay. Even then, Fox doubted if its dream for Mitzi would ever come true-that is, her transformation into a updated, 1950s version of Betty Grable.

Mitzi confessed to Terry that she thought, "I was Howard's only girl until I read about it in the newspapers." She also told Terry that Howard had told her that if she ever encountered Terry that, "You'd beat me up."

Over lunch the next day, the two stars talked about Howard, Mitzi promising that she never planned to see her errant lover ever again.

"If only I could say that with some conviction," Terry said with a certain sadness in her voice. "If only I could say that."

Los Angeles/Houston, 1970-1984

It was the night of March 7, 1970, when the phone rang at Terry's home. It was three o'clock in the morning. In her memoirs, Terry reports on the dialogue:

Terry:	Hello.
Howard:	Hello, Helen.
Terry:	What? Who?
Howard:	Hello, Helen.
Terry:	Howard?
Howard:	Yes, baby it's me.
Terry:	Howard, Howard, is it really you?"

The phone went dead.
That was the last she ever heard of him, in spite of her attempts to get in touch with him, including a later episode at the Inn on the Park in London.
Still looking lovely after the passage of many years, Terry became embroiled in 1977 in the long and drawn-out legal battle waged over Howard's estate. The Internal Revenue Service had computed it to be worth \$460 million, of which \$274,714,977 were due in Federal estate taxes.
Terry never pressed her claim of marriage in the Supreme Court of Texas. But once the heirs to the Hughes estate were legally established, they decided in essence to buy off the 54-year-old star in 1984.

The actual amount of the settlement was never announced. The actress later told the press that it was "not more than eight figures." Reports claimed it was as low as \$250,000 but may have been as much as \$350,000.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Los Angeles, 1949-1958

Although he'd never seen one of her movies, Howard had been obsessed with Elizabeth Taylor ever since he'd noticed her on the cover of *Time* in 1949. He was forty-five years old at the time, Elizabeth a tender seventeen. When a beautiful actress was very young, Howard first wooed the parents before going after the real prey.

Elizabeth's father, Francis Taylor, owned an exclusive art gallery in Beverly Hills. Looking like an unshaven bum, Howard drove to the gallery and introduced himself to Francis. Before he left an hour later, Howard had purchased eight very costly and overpriced paintings which he lost before six o'clock that evening. After leaving the gallery, he'd driven to the apartment of some unknown starlet, spending two hours with her. He'd left his Chevy parked in front of the apartment building with the car windows open. By the time he emerged from her home, all the paintings had been stolen. He didn't seem to care, as he hadn't wanted the art anyway.

Before leaving the gallery, he'd invited Francis to fly with him that weekend to a vacation retreat in Reno. His wife, Sara, was also invited. As an afterthought, Howard added, "Oh, don't forget to bring your daughter."

Before flying to Reno, Howard called Louis B. Mayer and attempted to purchase Elizabeth's contract. In the waning months of his powerful rule over the studio, the gruff Mayer informed him that the contract wasn't for sale. "You'll have to find another way to seduce her, Hughes," Mayer said before putting down the phone.

When Howard met Elizabeth at the airport, he was stunned by her beauty, he later reported to Johnny Meyer. "A real looker, with tits," he told his pimp. "I wish I had some way of finding out if she's a virgin."

"Have Dr. Mason examine her," Meyer said.

"Don't be an ass!" Howard snapped at him. "What am I going to do? Call her up and say I've made an appointment for my doctor to examine your hymen to see if it's been pierced."

At the resort in Reno, Howard met privately with Sara and Francis, telling them that he was prepared to put up a dowry of one million dollars if they would let Elizabeth marry him. Always ambitious for the advancement of her daughter, Sara promised her cooperation. She didn't seem bothered by the difference in their ages. Francis, however, urged caution. "Elizabeth's a very independent girl. She'll have to make up her own mind. But I'd love to have an art patron like you in the family."

Goaded on by the encouragement of Sara, Howard approached Elizabeth later that afternoon. She was lying in a white bathing suit by the hotel pool. A fully dressed Howard came up to her. In the same type of cardboard box he'd carried gems for Ava Gardner, he brought a similar unprepossessing package to present to Elizabeth. Opening the box, he dazzled her with rubies, diamonds, and emeralds. He turned up the box and let the stones fall on her sexy stomach. "C'mon," he said. "I'm taking you to get married. I've had someone make the arrangements. We can be married tonight. The chapel's already reserved."

Astonished, she rejected both the stones and the proposal. Jumping up and scattering the stones on the pool tiles, she raced back to her bedroom.

That night over champagne and crêpes suzette, with Sara and Francis listening, Howard more formally proposed marriage. Saying nothing, Elizabeth excused herself and left the table, heading back to her bedroom.

The next day, Howard sent Meyer to apologize. "Howard gets carried away sometimes," Meyer told the star. "He didn't mean to insult you, certainly not rush you into marriage."

"Tell that fucking madman to stay away from me," she shouted at Meyer. "Your boss bores me, flaunting his money. For god's sake, he reminds me of Louis B. Mayer, and I have no intention of marrying that monster. Or your monster either!" She slammed the door in Meyer's face.

Nonetheless, Howard was persistent and continued to pursue her once he'd flown the Taylors back to Hollywood. At her home, Elizabeth called her friend, actor Roddy McDowall, with whom she'd starred in the 1943 *Lassie Come Home*. "I know what I want, and I don't want Howard Hughes. A man can hit on me if he wants, but when I'm not interested, the word is no. I don't give a flying fuck who they are."

In spite of her protestations, Elizabeth reluctantly agreed to go out with Howard on three more dates against her better judgment.

Years later, she recalled, "Hughes was such an out-and-out bore, I wouldn't have married him for all his money. The few times I went out with him, he stared into space and never answered any of my questions. That was because he was deaf and wouldn't wear a hearing aid. He smelled like he needed a bath. His pants were wrinkled and hung on him like that of a scarecrow. He wore dirty sneakers with no socks. His left toe stuck out of one of them."

To Howard's disappointment, Elizabeth married Nicky Hilton that same year (1949). By that time, Howard had spies trailing both the hotel heir and Elizabeth herself. The spies learned that after only two weeks of marriage, Nicky was cheating on his wife. Even though Elizabeth remained faithful to Nicky during their short marriage, Howard suspected otherwise. He later said, "Every man should have the opportunity of sleeping with Elizabeth Taylor. At the rate she's going, every man will."

Even before the widely predicted divorce became final, Howard began to woo Elizabeth again. But instead of showing up at her door, he tried to court her through subordinates. She accepted an invitation to fly to Palm Springs with the handsome, dashing attorney, Greg Bautzer, who worked for Howard.

Once installed in a villa there, Elizabeth prepared herself to go to dinner with Greg. When the doorbell rang, she opened it only to find Howard standing on the doorstep, looking his usual bedraggled self.

"I have something to show you," he said, insisting that she walk out to his old battered Chevy. "It's a big surprise." It is not known if Elizabeth had heard about "the big surprise" Howard had shown other starlets.

In the front seat, he held up a red bandana like the kind Aunt Jemima might wear. He opened it to reveal a queen's ransom in jewelry purchased at Tiffany and Cartier. She didn't know if it were the same cache of jewelry presented to her in Reno. "Come with me," he told her, "and this is all yours."

Racing back to the house, she slammed the door on Howard. Packing hurriedly, she fled Palm Springs and returned to Hollywood on her own. On the phone to Roddy again, she told him, "Who does Hughes think I am? One of his bimbo starlets at RKO?"

In a surprise move, Elizabeth agreed to attend a party hosted by Howard in her honor at the Beverly Hills Hotel where he was staying in a bungalow. He pointedly did not ask Jean Peters to the affair, even though she, too, was living in a nearby bungalow. Then, as part of some game he was playing, Howard did not show up himself.

His marriage to Gloria Vanderbilt long dissolved, Pat DeCicco was back in Los Angeles working for Howard again. He was assigned to be Elizabeth's escort at the party. Over champagne, Pat pitched his client, promising Elizabeth that if she would marry Howard, he'd make her the biggest star in Hollywood.

"I'm already on my way to becoming the biggest star in Hollywood, with no help from Hughes," she told Pat. "I prefer to do it on my own." Trying to shake Pat, she told him, "and you can tell Mr. Hughes that I'm flying to London to marry Michael Wilding."

The next day, Pat called on Elizabeth and presented evidence to her that her future husband was a bisexual. Among others, he'd carried on a wartime affair with the handsome London-born actor, Stewart Granger. She refused to look at the evidence and dismissed Pat.

The next day, Hedda Hopper came to call on Elizabeth. Unknown to the star, Hedda had been sent by Howard himself. She, too, told Elizabeth that the man she was about to marry was a homosexual. At least Pat had given Wilding the benefit of being bisexual—but not Hedda. She was a homophobe and deeply distressed that her own son, William Hopper, was also gay. Elizabeth turned a deaf ear to Hedda's pleadings.

On the plane to London to marry Wilding, Elizabeth was startled to find that the seat next to hers was occupied by Pat DeCicco. Howard had obviously arranged for that. All across the Atlantic, Pat pleaded with her not to marry the British actor. The year was 1952. As she cleared customs, she told Pat, "Tell Mr. Hughes he can dream on and present all the evidence he wants against Michael. I'm still going to marry him." As a parting word to Pat, she told him, "I'm sure there are a thousand stars in Hollywood who would jump at Mr. Hughes's offer. Tell your boss to chase after one of those pussycats."

In spite of such rejections, Howard still planned to seduce Elizabeth. "I'll have to wait and play my hand again when the right time comes." He still spied on her during her marriage to Wilding, which lasted until 1957. He made attempts to get in touch with her after the divorce, as she'd become what he still liked to call "a wet deck." She consistently turned him down.

His spies informed him that she was dating showman Mike Todd, whom she married in 1957. When he died in a plane crash the following year, Howard planned to move in on her again after a decent interval had passed.

At the time of Todd's death, Howard swung into action, placing a TWA Constellation at Elizabeth's disposal to fly her to Todd's funeral at the Jewish Waldheim Cemetery in Zurich, Illinois, outside Chicago. Under heavy sedation of morphine and phenobarbitol, Elizabeth was helped aboard the plane, having accepted Howard's generous offer.

Before Howard could make a move toward Elizabeth, his spies brought some startling news. He was told that "the corpse hasn't even cooled yet, and Taylor's shacking up with singer Eddie Fisher." Fisher had been Todd's best friend and had flown with Elizabeth to comfort her in her grief. At the time he was married to Debbie Reynolds in what fan magazines called "a storybook romance."

"That fucking slut!" Howard shouted at Pat, angered at him for not securing Elizabeth's promise of a marriage. "As I figure it, she must be addicted to cut Jewish dick—first Mike Todd, now Eddie Fisher."

As headlines erupted over Elizabeth's scandalous affair and eventual marriage to Fisher, Howard finally gave up the chase. He would make no attempt to contact her in the future. As he told Pat DeCicco, "Future historians of Howard Hughes will record that only two big stars in Hollywood turned me down—namely Joan Crawford and Elizabeth Taylor."

Los Angeles/New York, 1950-1989

Even though he was in hot pursuit of Elizabeth Taylor, Howard also launched a campaign to seduce her "look-alike," Jean Simmons. Visitors to his office at 7000 Romaine Street noticed that he'd tacked up several pictures of Jean on his wall behind his desk.

At the time of Howard's growing interest in Jean, she was deep into a seven-year contract with British producer, J. Arthur Rank. Earlier in her career, she'd been called a "Vivien Leigh look-alike," and had actually played a harpist in Cleopatra's court in the 1945 film, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, which, coincidentally had starred the real Vivien Leigh.

Jean shot to fame playing Ophelia in the screen version of *Hamlet*, with Laurence Olivier in the starring role. At the age of nineteen, she'd received a best supporting Oscar nomination for her performance in Shakespeare's most shameless tear-jerker. That landmark in her career landed her on the cover of *Life* magazine on October 9, 1950. Howard no doubt had stolen a copy of *Life* from some office, having long ago canceled his subscription.

Elizabeth Taylor had several men come between Howard and herself—namely, Nicky Hilton, Michael Wilding, Mike Todd, and Eddie Fisher. Jean Simmons had but one man. Also London-born, like herself, he was the handsome, suave, and debonair actor, Stewart Granger, whose real name was James Stewart but that name was already taken. He would have been the ideal star to play James Bond in a tuxedo. Instead he ended up in costume romps and adventure films.

Fighting with British forces during World War II, he was severely wounded. Discharged, he was free to make British films until the end of the year and the post-war years thereafter. Most of these were florid melodramas or light comedies.

In 1949 he had co-starred with the beautiful Jean Simmons in *Adam and Evelyn*. The lovers arrived in Hollywood the following year, as Stewart was set to play the lead in MGM's big adventure film, *King Solomon's Mines*. The movie would go on to receive an Oscar nomination as best picture of the year.

Stewart, in New York City in 1989, revealed that no sooner had he arrived in Hollywood, than he began to receive phone calls from Cary Grant. "I don't know how else to describe these meetings I had with Cary other than a date. I knew he had a crush on me. His excuse was that he wanted 'to catch up on England,' but I knew otherwise. He took me to the Farmers' Market. He took me to the beach, always managing to come into the changing room as I was taking off my underwear. He asked me out for dinner. I had heard rumors that Cary and Howard Hughes were lovers, but I guess that did n't stop Cary from wanting to sample the At home with latest piece of meat arriving from London. In fact, during the first months in Hollywood I was seeing more of Cary than my wife. She grew jealous, but I assured her that the relationship was platonic."



At home with
Stewart Granger and Jean Simmons

In spite of Cary's advances toward him, Stewart informed the actor that he wanted to wed Jean in a secret ceremony so the press wouldn't find out. Cary claimed that he knew just the man to arrange that. "Howard Hughes!" Cary told him. "I'm sure he'll help you two."

At long last Stewart and Jean got to meet the mysterious Howard Hughes. "A chauffeur arrived for us one day and drove us to an airfield where Cary welcomed us," Stewart said. "He took us over to meet Howard who looked rather unassuming, not like the richest man on the earth. His wardrobe must have cost him all often dollars."

Inviting them to fly away with him, Howard asked Stewart to join him in the front seat, with Jean and Cary in the rear. Howard flew them to the Grand Canyon and installed them in a cliff-top hotel overlooking the giant chasm. Howard and Cary occupied one suite, Stewart and Jean the adjoining suite, which was even larger.

At some point Stewart, who was suffering "from the runs," as he called it, had to go to the downstairs men's toilet at the lodge "to take care of urgent business." He entered a stall with a door that had a clear view of the room, thanks to gaps on either side of its swinging door.

While the actor was seated on the toilet, he saw Howard and Cary come in to take a leak. In his memoirs, *Sparks Fly Upward*, Stewart reported on the dialogue between the two friends:

Cary	Well, what do you think of her?
Howard	I'd sure like to get my teeth into that. He's a goddamned lucky son of a bitch, that Granger.
	There was a long silence.
Howard	Oh, shit, I've got my cock caught in my zipper.

Asked years later to elaborate on what happened next, which he left out of his memoirs, Stewart said that Howard turned sideways to face Cary. "I had a clear view of his big cock. Without being asked, Cary knelt down in front of Hughes and took his cock in his hand and very lovingly freed it from the zipper, planting a kiss on the head of it."

"I don't care what latter day biographers have written about Hughes and Cary," Stewart said. "I saw before my own eyes the intimacy between those two. All the claims that those two were straight are bullshit. They were definitely lovers. I knew Cary was after me, and I think at one point Hughes also wanted me. Of course, in Hughes's case, he also wanted every other beautiful brunette woman in Hollywood as well."

Howard agreed to have Stewart and Jean flown to Tucson, Arizona, for a secret wedding, away from the prying eyes of the press. Michael Wilding would be flown in as Stewart's best man.

To plan the wedding, Howard was invited over for an evening with Jean and Stewart at their home. Ironically, both Wilding and Elizabeth Taylor were living with the other British couple until their own home became available.

Stewart recalled that both Jean and Elizabeth, who had become close friends, wore low-cut gowns that night. Howard seemed mesmerized to come face to face with the two beauties he'd been pursuing. "His eyes bugged out of his head," Stewart later claimed. "He literally drooled as he stood looking down at them sitting demurely side by side on a couch. He practically overbalanced trying to look down their cleavages, both of them being well endowed in that department. I'd heard the rumor before but now I was certain. Hughes was a tit man."

Finally, Stewart asked him, "Which do you prefer?"

"Goddamn, I can't make up my mind," Howard said.

"Well, hard cheese, old boy. You're not going to get either of them, so up yours!"

Stewart has gone on record as reporting that much of a more extended conversation. In the 1980s he filled in more details as to how the conversation concluded.

"I was just teasing a deaf mute at our little party," Stewart recalled. "What Michael Wilding and I didn't know at the time was that we were playing with a cobra."

Stewart later recalled that Howard looked at him ominously when told he could have neither Elizabeth nor Jean. Standing real close to Stewart, Howard said, "In that case, I'll just have to take you."

"Dream on, you bugger!" Stewart said. "I've sworn off gay sex."

"That's not what Cary tells me!"

In trying to amass a dossier on Wilding to present to Elizabeth, Howard had learned that the actor had had an affair in London with Stewart when they'd shared a flat during the war. Granger later dismissed the seriousness of this affair.

"People will say Mike and I were both queer. But we weren't, really. It was just something men did during the war."

“Howard hadn’t played his hand with Jean, and he was still after Elizabeth for years,” Stewart later said. He recalled an incident where “the dirty, double-crossing Machiavellian son of a bitch” invited Jean and me, along with Elizabeth and Michael, to Lake Tahoe for a weekend. Stewart said that he was suffering from a severe cold, but agreed to go along.

Howard took both couples on a flight in a converted airplane, a PBY. He flew real high before taking the plane into a nose-dive. As the plane swooped to earth as if it were crashing, Stewart felt this dreadful pressure in his ear. In agonizing pain, he returned to his hotel room where a doctor confirmed that his eardrum had burst. Alone in bed, he had to lie there in his suffering as Howard “filled in for me,” taking Jean, along with Elizabeth and Wilding, to the hottest shows in Lake Tahoe, including performances by Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr.

At three or four o’clock in the morning, Jean would return to their shared suite, joining her stricken husband in bed. Wilding and Elizabeth would go into another bedroom, and Howard would sleep alone in his bedroom, all of the accommodations opening onto a mutually shared living room.

From the moment he took over her career, Howard disappointed Jean, refusing to let William Wyler cast her in *Roman Holiday*, a role she coveted. She coveted it even more when Audrey Hepburn won the part and also was awarded an Oscar for her portrayal of the runaway princess with Gregory Peck. Instead, Jean was cast as Lavinia in *Androcles and the Lion*, released in 1952.

Howard continued to pursue Jean, sometimes demanding meetings with her in his car at three o’clock in the morning. Naturally, Stewart’s suspicions were aroused. At one point Howard called Jean at her home and asked, “When are you going to get away from that goddamned husband of yours?” Standing nearby, Stewart grabbed the phone from his wife. “Listen, Mr. Howard Bloody Hughes, you’ll be sorry if you don’t leave my wife alone!” He slammed down the phone.

Angered, Howard threatened that for the remainder of his contract with Jean, he was going to cast her in movies so horrible that they would destroy her career.

With only eighteen days remaining in his contract with Jean, Howard hired director Otto Preminger to shoot *Angel Face*, a black and white *noir* film starring Robert Mitchum. Critics called it the “last of Hughes’s tributes to homicidal females.”

Howard had decided that Preminger was just the director “to punish Jean.” He’d been impressed with Preminger’s portrayals of Nazis on the screen. Driving the Viennese-born Jewish director around the deserted streets of Hollywood at three o’clock in the morning, Howard confided, “I want to get even with that bitch.”

His final instructions to the director were, “Do your fucking nasty best with her. Make the bitch pay for what’s she’s put me through.”

As Jean later recalled, Preminger “absolutely destroyed me.” In one scene he kept ordering Robert to slap her again and again, “harder and harder until you get it right.”

“*Vunce* more! Preminger shouted at Robert. Finally, when the actor could take it no more, he slapped the director’s face with all his muscular fury. Preminger ended up printing the final take.

Before filming began, Howard had issued several memos about Jean’s hair. Stewart later said that “He’d developed a fetish about my wife’s hair, the same type he’d hankered for with Jane Russell’s breasts.”

To defy him, Jean took a pair of shears and hacked off her long locks, which horrified Howard. He called it “butchery,” and was furious.

Even after Jean’s contract ran out, Howard still exerted power over her. He called every major studio in Hollywood, warning them not to hire her, claiming he had an oral contract with her for the next seven years. No roles were forthcoming, because every major studio head knew that Howard could tie them up in multi-million dollar lawsuits if they signed even a one-time film contract with Jean.

As Stewart later confessed, “I decided then and there to murder Howard Hughes.” He lived with Jean in a cliffside house. At the time, Howard had their home under a 24-hour “spy watch.” According to Stewart’s plan, he was going to slip out of the house, driving slowly to the airport where he could be easily trailed by his stalkers. Once at the airport, he was going to board a plane for Las Vegas, but sneak off at the last moment and drive himself back home, slipping in through a secret entrance only he and Jean knew about. The plan was for Jean to call Howard and tell him that she was reconsidering his previous offers and would like to meet with him in private after all.

In his scheme, Jean would call Howard over for drinks on the terrace, overlooking a deep ravine. Stewart then told his wife that he wanted her to start screaming so loudly that all the neighbors would hear. At that moment, he planned to rush out and push Howard over the railing and into the ravine. Later in life, Stewart recalled, “I woke up in the morning and came to my senses. I decided a shit like Hughes wasn’t worth a seat in the gas chamber.”

Instead of murdering Howard, Stewart and Jean sued. On hearing the news, Louis B. Mayer called him to his office. “Hollywood is a company town,” Mayer told Stewart. “If you sue, you’ll destroy Jean’s career for good. She’ll have to go back to London to look for work. But you’ll also destroy your career too. You won’t work another day in this town. I’ll see to that personally.”

Ignoring advice from many of his friends not to take on Howard, Stewart continued the lawsuit. Halfway through the case, Greg Bautzer called to tell him that Howard wanted them to drop the suit, claiming that he would make no more demands on Jean or try to tie her up if other studios hired her. Jean and Stewart, against all advice, decided not to seek damages from Howard, but settled for just their legal expenses.

Howard feared that more court testimony would be damaging to him. At one point Stewart had told the world, “Hughes doesn’t want my wife to make films for RKO, he just wants to screw her.”

Nearing the end of his life in 1989, Stewart made his Broadway debut in *The Circle*, co-starring his friend, Rex Harrison, along with Glynis Johns. At that point in his life, having long ago been cast aside by Hollywood, he was very outspoken and candid in his comments.

“I still regret that I didn’t go through with my plan to murder Hughes,” he said over a dinner table at Sardi’s. “It would have been so much better for Hollywood—even the world—if I had done that foul act. Somebody should have killed Hughes. Instead I let the bastard live to ruin even more lives.

Los Angeles, 1950-1967

“What in hell did bossman ever want to hook up with Barbara Payton for?” Johnny Meyer once asked. “I mean, she was a gorgeous dame at the time before she turned herself into chopped liver. But that was one sicko. Howard wasn’t a temple of mental health himself. He didn’t need to get involved with this brassy blonde, with her black, whoring heart. Even though for one brief second a movie star, the bitch was Hollywood’s number one trollop. Bob Hope and Gregory Peck should have had it cut off for getting involved in the tawdry little world of Payton. No pussy is worth what she put bossman through.”

Twenty-three years old at the time she met Howard, Payton had come from the cold winds of Cloquet, Minnesota, to the hot beds of Hollywood. A woman of considerable beauty, she was blessed with blue eyes and a fair complexion that revealed her Norwegian ancestry.

Payton was passed on to Howard by his attorney, Greg Bautzer, who told his male friends, “You have never been given a blow-job until you’ve been on the receiving end of Barbara’s skilled mouth and tongue. I’ve been blown by the best of them, even Joan Crawford, but Barbara takes top prize.”

Intrigued, Howard called Payton for a date, and she readily accepted. “Bossman never minded taking Greg’s sloppy seconds,” Meyer maintained.

The next morning, Howard phoned Meyer to tell him, “The bitch will do anything in bed—and I mean anything. If you want to piss in her mouth, that’s okay with blondie.”

“Did you, bossman?” Meyer asked.

“Some secrets I don’t even share with you,” he said, dismissing further questioning.

Even though Greg warned Howard that Payton “was a stick of dynamite waiting to explode,” Howard continued to date her from 1950 to 1952. “Back in those days, Payton was the Queen of the Tabloids,” Meyer said. “Howard risked exposure by getting involved in some of her big, headline-making brawls. He came pretty close time and time again of landing on the front page. Fortunately, he had money—and plenty of it—and money talks. Bossman truly believed he could buy himself out of anything, and I guess he could.”



Barbara Payton

Dumping her husband, Payton arrived in Hollywood in the late 40s, with determination like thousands of other beautiful young women, to become a big-time Hollywood star. “If a blonde with absolutely no talent like Lana Turner can become a movie star, then I know I can do it too,” she announced to anyone she was introduced to. When her test at RKO didn’t work out, she ended up as a carhop at Stan’s Drive-In at the corner of Sunset Boulevard and Highland Avenue. Hustling tips while peddling chocolate milkshakes and juicy hamburgers, she also did another type of hustling on the side.

The riches from her nocturnal activities allowed her to buy an expensive wardrobe. Soon she was seen at all the posh clubs, including the Trocadero, Ciro’s, and El Mocambo. She was hailed as “the Queen of the Night.”

Her love nest on Cheremoya Avenue was paid for in 1949 by none other than the much-married Bob Hope. When the comedian refused to give her \$5,000 a week in “spending money,” she threatened to blackmail him for her silence. Hope settled what was later called “a huge sum of money” on her, but she went through all her new loot in just three months, claiming, “I have expensive tastes.”

“I told Howard all about the shit Hope got himself in,” Meyer said. “I told him to drop Payton at once. She was a hot potato looking for trouble. Even though he knew all about the blackmail attempt on Hope, Howard continued to date Payton. He just wouldn’t listen to me.”

Occasionally Meyer would encounter Payton. “She even offered to have sex with me, but I found her too much of a brazen hussy. She also had a foul mouth and could drink all night. She was such a nympho she would spot a hot hunk and practically rape him before she could take him back to her apartment. I think she had sex in cars more than in her bed.”

“One night she told me that actor, John Ireland, had the biggest cock in Hollywood, and she was the only woman who would swallow it to its root,” Meyer said. “The next night I saw her hugging and kissing gangster Mickey Cohen in a nightclub booth. The next night she showed up at El Mocambo with bossman himself. Payton wanted to be seen in all the fancy spots. Howard couldn’t stash her away in some bungalow in Beverly Hills like he did Jean Peters.”

A.C. Lyles, the movie producer, once claimed that “Payton never had an itch she didn’t scratch.” Minor actor Mickey Knox recalled that she’d kept him in bed for three days and nights, all at one stretch. “I had to crawl out of that dump on my hands and knees. What a workout! What a pussy! She sucked you dry. Never left a drop.”

She even got involved with James Cagney, who secured her a contract at Warner Brothers for \$5,000 a week,” Meyer said. “He put her in *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye*. That film had hardly been released before she was fucking Gary Cooper on the sound stages of *Dallas* and taking in \$10,000 a week. On the same picture, she was also fucking that humpy Steve Cochran after Joan Crawford kicked him out of her bed. The next thing I know she was shackled up with Guy Madison, Howard’s former lover.” They appeared together in a Civil War drama called *Drums in the Deep South*.

Suddenly, when Howard disappeared from Payton’s life for three weeks, she was seen around town with the classy New York actor, Franchot Tone, who had been married to Joan Crawford in the 30s. Tone was twenty-two years older than Payton, and he lavished expensive gifts on her, including jewelry.

Somehow Tone found out that Howard was secretly dating Payton, whom he planned to marry. The actor hired a private detective to spy on who was coming and going from Payton’s apartment. To set his trap, Tone announced to his errant lover that he was flying to San Francisco on a three-day business trip.

Receiving a call from the detective that Howard had arrived at his girlfriend’s apartment, Tone drove over in the middle of the night. Since he paid the rent on the apartment and held a key, he let himself in to discover Howard in bed with Payton, being the beneficiary of her expertise in fellatio.

Meyer said he is not exactly sure of what happened that evening, because Howard, out of embarrassment no doubt, didn't want to provide him with complete details. As Joan Crawford could have told Howard, her former husband had an extreme violent streak in him. Though normally an educated, cultured man, if provoked, he could become "a raging monster" in Crawford's view. She often went to her studio with her face so damaged that makeup could not conceal the bruises or a black eye.

Tone was known for "exploding" if he'd had enough to drink, and he drank all the time, leading columnist Ed Sullivan to call him a "vodka zombie." "I saw Howard the next day following his fight with that hot-tempered Tone," Meyer said. "I knew that Howard ran from fistfights, and I'm sure Tone struck all the blows. He must have gotten in some good punches, because Howard was badly beaten, with two front teeth missing. They were false teeth, Ava Gardner having knocked out the originals. I drove him to a private clinic where Dr. Verne Mason attended to the bruises. In private, Howard was taken to a dentist who put in new teeth. Howard didn't show his face around town for the next two weeks."

"The worst was yet to come," Meyer revealed. "Tone must have really been crazy about this Payton dame. He sent Howard a death threat. Dietrich urged Howard to go to the police, as this sounded serious. Howard refused. We learned that Tone had purchased a revolver and planned to gun down Howard, perhaps lying in wait for him in a parking lot. Howard doubled his Mormon guards. Already paranoid, he took the threat very, very seriously."

"With all this going on, Howard was still slipping around and seeing Payton," Meyer said. "By then, I think Howard's head was seriously on his way to Disneyland. He wasn't thinking right. He began to see Payton as forbidden fruit, and didn't want some two-bit New York actor ordering him around."

Howard was among the first to learn that Payton had fallen for rock-jawed actor Tom Neal, a sort of dime-store John Garfield. She'd met him at a Hollywood pool party. As recorded by *Exposed* magazine at the time, the handsome, macho Neal stood by the pool "displaying his masculinity via a brief pair of bathing panties." Although showgirls at the time laughingly referred to Tone as "jawbreaker," Payton obviously found the much younger Neal's "conspicuous bulge" even more enticing. They began a torrid affair. Almost sadistically, Payton played one man against the other and would in fact marry each of them, thereby creating two of the shortest marriages ever recorded in Hollywood history.

To get even with Tone for his attack and those lost teeth, Howard sent Meyer to Neal, an ex-college boxer. Meyer provided all the details of Tone's love affair with Payton and offered Neal ten thousand dollars if he'd stake out the 46-year-old actor and "beat the shit out of him."

Always broke, the B movie actor readily agreed. Actually, even prior to the offer from Meyer, he had planned to attack Tone anyway. On September 13, 1951, Payton dined with Tone at Ciro's. Later that night, Neal followed them back to her apartment. Coming out of the bushes, he attacked Tone, smashing his nose and breaking one of his cheekbones. Tone was rushed to the hospital with a brain concussion and remained in a coma for eighteen hours. The morning newspapers headlined this "Love Brawl" across the country.

"Howard's involvement in all this mess was never revealed," Meyer later said. "I think bossman paid out a total of \$30,000 before he finally extricated himself from Payton's pile of manure. She got most of it but Neal was paid off too, a lot more than the original ten thousand offered."

After he came so close to making headlines, Howard had finally learned his lesson. He dropped Payton and never saw her again. That was just as well. Deep into her heroin addiction, Payton was headed for skid row. She went from a \$10,000-a-week movie star to a broken down and snaggle-toothed whore on Santa Monica Boulevard, jumping inside the cars of strangers and giving fast blow-jobs while they kept the motor running."

Los Angeles/Mexico, 1954

Terry Moore's first meeting with James Dean was auspicious. It took place in her agent's office when she'd discovered, not her agent, but a young slovenly dressed actor asleep on a window seat. Tickling his nose with a Venetian blind cord, she woke him up. Tackling her, he rolled her over and over time and again on the floor. Or so Terry remembered in her memoirs.

Both stars had only one thing in common: Terry had worked for Elia Kazan and Dean had just completed *East of Eden* for the same director. Adapted from the John Steinbeck novel, it would be released in 1955 and would bring instant fame to this handsome, nonconformist Indiana-born actor.

Dean's romance with Terry never really got off the ground. She characterized him more as a "buddy" who followed her around to her various commitments, such as her ballet exercises at Goldwyn Studios or her singing lessons. He even took her to the premiere of *Red Garters*, starring Rosemary Clooney, which was one of the few occasions when he wore a tuxedo. Photographs of Terry and Dean at the time show just how uncomfortable he was and perhaps how ill mated he was with the ebullient Terry.

No sooner did Dean start appearing with Terry than the young actor—soon to be famous—attracted Howard's attention. He ordered Dean trailed day and night, even though from the beginning he was informed that there was no sexual liaison between Dean and his mistress.

Howard immediately learned that Dean was leading a bisexual life, enjoying women but more frequently men. He was lusting for Marlon Brando but ended up with Rock Hudson, with whom he'd make his last picture, *Giant*, in 1956. By that time, Rock and James had soured on each other. Initially they had been attracted to each other when Dean had been cast as a youth in the Rock Hudson/Piper Laurie comedy, *Has Anybody Seen My Gal?* in 1952.

On the night Dean brought Terry back to Glendale from the premiere of *Red Garters*, Howard was waiting in the shadows in a battered Chevy. He followed Dean's car for four blocks until the actor was forced to stop for a red light. Howard deliberately rammed into the rear of the actor's car, but not seriously enough to do any damage.

What happened at this point is not known. Johnny Meyer was told the following day that Howard was flying Dean to Acapulco and that he was to babysit for various mistresses, including Jean Peters, while Howard was away. "His cover story was that he had been called to Washington on urgent business that involved TWA," Meyer said.

In Mexico, Howard's playboy and musician friend, Teddy Stauffer, had arranged a luxurious villa for "The New Discovery." Stauffer later became the only source and eyewitness for the off-the-record weekend of what in time became two American legends, Howard Hughes and James Dean.

"The first day I came to call, I found Howard fully dressed and talking on the phone by the pool," Stauffer said. "That young Dean boy was buck-assed naked lounging by the pool wearing only a pair of sunglasses. There were three bedrooms in the villa. Only one bed had been used. The other two were still freshly made. So, I just assumed they connected, although I don't know for sure since I wasn't there with my camera. Oh, how I wish I had been!"

Stauffer claimed that Howard was supposed to stay only through Sunday night, but after the second day he extended his stay with Dean until Thursday night.

"In my opinion, Howard was very attracted to the young boy, who was a bit unconventional for Howard's tastes," Stauffer said. "It was pretty

evident to me that Howard liked to devour Dean in bed. The problem came every time Dean opened his mouth and delivered some opinion that made Howard wince. No two men could have been more ill matched. I'm talking personality-wise. To make matters worse, there was a big age barrier between them. Dean, I found out, had been born in 1931. Howard was born years and years before World War I. I'm not sure of the year. There was no doubt about it. Howard could definitely have been Dean's father. It was also evident that Dean had no real interest in Howard. He was just prostituting himself in front of Howard."

"I later learned that Dean had let many bigwigs in Hollywood use his body," Stauffer said. "From what friends told me, he would drop his pants for almost anyone. But with men he rarely reciprocated unless he was attracted to them—or so I was told. Frankly, and I'm not sure, but I think the 'romance' between Howard and Dean consisted of several blow-jobs, and rather frequent ones at that. From what I gathered, Dean just lay on his pillow with his eyes shut imagining god only knows what while Howard did all the dirty work. A sort of rough trade type of thing."

During his stay at Stauffer's villa, Howard and Dean dined with their host only once. One day Howard took Dean flying along the western coast of Mexico. On another day he rented a luxury yacht and took him sailing, landing in some small port somewhere. "Frankly, I think Dean was just going along for the ride, enjoying a Mexican vacation paid for by some rich man," Stauffer claimed.

Howard at one point tried to talk to Dean about flying, perhaps hoping to find some common ground. But Dean, in front of Stauffer, informed Howard that "the open road is what it's about. I like to feel the tires of my car hitting the asphalt."

"I'll always remember the way the evening ended," Stauffer said. "Back at the villa, Dean was trying to polish off a bottle of Tequila, much to Howard's annoyance. At one point, a drunken Dean pulled off all his clothes and danced nude for us. Later I learned that he had briefly studied dance with Katherine Dunham and had, at least somewhat seriously, considered a career in dance. Frankly, he was a lousy dancer, but I think Howard enjoyed watching his cock bounce up and down."

Before finishing off the evening, Dean told Stauffer and Howard, "Dream like you'll live forever but live like you'll die today."

"Later on, I learned he used that line on dozens of people, and for this tragic boy it was a true statement," Stauffer said.

After completing *Giant* for George Stevens in 1956, Dean was killed in a car crash while driving his Porsche Spider to Salinas, California. He was twenty-four years old.

It was Johnny Meyer who brought news of Dean's death to Howard.

"My bossman looked at me with a confused expression," Meyer later recalled. "For a moment, I thought he wasn't sure who Jimmy Dean was. Then he said something enigmatic."

"We'll never know what Jimmy saw when he looked into a mirror—that is, if he ever looked into a mirror. Case closed. Let's not talk about this again."

Los Angeles, 1955

Robert Francis was introduced to Howard at a private party hosted by agent Henry Willson in Howard's honor. Howard was already familiar with the rising young star from having seen him appear as a ranking officer in *The Caine Mutiny* the previous year, starring with such formidable talent as Jose Ferrer, Humphrey Bogart, Fred MacMurray, and Van Johnson. Clean cut and All-American looking, Robert had a trim swimmer's build and a fashionable '50s brushcut.

Willson had told Howard that Robert was going to become "the next big male star." The agent's point of view was that long-established stars such as Errol Flynn, Tyrone Power, Robert Taylor, and especially Bogart, were getting "a little long in the tooth," and would soon be replaced by his own discovery, Rock Hudson, and a host of others. Only the year before Robert had been voted one of Screen World's "Promising Personalities of 1954."

Willson later reported that Howard was immensely intrigued with Robert, and was especially captivated to learn of his experiences with Spencer Tracy during the aborted attempt to film *Tribute to a Bad Man*, in June of that year. "Howard was always a sucker for gossip about Spencer Tracy, whom he still loathed for becoming 'the man' in Katharine Hepburn's life," Willson said. "Howard didn't really want to have sex with Kate, he just wanted to control her. In Kate's case, that was impossible, of course."



James Dean

With the Greek actress, Irene Papas, Robert Francis had flown to the Rockies, near Montrose, Colorado, to begin filming *Tribute to a Bad Man*.

Much to the fury of director Robert Wise, Tracy arrived in the Rockies five days late, with no excuse for his tardiness. Almost from the first moment they met, Tracy had been enormously attracted to Robert Francis. “Tracy liked that butch military look that Robert had,” Willson claimed. “He pursued him with panting tongue. Only problem was, Robert was repulsed by Tracy who was already aging and fat, with the stench of liquor on his breath even in the early morning. When Tracy invited Robert to his motel suite, allegedly to rehearse a scene with him, Robert was apprehensive. He had reason to be. Instead of a rehearsal, Tracy crudely propositioned him by grabbing his crotch. Backing away, Robert fled from the room.”

The next day, Robert encountered a hostile Tracy who disrupted filming when he appeared in a scene with Robert. Furious that he was rejected, he began to taunt Robert and make fun of his acting. In one scene when the two men were to ride together, Tracy raced ahead, cutting Robert out of the frame.

Tracy and Wise were at each other’s throat, Robert later claimed. “They were heading for a showdown. Wise wanted to get rid of Tracy, and Tracy wanted to get rid of Wise.”

Eventually, MGM sent publicity chief Howard Strickling to Colorado. Tracy was fired from MGM, the very studio he’d helped build.

James Cagney was signed to replace Tracy in the movie, but was committed for the next month.

During the month he had off, waiting for Cagney to become free, Robert decided to take up flying lessons. Meeting Howard at Willson’s party, Robert said he was shocked when Howard volunteered to personally teach him how to become a pilot.

“With all he had going on in his life,” Robert later confided to Willson, “I couldn’t believe he’d take the time to teach me to fly. Of course, I knew what was coming, and I didn’t mind that at all. I figured there were a lot of things worse in Hollywood than becoming the boy of Howard Hughes. He promised me he was going to make me the biggest male star of Sixties. I believed him.”

What Spencer Tracy didn’t get to enjoy, Howard did. “He practically devoured me,” Robert later confided to Willson. “Couldn’t get enough of me. I think there was no part of my body, even my big toe, that didn’t get taken care of—that and a lot more!”

While waiting for *Tribute to a Bad Man* to resume filming, Howard saw Robert every day. A fast learner, Robert was becoming a pilot almost overnight. After only four days of lessons, Howard let Robert assume the controls of his private plane.

It was the last day of July, 1955. Howard had some emergency at 7000 Romaine Street and couldn’t accompany Robert that day. Even though Howard warned him not to, a cocky Robert said he wanted to take a plane up on his own, with a male friend as copilot. Howard told him not to. Robert agreed to stay on the ground that day. At the end of the phone call, Robert decided to fly anyway, figuring that Howard would never find out and chastise him.

Up in the air something went wrong with the plane’s single engine. Along with his friend, Robert—trapped in the doomed plane—hurtled to his death. Both young men were killed instantly when the plane crashed and exploded.

Willson called Howard with the sad news. “He was devastated,” the agent said. “Robert had quickly become what Jack Buetel and Guy Madison once were: one of Howard’s greatest physical attractions. After Robert died, Howard began to take reckless chances. I could have arranged to hook him up with some of the hottest guys in Hollywood. The sex could have been carried out discreetly at my home. But Howard didn’t want that. It seemed like he wanted more dangerous liaisons—more thrills. I warned him he was headed for trouble. If you’re Howard Hughes, you didn’t go to bordellos or pick up good-looking young men on Santa Monica Boulevard who just might rob you and cut your throat.”

Willson claimed that Howard abruptly dispensed with his services and began turning to a notorious male madam, who was known only as “Mr. Kenneth.” Apart-time drag queen, Kenneth specialized in arranging private parties for rich producers, directors, or even male movie stars themselves. He found young, well-built, and attractive out-of-work actors who looked like some major star of the time, handsome men like Rock Hudson or Troy Donahue. For one hundred dollars a night, clients could rent “Rock” or “Troy” for an entire evening.

Meyer said that Howard also patronized several of the female bordellos of the time. Like Mr. Kenneth, these houses of prostitution also promoted a night with look-alikes—“Ava,” “Lana,” or “Marilyn.” “What was a bit ironic was that bossman had had the real Ava, Lana, or Marilyn—and not merely the mock,” Meyer said. “It’s true that Howard wasn’t attracting the A-list beauties of his heyday. He was gaunt, dangerously thin, and looked twenty years older than he was. But I think I know why he turned to prostitutes. He could function sexually with only a select few as he got older. But with many partners, both female and male, he was often impotent. A big star might judge him too harshly and gossip about his sexual performance. He knew that Ava and Lana, for instance, often compared their various lovers’s performances in bed. Howard couldn’t stand that. He once told me, ‘With a whore, it doesn’t matter whether you get it up or not. They want their money and are probably relieved when you’re not too demanding. Also there’s a written law that a whore is hired to satisfy you. You don’t have to satisfy the whore.’”

As long as Howard stuck to bordellos, he was relatively safe, although he risked possible blackmail or even a police raid if the madam hadn’t paid off the cops regularly.

“Bordellos weren’t enough to satisfy Howard,” Meyer said. “Not dangerous enough. He did what many closeted gay men of the Fifties did. He started picking up handsome young boy prostitutes on the boulevard and demanded that they go down on him while he was still behind the wheel of a battered old Chevy.”

One night on Santa Monica Boulevard, something went wrong. Howard had picked up a handsome young prostitute wearing only a white T-shirt, tight jeans, and boots. Once in the car, Howard had requested that the young hustler fellate him. In the midst of this act—evocative of an event in the life of the latter day British actor, Hugh Grant—a policeman unexpectedly came upon the car and shined a flashlight inside. He demanded that Howard and the hustler get out of the car. Howard adjusted his trousers and got out from behind the wheel.

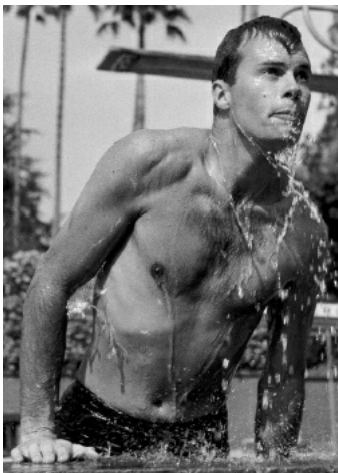
At this point the story grows vague. Apparently, the hustler either was let go by the policeman or else he ran away and wasn’t pursued. The policeman wanted his “big game” of the evening, Howard Hughes.

It may never be known what happened on the way to the police station. Howard never made it to the precinct. His name unknown, the arresting officer was hired to become assistant chief of Howard’s security forces at \$100,000 a year salary, with a guarantee often years employment. Greg Bautzer himself drew up the contract. Hughes’s biographer Charles Higham got wind of this story, and revelations of the arrest appear in his pioneering book on Howard’s sexuality, *The Secret Life*.

Higham claimed that Howard on the night of his arrest wrote a check for one million dollars and signed it “Howard Hughes.” Meyer’s story of the hiring of the policeman at \$100,000 has more creditability. At any rate, both Higham’s claim and Meyer’s claim still added up to a total of one million dollars.

As Meyer later said jokingly, “Bossman was administered the most expensive blow-job in the history of the world, but was interrupted before he got his rocks off.”

Meyer claimed that there was a final irony to the story. The police officer, whose name can't be ascertained, later had special duties to perform at night for Howard. A tall, muscular, and very handsome cop, Mr. Unknown was apparently straight, as Meyer thought, but "didn't mind dropping trousers for bossman from time to time. Do you realize what a \$100,000 salary was back in the '50s? Even CEOs of some big companies weren't hauling in that kind of dough. A man would do a lot for \$100,000 a year. I should know better than anyone. For the kind of money I was raking in from Howard, I would have run nude down Hollywood Boulevard if he commanded me to do so."



Robert Francis

"The gay streak in Howard eventually tapered off, from what I heard, except for an occasional bout with one of his Mormon guards called in for servicing from time to time when Howard got hungry," Meyer said. "It was an inglorious ending and quite a comedown for a man who had known intimately some of the most celebrated male and female beauties of the 20th Century."

Los Angeles/Las Vegas/London, 1945-1990

Ever since her marriage to bandleader Artie Shaw on October 17, 1945, Howard's spies had reported to him the most intimate details of the Ava Gardner marriage. By midsummer of the following year, he noted with a certain glee that Ava was sleeping on a couch in her living room. Often Artie didn't come home to use the lone bedroom. Ava's telephone was bugged, and Howard heard the beautiful young star tell Lana Turner that she hadn't slept with Artie in months. "I had that problem with him too," Lana confessed to Ava, referring to her previous marriage.

Howard learned that Artie had fallen for author Kathleen Winsor weeks before Ava heard the news. Ironically, only months before, Artie had caught Ava reading Winsor's bestseller, *Forever Amber*, the potboiling saga of a buxom beauty's saga through Restoration-era England, and had knocked the book from her hands, denouncing it as trash. At the time, two of Howard's girlfriends, Linda Darnell and Lana herself, were vying to play Amber in the film version, with the part finally going to Linda. No one was more surprised than Ava when Artie announced his marriage to Winsor, following his divorce from Ava. "He wouldn't let me read the trash but he married the trash," Ava told Lana.

After her marriage to Artie, Ava had become another "wet deck" for Howard. He still preferred recently divorced women when not in pursuit of virginal teenagers. She resumed dating him, though "still denying him my honey-pot," as she confided to Lana.

With every other actress in Hollywood willing to go to bed with Howard, insiders wondered why he continued to chase after the elusive Ava, who didn't mind sharing her charms with any number of other men, including actors Howard Duff, Peter Lawford, Robert Taylor, and attorney Greg Bautzer, along with gangster Johnny Stompanato who would eventually be killed by Lana herself.

Johnny Meyer once attempted to explain Howard's seemingly eternal attraction to Ava. "In Ava's case, it was the chase that mattered to Howard—he never really wanted to catch her. He pursued her more avidly than all the other gals who got away: Joan Crawford, Elizabeth Taylor, and Jean Simmons. Except for those holdouts, all the other stars and starlets in Hollywood put out for Howard. He knew he'd never conquer Ava. He'd never be able to dominate her, and he certainly couldn't buy her, although he tried to do that repeatedly. He loved the challenge that Ava provided. She was like no other woman he'd ever known."

"One thing that she didn't want was to become Mrs. Howard Hughes, in spite of his repeated proposals of marriage," Meyer said. "Ava was never in love with Howard. She once told Lana that she had to get drunk before she'd even allow him to put his hands on her tits. But when Frank Sinatra came along, that little Hoboken bastard could have tits, ass, and everything else Ava had to offer, including that so-called honeypot of hers that she kept locked away from Howard with a chastity belt."

Howard had managed to endure Ava's marriages to Mickey Rooney and Artie Shaw. What he couldn't endure was her burgeoning romance with the already married Frank Sinatra. "Howard positively hated Sinatra, and wanted him out of the picture. To erase Sinatra from Ava's life, Howard was willing to walk the final mile."

She later claimed that she'd encountered Sinatra a number of times in the late 40s, finding him a "conceited and arrogant son of a bitch." In New York in 1950, at opening night of the stage play, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, she became more intrigued. But she still refused to go out with him.

Encountering him three weeks later at a party in Palm Springs, she said yes. Taking her for a ride in his car, he amused her by pulling out his revolver and shooting out the windows of various darkened but inhabited suburban homes.

That seemed to turn Ava on, and she invited him into her bed that night. On the phone to Lana the next morning, she reported intimate details of the previous night. Lana didn't really need to be told, as Sinatra had seduced her many times in the past. "Frank's not very muscular," Ava told Lana. "All

his growth has gone into his cock.”

Later Lana jokingly reported the remark to Johnny Meyer, who proceeded to tell Howard. “Bossman became furious,” Meyer later said. “He demanded that my boys investigate to find out the exact measurements of Sinatra’s dick. It took us only two weeks to round up more than a dozen prostitutes among the Las Vegas showgals who’d slept with the singer. We vetted them and more or less came up with the same story over and over again. That skinny little runt was hung. A full report was given to Howard, who wanted to find out how he stacked up against Sinatra. I don’t recall exactly the final results, but I think Sinatra had bossman beat by an inch—maybe an inch and a half.”

“My God, he’s got a goddamned hollow chest,” Howard told Meyer. “A stringbean with no lines. His legs are scrawny. He wears padded shoulders on zoot suits from Hoboken. Instead of hair, he’s got patent leather. How could his cock be so big? Not only that, he’s a has-been with no money. His career is over, and he’s no comeback kid.”

Howard even attacked Sinatra’s physicality in front of Ava, who reminded him that, “Some gals call you a scarecrow as well, honey chile.”

Sinatra divorced his wife, Nancy, and married Ava on November 7, 1951, in Philadelphia. One hour before the wedding, Howard called Ava, begging her to jilt Sinatra at the altar and “marry me.” She refused this last-minute proposal, perhaps wondering how serious Howard really was, as she already knew about Susan Hayward, Jean Peters, and Terry Moore. Defeated, Howard told Johnny Meyer that he was “giving the marriage only two months.”

Howard’s hatred of Sinatra continued, and he even barred him from the RKO lot when Ava was shooting *My Forbidden Past* and having an affair with her costar Robert Mitchum. For reasons of his own, Howard kept knowledge of that affair from Sinatra. However, when Sinatra was out of town on a singing engagement, Howard secretly dated Ava, presenting her detailed reports on the women the singer was seducing on the road. After Sinatra’s marriage to Ava, Howard had ordered that the singer be trailed 24 hours a day.

Raging with jealousy, Sinatra accurately accused Ava of secretly dating Howard every time he left town on an engagement. Once at the Hampshire House in New York, Ava tossed a Tiffany gold-and-diamond bracelet—“worth a fortune”—out the window. She did this to prove that “Hughes doesn’t mean a god damn hill of beans to me.”

Howard had been enraged when he learned that Ava had been cast opposite “his other girlfriend,” Kathryn Grayson in MGM’s big blockbuster musical of 1951, *Showboat*. The extravaganza also starred Howard Keel, a dashing, tall, and handsome baritone of the time.

Grayson remembered Ava “shooting daggers at me during the filming.” Although Ava had repeatedly turned down proposals of marriage from Howard, she apparently was jealous of those same offers made to other actresses. She was also furious to learn that Howard had offered Grayson two million dollars worth of precious gems, whereas he’d once offered her only one million dollars in stones.

One scene in *Showboat* called for a wedding shot that included Grayson and costar Howard Keel. She later said that “the other Howard” (Hughes in this case) in a noisy amphibian swept down over the *Showboat* outdoor set, ruining take after take. He’d become jealous of the younger and more virile Keel.

“Howard knew every time Frank Sinatra and Ava had a knock-out, drag-out,” Meyer later claimed. “There were a lot of slugfests in those days during this stormy pair. Ava arrived in Las Vegas two days before anticipated, and walked in on Sinatra, catching him in bed with blonde starlet, Barbara Payton. That led to Sinatra’s biggest brawl with Ava. She was punched in the face and knocked on the floor, where Sinatra repeatedly kicked her.

Fleeing from the Flamingo, she arrived at the Desert Inn where Howard was staying on the top floor. Allowed entrance to Howard’s suite, Ava shocked him with her appearance. He ordered two doctors from the Las Vegas Hospital to come over and treat Ava privately, so as to avoid press coverage.

At about four o’clock in the morning, there was a knock on Meyer’s door in the adjoining suite. A sleepy Meyer confronted his bossman in bathrobe and slippers. “I’d never seen Howard this agitated before. He brought me up to date on all that had happened. Inside my suite and in very hushed tones, he told me he wanted two or three of my boys to wipe out Sinatra while he was sleeping at the Flamingo. Somehow Howard had already arranged for my boys to be admitted to Sinatra’s private quarters. I was given a passkey to his suite. Howard said that he didn’t want Sinatra shot but beaten to death the way he’d attacked Ava. I thought bossman had lost it. In fact, he looked like he’d gone completely bonkers. I listened to his intricate instructions. He had everything mapped out. I think Howard would have made a brilliant bank robber. He wanted me to offer each of my men fifty thousand dollars to do the dirty deed. I didn’t want to tell my bossman but I could have gotten the guys for five hundred dollars each.”

Meyer later recalled that he’d listened repeatedly as Howard told him in minute detail the exact way that Sinatra was to be bludgeoned to death. “I agreed to carry out his plan. Howard claimed that Sinatra was having a raging dispute with some gang members over an alleged \$100,000 gambling debt. The singer was refusing to pay because he claimed that the dice were crooked. Howard believed that Sinatra’s death would be blamed on a fallout with the mob. In those days, Sinatra was keeping company with some very dangerous characters. ‘No one will ever connect us with Sinatra’s murder,’ my bossman told me. ‘No one will even think we’re remotely involved. Sinatra has more dangerous enemies than us.’”

Years later, Meyer claimed that he never made the call to his boys to wipe out Sinatra. He waited in his suite until Howard summoned him next door around noon of the following day. “I got this distress call from Howard and rushed next door. He looked like hell. He as all alone in his suite. Ava had obviously left some time that morning when Howard had finally gone to sleep. He had learned that she’d taken the first available flight back to Los Angeles, wearing huge sunglasses to conceal a black eye.”

“To my complete surprise, bossman never mentioned his order to kill Sinatra,” Meyer claimed. “I was expecting to be fired on the spot. It was the strangest feeling I had, but I honestly believed—and I still do today—that Howard was so demented the night before that he had completely forgotten issuing Sinatra’s death warrant. Lucky for me that Howard was that forgetful. It was even luckier for Sinatra!”

By the time Ava agreed to appear in *The Barefoot Contessa*, to be directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, Sinatra was admitting to the press that their marriage “was all washed up.” There had been published reports that he’d attempted to commit suicide over a marriage gone sour. Privately, Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons were claiming that Sinatra’s suicide attempt was because of jealousy over Howard.

The Barefoot Contessa was a case of art imitating life. Ava claimed, “I knew I was playing Rita Hayworth and that Humphrey Bogart was playing Howard Hughes.”

In Spain, Ava had a scandalous affair with Luis Miguel Dominguin, the country’s greatest bullfighter of the time. Back in America, Howard was the first on the tarmac to greet Ava upon her arrival from Madrid. He found her more evasive than ever. Once again she turned down a marriage proposal from him, even though he promised to “make you the greatest movie star the world has ever known.”

Not only would there be no marriage, but she also refused to go to bed with him. He had only the memory of that “mercy blow-job,” as he called it, that she’d delivered as his reward for surviving the crash of the XF-11 in Beverly Hills.

To Howard's continuing distress, Dominguin arrived in Los Angeles in hot pursuit of Ava. Howard still had her house bugged so he could hear every detail of this burgeoning romance.

For the first three days, according to Meyer, Dominguin never left Ava's bed. The trouble began when Ava, with her attention deficient syndrome, threw a party and invited Duke Ellington and his band. Meyer later claimed that the bullfighter caught a drunken Ava going down on the black musician in the bushes of her garden. She ran upstairs and tried to bolt herself inside her bedroom. But Dominguin was too quick for her. He slapped her face repeatedly and dragged her body from the room. Holding a screaming Ava by the hairs of her head, he tossed her down the steps of her house.

She ended up with no broken bones but a severely sprained ankle and lots of bruises. Rushing into the room, her sister, Bappie, screamed when she saw Ava sprawled on the floor. Bappie rushed to call an ambulance to have her taken to the hospital. Even before Ava arrived at the hospital, Howard with Dr. Verne Mason was waiting in a private room he'd already arranged for her. The next morning, Meyer put Dominguin on a flight back to Madrid.



Kathryn Grayson

Howard was "the most delighted man on the planet" when Ava announced her intention to divorce Sinatra in 1957. Howard moved her to the Cal-Neva Lodge on Lake Tahoe to establish residency for her divorce. He also ordered his spy brigade to monitor her activities 24 hours a day in case Sinatra showed up to try to win her back.

For this important mission, Howard entrusted the assignment to Robert Maheu, who later claimed that Howard was more interested in controlling Ava than in romancing her.

As predicted, Sinatra, still madly in love with Ava, did show up at the lodge in Lake Tahoe, hoping for a reconciliation. Ava agreed to go out in a private craft with him on the lake.

In another boat, Maheu followed them. The ever-alert Sinatra quickly realized what was happening. Furious and seething with anger, he piloted his boat toward Maheu's craft, heading for a crash as Ava screamed. Maheu managed to zoom away in time to prevent a head-on collision.

Ava sent Sinatra away that night. On the following evening, Howard showed up at her doorstep, presenting her with a flashy and hugely valuable ring, composed of a Kashmiri sapphire and diamonds. He proposed marriage once again. This time she promised that she'd think it over.

After her stay in Nevada, Howard flew Ava to Miami, installing her in a private villa with her maid, Reenie Jordan. Unknown to Ava, he also flew Jean Peters down, renting a home for her on the Intracoastal Waterway. He was in Miami negotiating with Floyd Odlum, hoping that Odlum would buy back RKO. Under Odlum, the studio had made money. Under Howard's baton, it was "bleeding red," in the words of Noah Dietrich. Odlum turned down Howard's offer. "I'll practically give you back RKO." Even with such generous terms, Odlum still wasn't interested.

In Miami Howard had presented a pearl and diamond necklace to Ava—claiming that it had once belonged to Catherine the Great of Russia—valued at \$20,000, it had actually been purchased at Tiffany's in New York.

Growing restless and wanting to escape Howard's attentions, Ava flew to Havana where she was driven to Ernest Hemingway's house to hide out. "Since I didn't see any of his wives around," Ava later recalled to Johnny Meyer, "I fucked Papa. I figured Marlene didn't give him any, so I might as well."

"When Howard learned that she was in the bed with Hemingway, I think he more or less gave up on Ava," Meyer claimed.

"The bloom is off the flower," Howard told Meyer. Howard continued to have Ava spied on, especially when she flew to Spain to play Lady Brett Ashley in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, released in 1957.

The film starred not only Ava, but two of Howard's former lovers, Tyrone Power and Errol Flynn. "I hope those guys don't get together to compare notes with Ava," Howard told Meyer.

"When Howard sat for a private screening of *The Sun Also Rises*, he was shocked at how Ava had aged on the screen," Meyer said. "I thought she was still beautiful but all that alcohol and all those men—there were even rumors of lesbian affairs—had taken a toll on her once fabulous face. But what really shocked Howard was to see how Ty and Errol had aged. He just couldn't get over it. Unknown to Howard, both actors were close to death at the time. I think bossman wondered what he'd ever seen in them, forgetting what gorgeous guys they'd been in the Thirties."

As was inevitable, Howard and Ava drifted apart, although they occasionally spoke on the phone. Each year on their "mutual birthday" on December 24, he sent her long-stemmed red roses. Living in London's Kensington district in 1972, Ava was astonished to receive roses from Howard, as she'd heard that "he'd gone bonkers," and hadn't remembered her last five birthdays." A florist delivered fifty of the reddest and sweetest smelling roses on

God's earth."

"Oh, honey chile," she later said. "What a bastard that Hughes was. He could have been enough of a Texas gentleman to send thirty roses instead of fifty. The sucker likes to rub it in that I'm growing old."

Prematurely aged by a dissipated life, Ava would make her final screen appearance in the film, *Regina*, opening in 1982, although it wasn't released in the United States.

Having watched lines and wrinkles appear on "the most fabulous face ever to grace the screens of the 1940s," Ava died in London on January 25, 1990. A new generation of movie-goers didn't even know who she was.

In one of her last known and flippant remarks to a London reporter, she said, "Honey chile, I was just some poor Tarheel pussy who gave a lot of famous men hard-ons when I was young and beautiful."

Los Angeles, 1957-1970

From afar, while ensconced in Bungalow 19 at the Beverly Hills Hotel, Jean Peters watched in horror as Howard descended deeper and deeper into drugs. She learned from a Mormon guard that he was injecting codeine into his arms and swallowing dangerous dosages of Demerol and Valium. Mormon aides called Howard's ten-milligram Valium tablets "blue bombers" because of their color. In time he would pill-pop Seconal and Librium as well.

As Jean confided to Jeanne Crain, "I can't stop him! He orders his guards to remove me from his bungalow any time I mention drugs to him."

Her visits to Howard became severely regulated. A Mormon guard allowed her to visit her husband at 9:15 every morning. Because she always showed up on time at her studio, her nickname was "Punctual Pete." She was also allowed a second visit in the evening. He commanded that it be exactly at 7:31—"and not 7:30." If she were a minute early or a minute late, the visit would be cancelled. At no time was she allowed to go into his bedroom. She was forced to stand in the doorway to his bedroom, talking loudly to him, projecting her voice to his increasingly deaf ears.

In her bungalow, Jean was kept a virtual prisoner under 24-hour security guard. He would go for weeks at a time without seeing her, although he talked to her daily on the phone, inquiring about the most minute details of her life. Jean once confided in Jeanne Crain that Howard even went so far as to draw up an elaborate memo as to how she was to wash her vagina so as to prevent it from becoming infected. He promised that he'd have a child with her one day, because she was eager to produce a male heir for his empire. What he didn't let her know was that in 1955 he'd checked into a hospital and had a vasectomy performed on himself. Upon leaving the hospital, he told Meyer, "There will never be a Howard Hughes III. The name ends with yours truly." Even before the surgical procedure, his sperm had already been severely weakened by an early case of the mumps.

Howard demanded that his guards clock Jean's every move. He even wanted to read what she ordered from room service to eat or else store in the refrigerator in her bungalow. A memo, dated December 9, 1958 revealed: "6 containers of milk, sweet rolls, toast, 2 baked eggs, 3 raw eggs, cheddar cheese, orange juice, coffee, papers, and 6 bottles of Poland Spring water."

He even refused to let Jean go shopping, claiming that if she wanted something one of his Mormon security guards would go and purchase it for her. Although he failed to prevent her from smoking, he limited her intake of alcohol, refusing to allow room service to bring her any liquor. She was given only half a bottle of champagne every October 15 on her birthday—"and that's it!" he commanded. To pass the time of day, she took up embroidery and later the creation of metal sculptures. Instead of being with her husband, Jean spent many a night reading Plato, Nietzsche, or Aristotle. She would sometimes pass lonely hours listening to recordings of classical music.

Jean loved movies but was not allowed to go with her few remaining friends such as Jeanne Crain to see one. Howard demanded that his Mormon guards escort her to private screenings on the Goldwyn lot and not to a public movie palace. He dictated a memo to Bill Gay: "When escorting Jean Peters to the movies, if it is necessary to open the doors entering the theater, do so with the feet and not the hands. If you need to lower the seat for her, do so with Kleenex."

One day Howard woke up and summoned Gay with an instruction. He claimed that even if Jean were discovered dying, an ambulance was not to be called unless he was consulted first. He also issued instructions that he was not to be awakened even in an emergency. "I will deal with Jean's emergency only when I wake up."

"But she could be dead by then," Gay protested in a rare defiance of Howard.

"You heard me!" he shouted. "Get out!"

Later he backed down from this draconian position. He dictated another memo, claiming that, "If the situation is critical enough, then it's permissible to let a doctor call her on the telephone—but not see her."

He refused to celebrate Christmas with Jean, in 1957, even his alleged birthday which he still believed occurred on Christmas Eve. He always sent her flowers, but only after each petal had been washed in Poland Spring water. He feared that flowers contained germ-carrying insects.

Trapped in the bungalow, Jean would sometimes be allowed to roam the gardens at night. One night she encountered Marilyn Monroe, her neighbor, who told her that she was having an affair with French actor Yves Montand, even though his wife, Simone Signoret, was living next door.

Jean later confided in Jeanne Crain that she had also learned that singer Ethel Merman was a lesbian and actually hired call girls to come to her neighboring bungalow to service her. On one occasion, Jean ran into Elizabeth Taylor, whom Howard secretly lusted for, and the Duke and Duchess of Windsor who told Jean that they'd seen Howard in The Bahamas. The former King of England requested an audience with Howard, via Jean. She was forced to deliver a note to the former monarch the next day, claiming that Howard was too ill to receive visitors.

Insights into Howard's darkening world of 1958 came from security guard Ron Kistler, who published *I Caught Flies for Howard Hughes* in 1976, the year of the tycoon's death. Part of his job was to stand at the door to Howard's bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel, waving a newspaper to prevent any insect, especially a fly, from entering. But he said that flies often made "kamikaze dives" to get into the draped darkness of Bungalow 4.

If a fly got in, and Ron killed it, Howard insisted on examining it personally. At no time was Ron supposed to speak to Howard. He found this the most boring assignment in the world.

Other drivers for Howard had more enticing jobs such as hauling around starlets under contract to Hughes Productions. Dozens of beautiful young women had been acquired through Walter Kane, Howard's personal talent scout. Howard issued specific instructions to the drivers. As Ron relates in his memoirs, he cited Howard as saying: "When you're driving a vehicle with one of the female parties as a passenger, do not, at any time, drive over a

dip, swale, undulation, or other uneven surface at a speed greater than two miles an hour.” One of the employees told Ron “the reasoning” behind this mandate.

“Hughes is a tit man,” he said. “You will notice that all the gals you haul around are rather amply endowed. Hughes has a theory that sudden bumps, such as the ones you get when you hit a dip in the road, will cause a girl’s tits to bounce. This will inevitably cause a minor breakdown in the tissue, which will lead to sagging tits.”

Jean also learned that for a time, Howard was afraid to use the toilet, even if to stand before it to urinate. He began to urinate on the tiles of the bathroom. Then, in contrast, he became fascinated with the toilet. After having it sterilized, he would sit on it for long stretches at a time, once for twenty-seven hours straight, a guard later reported.

Years later he became fascinated with his own urine. Instead of “wasting” it on the tile floors, he began to save it. Milk was his only food source for weeks at a time. After emptying a milk bottle, he’d urinate in it and store it away.

Jean hated living in a hotel bungalow and pleaded with Howard to move out of the Beverly Hills Hotel and into a proper home for the two of them. To pacify her, he purchased the mammoth Major A. Riddle estate in Los Angeles for \$950,000, inviting her to move in, presumably without him. She refused to go.

As a means of tempting Jean further, he bought an even more elaborate estate, paying \$1.2 million in June of 1961. This 520-acre spread (“Spring Mountain Ranch”) outside Las Vegas had been placed on the market by German-born actress Vera Krupp, ex-wife of the Nazi munitions heir, Alfred Krupp. Seeking isolation and anonymity, the Baroness had bought the ranch after her divorce from the industrialist, who had been a major supplier of munitions to the Nazi war machine. With her, she brought the 33.3-carat Krupp diamond, a gift from her husband which she’d retained as part of her divorce settlement. When robbers broke into her home, tied her up, and made off with the diamond, she never felt safe there again—hence, her decision to sell the property. Rediscovered by law enforcement officers in New Jersey, the diamond, worth \$250,000 when she owned it, was later returned to her. After passing through several other owners, it was acquired in 1968 by Richard Burton, who paid \$305,000 for it and presented it to Elizabeth Taylor.

Jean also refused to move into the Krupp estate, preferring to remain “at my husband’s side.” Actually, she was not at his side. Their relationship had reached the point where he no longer wanted her to touch him, fearing that she would contaminate him.

Finally, to save what was left of their marriage, he agreed to move to Rancho Santa Fe, an exclusive residential compound in San Diego County, on December 24, 1960, which he was still claiming was his birthday. He lied to her and told her that he’d bought it as a home for her. Actually, he only rented the property.

Away from the hotel, his condition worsened. Fueled by Ritalin, and beset with TWA’s financial problems, he slipped deeper and deeper into the lonely world of a drug addict.

When dust balls accumulated in his bedroom where he slept alone, and Howard refused to allow a maid to clean it, his living quarters became filthy. Fecal matter blended with cookie crumbs on the white tile floors.

At one point he reluctantly consented to let Jean vacuum the floor herself, providing she’d enter the room only with the vacuum hose and leave the dirty bag filled with “dangerous germs” outside.

At one point he became hysterical and started to scream. Mormon guards, fearing he might injure himself, strapped him into his bed until a doctor with a needle could arrive to subdue him.

When the pipes broke at the rented house in November of 1961, Howard ordered his guards to pack up and flee the premises. He feared that the entire house had been contaminated with sewage and that inhaling the air would lead to his death.

By November 23, 1961, he’d moved to another deluxe rental property at 1001 Bel Air Road, in the swanky Bel Air section of Los Angeles.

Walking the grounds of the Bel Air estate, Jean pointed out the panoramic views to Howard, including vistas of the distant Santa Monica Mountains. He immediately went inside and ordered black velvet draperies to blot out the view. The property was fenced in and guarded 24 hours a day. For himself, Howard took “the monk’s quarters,” demanding that only a double bed, a small writing table with a stiff-backed chair, a television set, and one armchair be placed in the room.

The house at Bel Air was owned by John Zurlo, the Los Angeles financier. Howard refused to allow his real estate agent, Virginia Tremaine, to reveal his identity to Zurlo, who obviously found out since both *Life* and *The Saturday Evening Post* ran pictures of the mansion, identifying it as the home of Mr. and Mrs. Howard Hughes.

After the first month in Bel Air, Jean grew alarmed at her husband’s weakening physical condition and urged that he be thoroughly examined by Dr. Verne Mason. Howard refused, telling her that never again in his life would he ever submit to a complete physical examination.

He informed her that he needed doctors “only to supply me with drugs for my pain.” The Beverly Hills internist, Dr. Norman F. Crane, began to tend to Howard as he’d done in the past.

Jean was also appalled at Howard’s grooming, as he refused to cut his hair, letting it grow down to the tip of his buttocks. A long beard trailed onto his chest. He insisted on remaining naked, saying that he could not stand the touch of clothing against his skin.

To get rid of his foul breath, she begged him to brush his teeth but he stubbornly refused. His teeth continued to rot. He’d go so long without bathing that incrustations of dirt formed on his body. After pleading for weeks, he finally gave in to her demands to take a bath. But he let the water overflow in the bathtub, flooding the house.

She told Jeanne Crain that the last time she slept with her husband, his toenails were so long that they clicked whenever he wiggled his toes, keeping her awake. She put tissue between his toes so that the clicking sound couldn’t be heard.

Except for speculation, the outside world knew little of this marriage. Even as late as September of 1962, *Life* magazine reported, “Despite his strange ways, theirs is a good marriage.”

As weeks gave way to months, Jean watched from afar as Howard’s condition grew worse, and her husband retreated more and more into a cocoon. To her horror, she learned that he occupied his mind plotting schemes. Since he was Howard Hughes, he could get some of the most powerful people in the world to indulge him in these fanciful plots.

With his new chief honcho, Robert Maheu, he plotted to have Cuban leader, Fidel Castro, assassinated. For this scheme, Howard—temporarily at least—secured the cooperation of the CIA. He even leased a deserted island, Cay Sal, in The Bahamas, which he planned to make available to anti-Communist military troops who would be trained to invade Cuba. That scheme, like so many others, never got off the ground.

It has been reported that the Bel Air house turned into a divided camp, with Jean fighting against the Mormon guards. In time—specifically on June 10, 1966—she knew she’d lost the battle. Howard moved out, with vague promises to go and live with her on some farm back in the East. He took his

phone amplifier and his old lounge chair with him, along with what few possessions, especially clothing, he had. Putting on his lucky fedora, he departed from their last home together. He would never return.

Pouring out her rage that night, she threatened suicide. Jeanne, taking her seriously, called Howard's doctors, who sedated Jean and stationed a 24-hour guard over her to prevent her from committing suicide.

She later learned that Howard had gone by private train to Boston and was staying at a suite at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. Records show him registering on July 17, 1966.

Growing discontented there, he left Boston on November 25, 1966, again by private train, arriving in Las Vegas, where he'd booked the entire top floor of the Desert Inn.

Jean's marriage to Howard was in name only.

In 1965 an eagle-eyed reporter spotted Jean, using the alias of "Jane Smith," reading to Sunday school classes for blind children sponsored by the Braille Institute of Los Angeles.

Finally, despairing of ever having a reconciliation with Howard, Jean desperately called Jeanne Crain. "Howard has gone to a far and distant place," Jean confided. "A place where I cannot travel."

In Las Vegas, Jean feared that Howard's Mormon guards were holding him a virtual prisoner. She was no longer allowed to speak with him on the phone.

He penned her a desperate note:

*Dearest,
I'm ill but very, very ill yet confident I'll feel better soon. You will hear from me the minute I feel even a little better. My very most love. "*

Her last attempt to see her husband occurred in March of 1967. It was at the Desert Inn. Howard, in his drugged state, refused to see her.

Unknown to Jean at the time, J. Edgar Hoover's FBI agents were trying to determine if Howard were even alive—or if he might have been murdered. The FBI report concluded that it could "not guarantee that Howard Hughes is alive or that he is the man on the ninth floor of the Desert Inn."

That left open the possibility that the man pretending to be Howard Hughes might be an impostor, that the real Howard Hughes was dead, and that a cabal of persons was secretly conducting the Hughes operations and siphoning off the money.

With all hope for her marriage lost, Jean filed for divorce in 1970. She'd grown tired of a telephone marriage, which wasn't even that any more. She asked for \$70,000 a year in alimony, which might rise to as much as \$140,000, depending on inflation. Howard was shocked at how low the demand was. He even offered to settle millions on her. She refused, claiming that she could live quite well on the amount requested. Columnist Sidney Skolsky reported that the settlement was for \$120,000,000. Howard's friend, Louella Parsons, claimed that this figure was "pathologically absurd," but didn't print her rebuttal to Skolsky.

Howard never blamed himself for the failure of the marriage, but placed the responsibility for its failure squarely on one of his most important subordinates, Bill Gay. He told his new chief, Robert Maheu, that, "Bill's total indifference to my pleas for help in my marriage—urgently voiced by me week by week over the past seven years—has resulted in a complete, irrevocable loss of my wife. I blame Bill completely for this unnecessary debacle. I feel he let me down—utterly, totally, completely!"

Maheu claimed that it wasn't the starlets who destroyed the marriage of Howard and Jean. "It was his sickness and pathological fear of personal contact," Maheu wrote in his memoirs. "As time went on, they spent more and more of their time apart."

Her divorce from Howard became final on June 18, 1971 in Hawthorne, Nevada. She was granted a house at 507 North Palm Drive in Beverly Hills. Wasting no time, she married Stanley Hough, an executive with 20th Century Fox, in the summer of 1971. She was still married to him when he died in 1996.

Still keeping Howard's secrets long after his death, Jean herself died at her home in Carlsbad, California on October 13, 2000. She was suffering from leukemia. At the age of 73, her body was interred at Holy Cross Cemetery at Culver City, the same place she'd watched Howard take off on that fateful Sunday morning test flight in his doomed XF-11.

Los Angeles/Washington, DC, 1963-64

Ablaze of gunfire on November 22, 1963 in Dallas, Texas, Howard's home state, ended the reign of Camelot. Howard was sitting with Johnny Meyer discussing plans when the news came over his television set that President John F. Kennedy had been shot in a motorcade in that city. The extent of his wounds was not immediately known. According to Meyer, Howard dropped all plans that day and stayed glued to the television set for the next eighteen hours without sleep.

"I knew that bossman had known young Jack Kennedy years ago," Meyer later said. "I also knew that Howard hated old man Kennedy and wasn't a particular admirer of the 'left wing' politics of his son. Yet he stayed glued to that set like he'd lost his best friend. I just didn't get it. It was weeks later before I learned the full extent of bossman's scheme. He wasn't mourning the slain president. He was planning to replace him!"

In the year of Kennedy's death, Howard refused to face business emergencies. He postponed decisions or else ignored them completely. "There were more than brush fires to put out," Meyer said. "There were bonfires. Everybody on the planet was suing Howard, sometimes successfully."

The spring of 1963 had gone badly for Howard. On February 11, 1963, he had refused to appear for deposition in a TWA lawsuit. On May 13 of that same year, a Federal judge in New York had awarded TWA a default judgment for Howard's refusal to show up. He was ordered to pay his own airline \$135,000,000 in damages and sell his own stock. "That was a bitter pill for Howard to swallow," Meyer said.

"I think Howard was lusting for other worlds to conquer, but he hadn't made up his mind what those worlds were to be," Meyer said. "By 1967 he would channel his fading energy into acquiring the Desert Inn Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, the first step on the road to building an empire in Las Vegas and becoming King of the Desert."

In the aftermath of Kennedy's assassination, Howard began to develop a dream that was far greater than Las Vegas. In September of 1960, he'd turned fifty-five and with his gray hair and declining health had begun to refer to himself as middle aged, even though he hated the term. "Who in the fuck decided that a man in his fifties is middle aged?" he once asked Meyer. "How many men do you know who are a hundred years old?"

As November faded into a bleak Christmas of 1963, Howard began to take stock of himself. He'd conquered many fields—more or less well—including aviation and motion pictures. Satellites his company made were orbiting the planet, bringing *I Love Lucy* into homes in Bombay and Sydney. TWA was flying passengers across the globe. But only three years before Kennedy's assassination, Howard had lost control of TWA.

"One time he turned to me and I'd never seen such a pathetic look on his face," Meyer said. "Normally when I looked into his eyes, I saw a feudal baron of immense power staring back at me. Even though we'd been asshole buddies for years, and I knew all his secrets, those blazing eyes of his sent shivers through me. Howard scared the shit out of me he was so vindictive. I never wanted to cross him. I like eating too well, as one look at me will quickly reveal. He'd already turned on Noah Dietrich and made him the enemy. I knew he could do that to me as well."

"He seemed obsessed with Kennedy's assassination and couldn't wipe it from his mind," Meyer claimed. "I don't know how he got it, but he'd obtained a copy of the Zapruder film which he watched endlessly. He must have seen it a thousand times. He wasn't watching a home movie, but studying it with the eyes of a cobra."

A Dallas manufacturer of women's garments, Abraham Zapruder just happened to be shooting a home movie of Kennedy's Dallas motorcade at the precise moment of the assassination. Had he not done so, the actual assassination would not have been captured on film. Zapruder sold this historic film to *Time-Life* for \$50,000, although Howard thought that it was worth at least two million—"maybe more"—he confided to Meyer.

"He was watching it for some clue, although I didn't know what at the time," Meyer said. "At first I thought he was seeking some clue as to who shot Kennedy. But he had something else on his mind."

"Mrs. Kennedy is being portrayed in the press as the grieving widow," Howard told Meyer one day after viewing the Zapruder film for at least three playbacks in a row. "But I see something else there. This woman is a me-first type gal. She's a survivor."

The Zapruder film did, in fact, contradict Mrs. Kennedy's future testimony in front of the Warren Commission. As all the world now knows, the Texas governor, John Connally and his wife, Nellie, were riding in the motorcade with the Kennedys. At the first sound of gunfire, Nellie pulled her wounded husband into her lap and out of the line of fire. She even bent over him with her own body. Before the Warren Commission, Mrs. Kennedy testified, "If only I had been looking to the right, I would have seen the first shot that hit him," she said, referring to her own husband. "Then I could have pulled him down, and then the second shot would not have hit him."

With his endless watching of the Zapruder film, Howard came up with another conclusion. Mrs. Kennedy *was* looking to the right. When the first bullet hit, she was riveted to her seat. It appeared that she stared for at least seven seconds at her husband after he'd taken the first bullet. But unlike Nellie Connally, she didn't reach to aid him.

In the film, she appeared shocked and stunned. Instead of coming to the aid of her husband, she jumped up and scrambled out of her seat and onto the trunk of the moving convertible. As she did, the heel of her shoe accidentally kicked her husband in the head. Howard felt that she was probably trying to reach a mounted rubber handgrip at the rear of the trunk. This handgrip could be a way of egress from the limousine, which at that point had begun to accelerate.

Later, Mrs. Kennedy had tried to put a better spin on her attempt to flee the vehicle, claiming that she was trying to retrieve a piece of her husband's skull.

"That's one bitch who had survival on the brain," Howard told Meyer. "My kind of woman! I admire that. She probably concluded that Jack was dead and there was nothing she could do for him at that point. She didn't want to be the next victim of a bullet. But in her panic she was also stupid. She should have buried herself on the floorboard of the car and pulled Jack's body down on top of her to serve as her human shield. By trying to crawl across that trunk in that very visible pink dress, she made herself more vulnerable to a potential assassin's bullet."

In the weeks to come, Howard ordered Meyer to gather up all the information he could about those HUGHES FOR PRESIDENT clubs that had once sprang up across the country in the wake of his testimony in front of Senator Brewster's committee after the war. Although they had long dried up, Howard instructed Meyer to "reactivate them—money is no object."

In the weeks ahead, Howard's plan began to reveal itself to Meyer more fully. Howard had more or less assumed that Lyndon B. Johnson, a fellow Texan, would seek and win the presidency in 1964. "Howard announced to me that he was going to run for president in 1968 on the Democratic ticket even though he was an arch-conservative," Meyer said. "He wasn't a Democrat. Neither was he a Republican. Politically, Howard lived in limbo land."

The way Howard saw it, his chief competitors for the 1968 Democratic Presidential nomination would include Lyndon Johnson and Robert Kennedy. Richard Nixon, he surmised, would seek the nomination on the Republican ticket.

"Howard felt he could eliminate Nixon by offering him bribes," Meyer said. "He believed that Nixon was such a crook that he'd accept any bribe. Once Howard had him where he wanted him, he'd release news of Nixon's dirty deeds to the press, which would destroy his political career and cost him the election."

"How do you plan to knock out Bobby Kennedy and LBJ?" Meyer asked Howard. "He looked at me for an astonishing moment, then said, 'I plan to marry Mrs. Kennedy!' You could have knocked me over with a feather. At first I thought he was joking, but when I saw that steely look in his eyes, I knew he was determined."

"My surprise wasn't over," Meyer claimed. "Later that day he told me that I was to be the go-between in negotiating a marriage between Mrs. Kennedy and himself. It was to be a marriage of convenience. I was to contact Mrs. Kennedy and offer her ten million dollars if she'd marry Howard and campaign for him in the 1968 election. For her cooperation, he would also set up separate trust funds for her children, John Kennedy Jr. and Caroline Kennedy."

"Tell Mrs. Kennedy that I'll reinstate her in the White House," Howard said. "She can return in triumph, and I'll promise to give her unlimited power for a First Lady. I understand that dame loves power."

"I'll pay for the next goddamn redecoration of the White House—if that's what it takes to please her," Howard told Meyer. "That's not all. I'll even call that shithhead Oleg Cassini, whom I hate, and tell him that Mrs. Kennedy will have *carte blanche* to order clothes from him, as many outfits as she wants even if it's three gowns a day. Tell her I'll also open charge accounts—the ceiling's the limit—at both Tiffany's and Cartier. I'll also provide 24-hour-a-day security guards for her and her kids."

Meyer said that he made at least eight attempts to get in touch with Mrs. Kennedy, both through hand-delivered courier and by telephone, as he'd easily obtained her private number. "She would not answer my letters nor take my calls," Meyer said. "Someone else always answered the phone at her house. Sometimes it was a man, but more often a woman. One time the voice on the other end sounded like Bobby Kennedy."

"It must have been three o'clock in the morning in Washington, D.C., when Mrs. Kennedy finally returned my call," Meyer said. "I was in bed with, of all people, Ann Miller. I had lured Ann to my bed with three pieces of incredibly expensive jewelry that Howard had originally given Ava Gardner and that she'd thrown back at me, telling me to return the jewelry to Howard. I never did. I presented the gems to Ann, who seemed willing to give me a

night of pleasure for the stones. I don't mean to imply that Ann was a hooker. But, unlike Ava, she respected the value of Howard's baubles."

"Mrs. Kennedy's voice came over the phone wires," Meyer said. "I would have recognized that little girl voice anywhere. 'Mr. Meyer,' she said. 'This is Jacqueline Kennedy. I've received your latest letter and would like for you to fly to Washington Tuesday night to meet with me. I'm at least willing to hear what Mr. Hughes has to say.' She proceeded to give me instructions on how to reach her. After doing that, she gently put down the phone."

"I could swear she was drunk," Meyer told Ann. The next morning, he informed Howard of the news, and "bossman seemed elated. His plan to take over the White House, and ultimately the nation—maybe the world—was about to be launched. I'm not exaggerating when I say world. Howard believed that the man who controlled the White House in 1968 could ultimately control the world. He even had a plan to wipe out the Soviet Union in a sudden, unexpected missile attack. 'With Russia out of the way, no one will stop me,' he told me."

Meyer flew to Washington and at the appointed time called on Mrs. Kennedy, finding her alone in her house. "She even answered the door herself," Meyer said. "She asked me if I wanted tea but I requested a drink instead. I was trembling all over. I mean, here I was in the presence of the most famous woman on the planet. In terms of fame, she ranked up there with Helen of Troy, Catherine the Great, and Cleopatra."

Meyer recalled that he sat on a sofa facing Mrs. Kennedy, who occupied a winged armchair, placing her legs in a typical "debutante pose—all prim and proper."

"I tossed out Howard's offer to her even though I knew I was treating her like a hooker," Meyer said. "She didn't seem shocked—nor even surprised."

"In that little girl voice, almost a whisper, she finally said, 'I thought it was something like that.' I remember her leaning back in her chair and saying, 'You go back to your Mr. Hughes and tell him I'll accept his proposal of marriage, but not for ten million. I put a higher price tag on myself than that. Tell him my price tag is fifty million. Also my attorneys will set up trust funds for each of my children. Enough money to give each of them a lavish lifestyle, if that's what they want, for the rest of their lives. I like the offer of 24-hour security protection. But the Hughes Tool Company will have to agree in contract to offer that protection not only for the rest of my life but for the rest of the lives of both John and Caroline.'"

"Of course, Mrs. Kennedy," Meyer said, "I'll take that counter-offer back to Mr. Hughes."

He then remembered Mrs. Kennedy leaning forward in her chair. In almost a whisper she said, "There is one final thing, Mr. Meyer. A delicate issue. Mr. Hughes will have to agree, and put it in contract form, that marriage to me will not entail conjugal visits."

"That hit me like a lead balloon," Meyer claimed. "But I told her I'd also convey that request to Howard. Frankly, I think Howard would have accepted the offer. He wanted to marry Mrs. Kennedy to gain political power unlike anything he'd ever known. He wasn't marrying her to get some pussy, although with her brunette hair and good looks, I think she could have gotten a rise out of bossman. But his libido was pretty much shut down by 1964."

Meyer flew back to the West Coast, conveying the astonishing news to Howard. "The financial terms didn't bother him at all," Meyer claimed. "Bossman knew he'd have to pay many more millions to get into the White House, and he seemed prepared to do that. He said he was going to delay for three weeks a formal response to Mrs. Kennedy, which he was going to deliver in person, meeting her at a secluded cottage on Martha's Vineyard, which I was to rent and secure for him. I went ahead with plans for the Martha's Vineyard rendezvous, but it never came off."

At this point, Meyer hesitated in his remembrance, claiming that what he was about to reveal was so shocking that "it defies believability."

"Howard delivered his answer to me in about three weeks, more or less, but it wasn't the message that Mrs. Kennedy was waiting to hear," Meyer said.

"He had concluded that he could not run for president because of one thing: He'd have to shake the hands of half the male and female population of America, if not the world."

"In the years to come, I'll have to shake all those slimy paws," he said, "some of whom will have just emerged from the toilet after wiping their ass and not washing their hands. The germs will surely kill me. I can't make the run. You have to thank Mrs. Kennedy for her acceptance, but withdraw the offer. I can't go through with it!"

"Frankly," Meyer said, "even though bossman instructed me to, I didn't have the balls to write or call Mrs. Kennedy with the turndown. It was too goddamn embarrassing. But perhaps my visit to Mrs. Kennedy jarred her into a new reality. I'd heard that she'd been drinking heavily, was in a deep depression, and was carrying on an affair with her brother-in-law after her husband's assassination. At least, I got her thinking in the right direction. Another rich man, but not Howard Hughes, lay in that gal's future."

Las Vegas/Nassau/London 1959-72

As the late 40s deepened into the 1950s, Howard and Cary Grant would meet rarely and then only for brief interludes. The sexual passion between them had cooled, as both of them had aged and moved on to other affairs with both men and women. As the years went by, their friendship would mostly be conducted on the telephone. The relationship would last until the final months of Howard's life, when he no longer knew who Cary Grant was.

A rare insight into the friendship of these two famous figures was offered by Ray Austin, Cary's chauffeur, assistant, and "all around best friend" for years. In the early autumn of 1959, Austin was at the site of the last known meeting between Cary and Howard. It took place in the parking lot of the Desert Inn in Las Vegas.



Jacqueline Kennedy

On the plane ride to Nevada, Cary had refused to tell Austin why he was flying to Las Vegas. His assistant assumed that the two of them would go to see a number of shows.

Arriving in Las Vegas, Cary prepared to leave his hotel room at around nine o'clock that night, having ordered Austin to rent an inconspicuous Chevy. Once in the car, Cary instructed Austin to drive to the parking lot of the Desert Inn where they waited for an hour. Finally, Austin spotted a tall, lanky figure emerging through the staff entrance at the rear of the hotel. Instructing Austin to stay in the car, Cary got up and walked toward the mysterious figure.

Only when the figure appeared under a security light did Austin recognize who it was. "It was Howard Hughes," he later recalled. "Most of his face was covered by his fedora, and he wore a long trenchcoat, even though the night was hot."

The parking lot was sufficiently lit for Austin to make out the figures of Howard and Cary who must have met for only five minutes before Cary returned to the Chevy, and Howard went back inside the Desert Inn. "Those two guys didn't seem to have much to say to each other," Austin said. "They mainly just stood there looking into each other's eyes. It was like they didn't need words for communication."

Cary would play a final pivotal role in Howard's life during the notorious Clifford Irving affair spinning around a fake "autobiography."

In 1971, McGraw-Hill announced to the world that it was publishing *The Memoirs of Howard Hughes: His True Life Story as Told to Clifford Irving*. From its beginning, the book had been a hoax. Its author, Irving, had never met Howard. Nevertheless, he claimed to have conducted lengthy interviews with him at mysterious locations, and had forged samples of his handwriting.

Throughout the ordeal, wherein the media demanded Howard's reaction to the fraudulent texts, Howard, although heavily drugged, remained in close phone contact with the media-savvy Cary. Finally, Howard took Cary's advice and agreed to be interviewed on the air.

Negotiations in advance of the broadcast were prolonged and laborious. Eventually, it was agreed that TV cameras would have visual access to a panel of well-respected journalists, each of them listening to an audio link hooked up directly to Howard's hotel suite in The Bahamas. At no time, according to the agreement, would TV cameras have access to either Howard, his living quarters, or members of his immediate entourage. The purpose of the communal interview involved verifying that, indeed, the voice at the end of the sound hookup was that of Howard Hughes, and that Howard Hughes, once authenticated, would deny any association, real or implied, with either Clifford Irving or his alleged "autobiography."

At the time, Howard was living in seclusion on Paradise Island, a separate island across from Nassau, in The Bahamas.

On January 7, 1972, listeners around the world heard what was believed to be the voice of Howard as it was transmitted thousands of miles away to seven veteran newsmen. One of them was Hollywood reporter Jim Bacon, who had known Howard in previous years. The press corps members were seated in a studio at the Sheraton-Universal Hotel in Los Angeles.

Cary's advice worked. During the broadcast, despite a very frail voice and an occasional breakdown in memory, the person at the other end of the audio link convinced the reporters that they were indeed talking to the *real* Howard Hughes, and that he'd been the victim of a literary hoax. Irving was exposed for having committed "the literary heist of the decade." *Time* magazine went on to dub him "Con Man of the Year." Later convicted for fraud, his reputation in shambles, Irving went to prison.

The TV broadcast had a negative reaction in Nassau. Howard's residency permit had expired, and the notoriety surrounding the Hughes/Irving affair convinced Bahamian officials that Howard was having a bad effect on their vital tourism industry. Police were dispatched to Paradise Island to remove Howard by force if necessary from his penthouse suite.

A paid tipster in the Bahamian government alerted Howard's guards of this action. Fleeing the hotel dressed only in a bathrobe, and carried on a stretcher, Howard was taken to a private yacht, *Cygnus*. Trying to reach the Florida coast at Key Biscayne, the vessel had to battle twenty-five foot waves. Howard became desperately ill and was given an overdose of Dramamine.

The *Cygnus'* captain, Rob Rehak, later reported that when Howard arrived in Florida he didn't know where he was. Allowed to sleep for eight hours, he made an amazing recovery. Before leaving Florida, he penned a brief note to Cary in Hollywood, thanking him for his advice and help during the Irving affair.

In a leased jet, Howard flew to check into the top floor of the Intercontinental Hotel in Managua, Nicaragua. There he stayed until 12:30am on December 23, 1972. He was watching a James Bond thriller, *Goldfinger*, when a devastating earthquake struck the Central American country.

Starvation-thin, with long, greasy hair and untrimmed toenails and fingernails, an emaciated Howard set out for his next sanctuary: the deluxe Inn on the Park in the heart of London. It was said that from the window of his suite, he could look down and spot the Queen in her dressing room at Buckingham Palace, provided that he'd been given a pair of binoculars. He never tested that rumor, as all of his windows, which otherwise would have provided panoramic views over one of the most sought-after neighborhoods of London, were shrouded in heavy black draperies. "I never want to see daylight again," he told his staff.

In London at the Inn on the Park in 1973, Cary would go by the hotel, hoping to gain admittance to Howard's suite to check on his condition. By that time, Bill Gay had become Howard's chief honcho, having replaced Noah Dietrich and superceding Robert Maheu. Cary was turned away. He later told friends that he suspected that the guards didn't let Howard know that he was in the lobby of the hotel wanting to come up to see him.

Cary never spoke publicly about his longtime companion, except on one occasion. After being refused access by Howard's guards, he told a reporter for the *Times of London*, when asked about Howard's condition: "The soul and the mind are dead."

Acapulco, April 5,1976

A feeble old man, his skeletal body marred by needle tracks and riddled with bedsores, lay dying. His six feet, four inch frame had shrunk two inches, and his frail body weighed only ninety-three pounds. Dirt encrusted the pores of his skin. His fingernails and toenails were eerily yellowed, curved, and impossibly long. And his yellow-gray beard and his long, oily, and stringy hair were in dire need of a shampoo.

It was Howard Hughes, the former Playboy of the Western World and one of the richest men on the planet. He was dying of dehydration and malnutrition. Despite the fact that he was surrounded with attendants, he desperately needed a glass of water and a plate of food.

He was occupying a barren-looking room in the \$2,000-a-night penthouse at the Acapulco Princess Hotel, where he'd flown in a chartered British-built BAC II from Freeport, The Bahamas, on the night of February 10. He'd checked into the hotel under heavy security guard and was wheeled to his suite in a stretcher, his face covered with a blanket as if he were already dead.

His eyes, formerly a shade of dark brown, had turned a ghostly, pale yellow. One of the Mormon guards, Gordon Margulis, felt that Howard could no longer see the world. Not that there was much world to see. The gardens of the hotel were lush and filled with flamboyant colors from various flowers. But Howard had ordered sheets of plywood and heavy black velvet curtains placed over all the windows. He no longer wanted to see the world. Nor did he want the world to look and see him in his devastation.

Had he been able to see the hotel he'd checked into, he would have noted that its shape was that of a pyramid, structures that functioned as tombs for some of the ancient rulers of Egypt. Would this hotel also be his graveyard?

Once, an airplane had taken him around the world, setting a historic record in aviation. Piloting other airplanes, he had broken speed records. Now, as he lay nude in his orthopedic bed, an electric-powered wheelchair provided his sole means of transportation.

His bedside table was gaudy, covered with *faux* mosaics depicting golden stars. There was a large crystal bowl filled with Valium tablets along with codeine pills and Librium.

He could no longer speak to anyone. Aides, such as his most trusted, George Francom, remembered him repeatedly calling out the name of Allene. After knowing some of the most celebrated women of the 20th century, his fading memory seemed to be able to recall only his mother who had doted on him back in Houston. He drifted deeper and deeper into a coma, and as the hours passed, no more sound came from his lips.

Before fading into oblivion, Francom heard him utter the name of Allene once more, but it came out as a whisper, barely audible.

His last known command was to tell his guard and aide, Gordon Margulis, to send a message to Jean Peters. It was to read: "You are the only woman I've ever loved." That wasn't really true. Perhaps he'd never really loved any woman. Maybe he hadn't even loved himself. But he wanted that message sent anyway.

His last known coherent conversation was with his old friend, Jack Real, the aviation industrialist. Howard voiced concern about how he'd live in history. He feared future biographers would concentrate on his women and his movies, especially *Hell s Angels* and *The Outlaw*. "God forbid they write a chapter about me and Jane Russell's breasts," he told Real. He wanted biographers to write only about his contribution to aviation, but he knew he could no longer control and manipulate the media as he once had. What he feared the most, but couldn't convey to his macho friend, was that writers of the future might discover his secret life, known only to trusted friends like Cary Grant or to hired pimps such as Johnny Meyer and Henry Willson.

Dr. Lawrence Chaffin, who had helped Howard survive the almost fatal plane crash over Beverly Hills in 1946, was at his bedside in Acapulco. But he was almost powerless to help his fading patient.

Feeling there was very little he could do to save Howard's life, he summoned Dr. Victor Montemayor, who enjoyed a reputation as the best doctor in Acapulco. Answering the summons, Dr. Montemayor rushed to the Acapulco Princess where Mormon guards were waiting to deliver him via private elevator to the 20th floor of the deluxe hotel.

According to a log, the doctor had arrived at the hotel at 5:58am on the morning of April 5.

He was immediately ushered into Howard's suite by Dr. Chaffin. What Montemayor discovered in a head-to-toe examination of the patient horrified him. In spite of all the Mormon guards and the around-the-clock medical care, the patient appeared to be dying of neglect. The Mexican doctor could feel fragments of hypodermic needles broken off in his arms and still imbedded there.

"Those arms looked like rail-thin bamboo shoots," Montemayor later said. "Not arms at all." He was not certain of Howard's age, but guessed him to be "around eighty-eight years old."

His skin was like parchment found in some ancient tomb. It was of a greenish-yellow pallor and seemed to hang from his body in folds.

There was a hideous, bloody gash on Howard's head, like an open sore. It appeared to be a cancerous tumor. The last time Howard had attempted to rise from his hospital bed, he'd fallen, hitting the fleshy growth on his head and bursting it. Even so, he refused to have it stitched back together again or operated on.

Montemayor also noticed that Howard was virtually toothless. He asked if he'd had his teeth pulled. Dr. Chaffin told him that his teeth had apparently fallen out one by one and that Howard presumably had swallowed them since none of the teeth had ever been found in or around his bed.

"I've examined dying vagrants off the street who were cared for better than Mr. Hughes," the doctor later said.

Montemayor expressed his concerns about administering to a man in his condition. He feared that Howard's body showed such neglect and abuse that

it might invite a lawsuit under Mexican law. The possible charge? Manslaughter.

As if he could help, Dr. Wilbur Thain, Howard’s chief physician, residing in The Bahamas, had been summoned the day before. Thain was asked to fly at once to Acapulco to administer to Howard. Dr. Thain was the brother-in-law of Bill Gay, Howard’s chief Mormon honcho at the time.

Dr. Montemayor had already left Howard’s suite before Dr. Thain arrived. Before leaving, Dr. Montemayor had ordered that the patient be flown “at once” to the United States, as he did not feel the hospital in Acapulco was adequate to save him.

Dr. Thain arrived about an hour later, after Montemayor had departed, but he did not immediately enter Howard’s suite to examine the patient. One of Howard’s Mormon guards, Chuck Waldron, caught the doctor packing up Howard’s medical records and stuffing them into his briefcase.

Dr. Thain finally entered the suite and administered two shots of Solu-Cortel, which he hoped would prevent a serious attack of dropsy.

Here the mystery deepens. In all the confusion, some unknown person, who was either in the suite as a member of the staff or else someone who slipped in unnoticed, approached Howard’s bed.

Even though he was in a coma and in no conscious pain, a dose of codeine was injected into Howard’s blood stream by his unknown man.

When Howard’s body was later examined, the high amount of codeine in his bloodstream was considered “a lethal dose.”

Wrapped in heavy blankets in spite of the sticky, humid April weather in Mexico, Howard was taken on a stretcher from his bedroom where he’d lain for weeks and slipped out of the hotel through the service elevator. An ambulance was waiting at the rear of the hotel. With sirens wailing, the white limousine headed for the local airport.

On the way there, a plastic oxygen mask covered Howard’s face. In the words of aide John Holmes, Howard’s “eyes had sunken deep into his head.”

Holmes had placed an emergency call to Dr. Henry D. McIntosh, chairman of the Department of Internal Medicine at the Methodist Hospital in Houston. His call came in as a “red alert” for the hospital, although Holmes refused to divulge the name of his famous patient, suggesting that a pseudonym of “J.T. Conover” be used. The Mormon guard requested that the hospital be prepared to receive the patient “as if he’s the President of Mexico.” Intrigued, Dr. McIntosh agreed to this unusual request.

In Houston, word quickly spread through the hospital that the stricken President of Mexico was flying in for emergency surgery. The best room was prepared for the arrival of this patient, and the finest doctors in the city summoned.

The hospital staff could only wait and wonder.

One doctor is reported to have said, “If the life of this VIP can be saved, we’re prepared to do it!”

Houston, 1976

Both Dr. Chaffin and Dr. Thain were crowded uncomfortably into the small, specially chartered jet aircraft, since Howard’s stretcher occupied most of the space. It was later reported that at 1:27pm, the moment the pilot of the aircraft, Robert Sutton, flew across the Mexican border into Texas airspace, Howard Hughes died.

Sutton later wondered if that were true. Did Howard really die at that exact moment, as was reported? Even on the day of Howard’s death, speculation began to rage that he was actually dead when his body was placed aboard that chartered jet. The claim was made that the two doctors were not administering to a dying man but to a corpse.

When Sutton was helping load Howard’s stretcher onto his plane, his left arm fell out from under the blankets. When the pilot reached for Howard’s arm and tried to put it back under the blankets, he later reported that “It felt as cold as an Arctic night.”

Not sworn to secrecy like the Mormon guards, Sutton notified the control tower at the Houston International Airport that he was landing and that he had a dead passenger aboard—“and his name is Howard Hughes!” Sutton requested that the airport have an ambulance waiting.

Obviously someone overheard this announcement from the chartered jet from Mexico. Within twelve minutes, some unknown party placed a call to Associated Press. Unaware of the details, the Associated Press sent out an immediate bulletin to all its affiliated newsrooms around the globe. Editors were advised to stand by for late-breaking news. It was suggested that the story be accorded the same status as the death of a sitting U.S. president or a declaration of war. Newspapers going to bed around the world were told to save their frontpages for an “epic” news event.

The jet from Mexico touched down at the Houston Airport at 1:50pm. A green-and-white ambulance was waiting to take Howard to the Methodist Hospital, which was twenty-seven miles south of the airport. Instead of trying to save Howard’s life, doctors at the hospital would now be ordered to perform an autopsy.

Just as Howard’s dead body was being wheeled across the tarmac of the Houston airport, the news of his death was flashed around the world. Lacking details, many newspapers went to press immediately with Second Coming banner headlines: HOWARD HUGHES DIES.

Arriving at the hospital at 2:51pm, Howard’s body was delivered to the morgue in the basement. Once there, Dr. Jack L. Titus, chief pathologist, conducted a preliminary examination. His finding discovered that Howard may have been dead for three hours. The cadaver was placed in a cooler at the morgue with 24-hour security guards posted nearby.

After the autopsy, a Cadillac hearse, “black as death” in the words of John Holmes, arrived at the hospital to claim the cadaver. What was left of Howard was taken to the George Lewis & Sons Funeral Home for embalming. A security force was hired to guard the corpse from “countless visitors and who knows how many rubbernecks.”

In a surprise, the funeral home later reported that there was not one visitor. “Not one person came to pay their final respects to Howard,” one of the directors claimed. “All the reporters assigned to the case weren’t badgering us but were seeking information from live sources. Only one call came in inquiring about Hughes’s body. The caller identified herself as Jean Peters Hughes.”

With no known will, Howard’s long-suffering aunt, Annette Gano Lummis, now eighty-five years old, and the younger sister of Allene, was the chief heir apparent. Too weak to oversee the chaos following Howard’s death, she immediately asked her son, William Rice Lummis, to make the funeral arrangements.

Annette had not seen Howard since his triumphant return to Houston in 1938. On learning of his death, she raised several provocative issues,

claiming that she did not believe that the cadaver flown in from Mexico was actually the body of her nephew.

She ordered that an autopsy be performed. However, she balked when J. Edgar Hoover sent in a request to allow FBI agents to enter the morgue and take fingerprints of the cadaver.

In Washington, D.C., the chief of the FBI also didn't believe that the cadaver was actually the body of Howard Hughes. Without recording it to paper, Hoover had even told such cohorts as Richard Nixon that he believed that Howard Hughes had been murdered and that the man pretending to be Howard was actually an impostor, a puppet being manipulated by powerful interests who were in charge of the vast empire.

The FBI had determined that the man who had met on March 13, 1972 with Nicaraguan President Anastasio Somoza in Managua, along with U.S. Ambassador Turner Shelton, "was not Hughes, but someone else."

The real Howard Hughes had allegedly signed papers on September 25, 1972, authorizing the sale of the oil-tool division of Toolco in Houston. By December of that same year, the division was auctioned off to the public for \$150 million. Howard's holding company was renamed the Summa Corporation.

Hoover's agents secured copies of Howard's authorization for this. After FBI experts examined the papers, they reported their suspicions that Howard's signature was a very skilled forgery.

Hoover was also convinced that the reason for a burglary of Howard's offices at 7000 Romaine Street in Hollywood on June 5, 1974, involved the removal of private papers revealing the details of Howard's murder.

When Hoover learned that Annette Lummis was objecting to the FBI taking Howard's fingerprints, he felt that he'd not only proven his theory, but that Howard's aunt was part of the conspiracy to defraud. "Why would she not want us to take fingerprints?" he asked associates. "I'll tell you why. The bitch is part of the cover-up!"

Howard was a mystery in life and remained an even bigger mystery in death.

Evocative of the aftermath of the assassination of President Kennedy, tantalizing questions—still unanswered—remain to this day. Many questions were never resolved by the autopsy performed on Howard Hughes in the Houston hospital.

With Howard's doctors, Titus and Chaffin, looking on, medical examiner Dr. Joseph A. Jachimczyk, performed an autopsy on Howard's body. Dr. Ted Bowen, president of the Methodist Hospital, announced to reporters that Howard had died of "chronic renal disease," or kidney failure. Dr. Jachimczyk also maintained that Howard had cancer, as diagnosed in both the ruptured tumor on his head and in his prostate.

The report also concluded that as a result of tertiary syphilis and more than a dozen plane and car crashes, Howard's brain cells had "dangerously deteriorated." The results of Howard's autopsy and the circumstances of his death would be investigated and disputed for years to come.

A Swiss doctor, Bernhardt Geber, who examined the evidence on a visit to Houston, concluded years later that Howard died of AIDS.

In 1976 the HIV virus had not been isolated, and the fatal disease was not referred to as AIDS at that time. Nonetheless, the doctor cited the widely publicized case of a British sailor who had died of a mysterious illness in 1959. A blood sample taken from the stricken man was frozen and later exhumed for examination when more sophisticated medical practices were in use. In the '90s, it was determined that the sailor had died of AIDS.

Dr. Geber concluded that Howard's last known symptoms, including kidney failure, were indicative of AIDS.

Even more provocative were two still unanswered questions: Was Howard Hughes murdered? Was the cadaver that was flown north from Acapulco actually the body of Howard or that of an impostor?

As 1979 rolled around, it appeared that no law enforcement agency planned to investigate rumors that Howard (or his impostor) had been murdered just prior to leaving Acapulco. Likewise, no law enforcement agency showed any real interest in pursuing the possibility that Howard Hughes had been murdered years before, and his empire commandeered by unknown forces. A reporter making an inquiry in Houston in 1981 was bluntly told by the police: "Case closed!"

Dr. John Chappel, who extensively probed the circumstances of Howard's death, issued a conclusion that the body put on the chartered plane in Mexico was already dead. The attorney general of Mexico, who ordered an investigation of Howard's death, announced his conclusion: "Howard Hughes died at 10 o'clock on the morning of April 5, 1976. His dead body was then put on a plane and flown to Houston."

Someone in the attorney general's office later secretly told reporters that Mexican authorities, had they known that Hughes had died in Acapulco, would have sent police officers rushing in squad cars to the Acapulco Airport. They would have seized the body, examined it, and held it as evidence in "what was obviously a murder case occurring on Mexican soil, giving us complete jurisdiction over the corpse."

Conspiracy theories proliferated throughout the 1970s. They continue, unresolved, even today.

On a final tantalizing note, one of Howard's Mormon bodyguards, who refused to identify himself, sent a note to Annette Lummis after her nephew's death. "You were right in your suspicions," he wrote. "That was not Howard Hughes we were looking after and protecting all these years. Your nephew was murdered in 1968 in Las Vegas. I personally saw his body wheeled out and an impostor arrive. The man who went on the air to conduct an interview on January 7, 1972, with newsmen in Los Angeles to refute the so-called Clifford Irving autobiography of Howard Hughes was not your nephew but someone else."

It was reported that Annette Lummis debated sending the note to the police, but decided to destroy it. Her final conclusion, as related to her friends, was, "I want to let Howard rest in peace. That was some precious commodity he never got to know in life. God bless his eternal soul!"

On a bright sunny day on April 7, 1976, one of the 20th century's most fabled figures was laid to rest in the family plot at the Glenwood Cemetery, uniting Howard with his doting mother and his distant father.

In casinos throughout Las Vegas, public address systems called for a minute of silence.

At the Desert Inn, the head croupier glanced nervously at his wristwatch, waiting impatiently for the minute to tick away. Turning to a cocktail waitress, he whispered, "Let's give the fucker his minute!"

When the minute had passed, he called out to his table, "Let's roll the dice! Lady Luck will surely shine on you today like it did on Howard Hughes."

Win a billion!”

In Houston, under the moss-draped oak trees at the Glenwood Cemetery, only twenty-one mourners showed up. Except for Annette, none of them had known Howard personally.

The Reverend Robert Gibson, pastor of Christ Cathedral Church, where Howard had been baptized as a small child, presided. His final blessing, as Howard’s coffin was lowered into the ground, was a rewrite of a passage from *The Book of Common Prayer*. “He brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that he will take nothing out of it.”

Even as gravediggers were shoveling the final dirt over the body of a man who had wanted to be cremated, anyone with even the remotest claim to Howard’s estate was meeting with their attorneys for legal challenges. Howard had been sued ever since the 1920s. In death, he would face an avalanche of lawsuits, many of which were frivolous or fabricated.

Annette lamented to friends, “I thought death would bring peace to my nephew. It has brought peace to none of us.”

Howard’s coffin was almost covered with red dirt when one final funeral bouquet arrived late. Annette remembered it as filled with three dozen of “the world’s most beautiful roses,” the type that Howard himself used to send to the likes of Ava Gardner or Katharine Hepburn.

The roses were so stunningly beautiful and had such a tantalizing aroma, that Annette remembered looking at a handwritten message on the card.

Dear Friend,

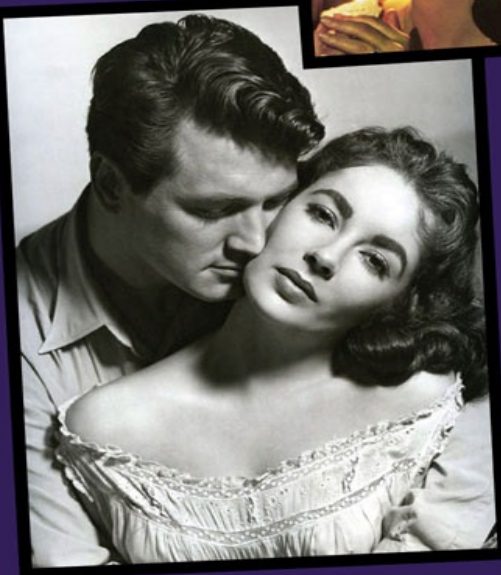
Until we meet again in Heaven, or some lesser address.

Love Eternal,

C.G.

ELIZABETH TAYLOR

**THERE IS
NOTHING LIKE
A DAME**



**All the Gossip
Unfit to Print from
the Glory Days of
Hollywood.**

EVERYBODY (INCLUDING ELIZABETH TAYLOR) HAD A POINT OF VIEW ABOUT ELIZABETH TAYLOR

“She is one of the most misunderstood and underestimated people of our time.”

—**Truman Capote**

“Nobody on earth is better company than Elizabeth Taylor, more lively, more fun, and more of a three-ring circus. When I began seeing her, she was fifty-five and better than ever. The year was 1986. She had divorced Senator John Warner and shed all that weight that John Belushi lampooned on Saturday Night Live. For Elizabeth, looking great was the best revenge.”

— **George Hamilton** in *Don't Mind If I Do*

“She was a femme fatale. I was an homme fatale. We made a fatal combination. She told me she wanted to marry me, but she was still a struggling actress at the time. I told her she couldn't afford me.”

— **Porfirio Rubirosa** to Elsa Maxwell

“Let's face it: My life seems to lack dignity.”

— **Elizabeth Taylor**

“Elizabeth was a committed wife — at least for the first week.”

— **Lana Turner**

“Elizabeth's favorite pastime was celebrity gossip. Her definition of celebrity included royalty, world leaders, writers, artists, and musicians, and the occasional Greek billionaire. She needed gossip as fuel to shock at dinner parties. She had to know who was sleeping with whom, who was great in bed, and who was not, and who was well hung. The gay secretaries were especially good at collecting that necessary information, especially Richard Hanley, whose years at MGM had made him a sexpert on the entire film industry.”

— **Vicky Tiel**, *It's All About the Dress*

“I lied about being a virgin on my wedding night. Actually, my first sexual experience was giving John Derek a blow-job when I'd just learned to walk, which is only a slight exaggeration. I was very, very young at the time, and he was a child molester.”

— **Elizabeth Taylor** at a dinner party in Gstaad in 1968

“Elizabeth should have acquired more jewelry and fewer husbands. But who am I to cast 'stones,' dah-link?”

— **Zsa Zsa Gabor**

“That Krupp diamond is far too vulgar to wear in public.”

— **Princess Margaret**

“After Elizabeth and I smelled each other out, we became two fast friends. Bitches in heat recognize each other.”

—**Laurence Harvey**

“My troubles all started because I have a woman's body and a child's emotions.”

—**Elizabeth Taylor**

“I was torn in my loyalties between two goddesses—Bessie May and Pussy.”

—**Monty Clift**, using his nicknames for Elizabeth Taylor and Marilyn Monroe

"I called Elizabeth Taylor and told her that Monty Clift was being held a prisoner in his apartment in New York. He got involved with this dangerous hustler. He's bringing in guys who want to fuck Monty and charging them a hundred dollars a lay. You've got to come and rescue him."

— **Truman Capote** in Key West

"What is this, a memory test?"

— **Elizabeth Taylor**, responding to the justice of the peace at her wedding to Larry Fortensky when he asked her the names of her former husbands.

"You know, an actress can learn to hate Elizabeth Taylor."

— **Patricia Neal**

"I often fucked actors who liked to fuck each other—Peter Lawford, Monty Clift (well, I tried at least), Rock Hudson, James Dean, Paul Newman. Or, actors who other actors wanted to fuck—namely George Hamilton, Robert Wagner...do we have all night?"

— **Elizabeth Taylor**

"No raise. Now get out. You're such a whore."

— MGM's casting director **Benny Thau** to Elizabeth Taylor after denying her request for a pay raise

"Burt Lancaster raped me that night back in April of 1961 after we'd won our joint Oscars for *Butterfield 8* and *Elmer Gantry*. Well, it wasn't rape exactly, but a gal can pretend, can't she?"

— **Elizabeth Taylor** in 1975

"Elizabeth Taylor got to sample my noble tool when we made *Reflections in a Golden Eye* together. Burton found out and was seriously pissed off, probably because I didn't fuck the sod himself."

— **Marlon Brando** to Carlo Fiore

"Drugs have become a crutch. I wouldn't take them just when I was in pain. I needed oblivion, escape...I was hooked on Percodan and of course, I could drink everybody under the table. I had a hollow leg. My capacity to consume was terrifying. I didn't even realize I was an alcoholic."

— **Elizabeth Taylor**

"I guess in time all of us fucked her. I know Sammy did. So did Frank. So did Peter, a long time ago. Joey Bishop was the only one who didn't join the rat race."

— **Dean Martin** about Elizabeth Taylor

"What did you expect me to do — sleep alone?"

— **Elizabeth Taylor** to Hedda Hopper

"The trouble with Elizabeth Taylor is that she always envied my sex appeal. She just didn't have it, and I did."

— **Marilyn Monroe** to Clark Gable

"I have written a sequel to *The Wizard of Oz* about a 60-year-old Dorothy returning to Oz and I'm talking to Elizabeth Taylor about starring in it. She told me she wants to play the role, and she would be perfect for it."

— **Rod Steiger**, 1998

"Yes, it's true. On that infamous night I recited the Gettysburg Address at the Lincoln Memorial wearing nothing but a mink coat. Ask Halston. He was the designer who dressed me."

— **Elizabeth Taylor**

"In this Age of Vulgarity, marked by such minor matters as war and poverty, it gets harder every day to scale the heights of true vulgarity. But given some loose millions, it can be done — and, worse, admired."

“I know I’m vulgar, but would you have me any other way?”

— **Elizabeth Taylor**

“Does it matter what Maureen Stapleton weighs? Why the hell does it matter what I weigh? It’s nobody’s damn business what I weigh, but talking about it seems to be a national pastime. And that pisses me off!”

— **Elizabeth Taylor**

“I visited her in London in the hospital when she had that trachotomy. She had what looked like a silver dollar in her throat. I couldn’t figure out what held it in place, and it surprised me she wasn’t bleeding or oozing. A few nights later, I went out with Eddie Fisher. The next afternoon, Elizabeth told me that Eddie thought I was trying to make a pass at him. At that moment, she played a trick on me and yanked at the plug in her throat, spurting out champagne — I’d brought her a magnum of Don Perignon — all over the hospital room. I thought I was going to pass out.”

— **Truman Capote**

“After I married Mike Todd, he invited Eddie Fisher into our bedroom and pulled the sheet off me, exposing my nude body to Eddie. I think he really wanted a ménage à trois. There are those who say we had one.”

— **Elizabeth Taylor**

“She had the face of an angel and the morals of a truck driver. We’d make love three, four, five times a day. We’d make love in the swimming pool, on Mexican beaches, under waterfalls, in the back seat of a limousine on the way home from a party. There was nothing more erotic than a moonlit beach and Elizabeth Taylor.”

— **Eddie Fisher**

“Did I seduce Mike Todd’s son and Peter Lawford’s son? I wouldn’t put it past me.”

— **Elizabeth Taylor**

“I think Elizabeth is having an affair with Sammy Davis, Jr, but she dismisses the notion, joking that ‘just over five foot tall’ Sammy couldn’t reach that high.”

— **Richard Burton**

“Do you want to know some people I screwed that most people don’t know about? Ardeshir Zahedi, the Iranian ambassador to the United States. Would you believe that Swedish boxer, Ingemar Johansson? Ronald Reagan, Errol Flynn, John and Bobby (guess who?), Prince Aly Khan.”

— **Elizabeth Taylor**, overheard by the author in 1961, in a bar in Portofino

“If you leave me I shall have to kill myself. I love you. There is no life without you.”

— **Richard Burton** during his second divorce proceedings from Elizabeth Taylor.

“I hung up the phone after Mike Todd told me he was in love with Elizabeth Taylor. I had been...taken. When I wasn’t looking, I was delivered the knockout punch. I felt jilted. I should have seen it coming. He fell in love too fast. Like that phone call from Moscow to Marlene Dietrich when she was still big news. Like that circus act when he got Marilyn Monroe to ride the pink elephant at Madison Square Garden. And now Elizabeth Taylor beckoning with her little pinkie.”

— **Evelyn Keyes** in her memoir, *Scarlett O’Hara’s Little Sister*

“In May of 2000, I was critically ill with pneumonia and had a near death experience. I was on the other side, like in a tunnel, and I was with Mike Todd. I held onto him and he said, ‘You have to go back now. You have things to do and I will be here.’ I wanted to stay with Mike. He was my one true love.”

— **Elizabeth Taylor**

"Elizabeth Taylor was the last of the great glamour stars. She was the longest running soap opera in history, and represented all the allure and tragedy that attracts people to Hollywood."

— British director **Michael Winner**

"I'm old and I'm tired and I've represented everyone from that cunt Bette Davis to Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. Everyone wants to know my secrets. Okay, I'm dying and out of harm's way now, so I'll tell you a few — Burton said he liked to fuck Fisher's ass better than he did Elizabeth's. She screwed Ronald Reagan, John F. Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy. Tallulah Bankhead masturbated Elizabeth at the dinner table one night. Marilyn Monroe went down on her one night in Las Vegas. Elvis Presley fucked Elizabeth and wanted to do a movie with her. She had a three-way with Monty Clift and Marlon Brando. And I'm only just getting wound up."

— Talent Agent **Robert Lantz**

"I get pissed off with all the talk of the great love story of my husband Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. Yes, they were in love, but they divorced twice. That means their marriages didn't work. I'm still very bitter about the torch Richard carried for that woman."

—Richard Burton's widow, **Sally Hay**, in 2011

"Richard Burton fucked me long before he did the honors with you."

— **Noël Coward** to Elizabeth Taylor on the set of Boom!

"I knew she would be devastated, shattered by the death of Burton, but I didn't expect her to become completely hysterical. I could not get her to stop crying. She was completely out of control. I realized how deeply tied she was to this man, how vital a role he played in her life. And I realized I could never have that special place in her heart she keeps for Burton. For me, the romance was over, and I told Elizabeth that."

— **Victor Luna**, Mexican Attorney

"We have been fighting and have been fighting for over a year now over anything and everything. I dread it at night when she has had her shots of drugs and is only semi-articulate. When she moans and groans in agony, I simply become bored. What is more frightening is she has become bored with everything in life. I have always been a heavy drinker, but now I'm drinking twice as much. The upshoot will be that I'll die of drink while she'll go on blithely in her half-world."

— **Richard Burton** in his diary, 1969

"Being with Elizabeth Taylor is like sticking an eggbeater in your brain. I loved her, and I think she loved me. But on the practical level, she was not the woman I needed in my life. With her, there was a great deal of maintenance. This is not a woman who gets up in the morning and fixes breakfast. By the time she comes downstairs for breakfast, it's time for dinner. Her life is built completely around Elizabeth, and she needs a man to service her life 24/7."

— **Robert Wagner**

"In our last chat, I told Elizabeth that getting old is really shit. She said, 'It certainly is. It certainly is, Debbie. This is really tough. I'm really trying to hang in there.'"

—**Debbie Reynolds** in 2011

"She told me that there had never been a time in her life when she wasn't famous."

— **Barbara Walters**

“We just stopped communicating. Why was every guy she befriended gay?”

— **Larry Fortensky**

“Stay with me,” Elizabeth said. Curling up close, spoon fashion, I wrapped my arms around her and looked at the room I found myself in. A woman’s bedroom. So inviting. So frightening.”

— **Frank Langella**, in his memoirs

“She was a great broad.”

— **Whoopi Goldberg**, commenting on the death of Elizabeth Taylor

ELIZABETH TAYLOR

THERE IS NOTHING LIKE A DAME

"There are guilty pleasures. Then there is the master of guilty pleasures, Darwin Porter. There is nothing like reading him for passing the hours. He is the Nietzsche of Naughtiness, the Goethe of Gossip, the Proust of Pop Culture. Porter knows all the nasty buzz anyone has ever heard whispered in dark bars, dim alleys, and confessional booths. And lovingly, precisely, and in as straightforward a manner as an oncoming train, his prose whacks you between the eyes with the greatest gossip since Kenneth Anger. Some would say better than Anger."

—**Alan W. Petrucelli**

The Entertainment Report
Stage and Screen Examiner

Examiner.com

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO

DICK HANLEY
&
RODDY MCDOWALL

AND TO A CAST OF THOUSANDS, FRIENDS AND FOES, WHO SHARED GOOD TIMES AND BAD TIMES
WITH DAME ELIZABETH



The Films of Elizabeth Taylor

A Lifetime of Achievement

- There’s One Born Every Minute**, Universal, 1942, D: Harold Young, with “Alfalfa” Switzer, Peggy Morgan, Hugh Herbert.
- Lassie Come Home**, MGM, 1943, D: Fred M. Wilcox, with Roddy McDowall, Donald Crisp, Edmund Gwenn, Dame Mae Whitty, Elsa Lanchester, Pal (Lassie).
- Jane Eyre**, 20th Century Fox, 1944, D: Robert Stevenson, with Orson Welles, Joan Fontaine, Margaret O’Brien, Peggy Ann Garner, Agnes Moorehead.
- The White Cliffs of Dover**, MGM, 1944, D: Clarence Brown, with Irene Dunne, Alan Marshal, Dame Mae Whitty, Peter Lawford, Van Johnson, Gladys Cooper, Roddy McDowall.
- National Velvet**, MGM, 1944, D: Clarence Brown, with Mickey Rooney, Donald Crisp, Angela Lansbury, Anne Revere.
- Courage of Lassie**, MGM, 1945, D: Fred M. Wilcox, with Frank Morgan, Tom Drake, Selena Royle, George Cleveland.
- Cynthia**, MGM, 1947, D: Robert Z. Leonard, with George Murphy, Mary Astor, S.Z. Sakall, Gene Lockhart, James Lydon, Spring Byington.
- Life with Father**, Warner Brothers, 1947, D: Michael Curtiz, with William Powell, Irene Dunne, Edmund Gwenn, ZaSu Pitts, James Lydon.
- A Date With Judy**, MGM, 1948, D: Richard Thorpe, with Wallace Beery, Selena Royle, Jane Powell, Robert Stack, Carmen Miranda, Xavier Cugat, Scotty Beckett, Leon Ames, George Cleveland.
- Julia Misbehaves**, MGM, 1948, D: Mervin LeRoy, with Greer Garson, Walter Pidgeon, Peter Lawford, Cesar Romero, Mary Boland, Nigel Bruce, Lucile Watson.
- Little Women**, MGM, 1949, D: Mervin LeRoy, with June Allyson, Peter Lawford, Janet Leigh, Margaret O’Brien, Mary Astor, Lucile Watson, Rossano Brazzi.
- Conspirator**, MGM, 1949, D: Victor Saville, with Robert Taylor, Robert Flemyng, Honor Blackman, Thora Hird.
- The Big Hangover**, MGM, 1959, D: Norman Krasna, with Van Johnson, Leon Ames, Gene Lockhart, Selene Royle, Rosemary DeCamp.
- Father of the Bride**, MGM, 1950, D: Vincente Minnelli, with Spencer Tracy, Joan Bennett, Don Taylor, Billie Burke, Leo G. Carroll, Russ Tamblyn.
- A Place in the Sun**, Paramount, 1951, with Montgomery Clift, Shelley Winters, Anne Revere, Keefe Brasselle, Raymond Burr, Shepperd Strudwick.
- Love is Better Than Ever**, MGM, 1952, D: Stanley Donen, with Larry Parks, Josephine Hutchinson, Tom Tully, Ann Doran.
- Ivanhoe**, MGM, 1952, D: Richard Thorpe, with Robert Taylor, Joan Fontaine, George Sanders, Emyln Williams, Finlay Currie, Feliz Aylmer, Robert Douglas.
- The Girl Who Had Everything**, MGM, 1953, D: Richard Thorpe, with William Powell, Fernando Lamas, James Whitmore, Gig Young.
- Rhapsody**, MGM, 1954, D: Charles Vidor, with Vittorio Gassman, John Ericson, Louis Calhern.
- Elephant Walk**, Paramount, 1954, D: William Dieterle, with Dana Andrews, Peter Finch.
- Beau Brummell**, MGM, 1954, D: Curtis Bernhardt, with Stewart Granger, Peter Ustinov, Robert Morley.
- The Last Time I Saw Paris**, MGM, 1954, D: Richard Brooks, with Van Johnson, Walter Pidgeon, Donna Reed, Eva Gabor, Kurt Kasnar.
- Giant**, Warner Brothers, 1956, D: George Stevens, with Rock Hudson, James Dean, Carroll Baker, Jane Withers, Mercedes McCambridge, Sal Mineo, Chill Wills, Dennis Hopper.
- Raintree County**, MGM, 1957, D: Edward Dmytryk, with Montgomery Clift, Eva Marie Saint, Lee Marvin, Nigel Bruce, Rod Taylor, Agnes Moorehead, Walter Abel, Tom Drake.
- Cat on a Hot Tin Roof**, MGM, 1958, D: Richard Brooks, with Paul Newman, Burl Ives, Judith Anderson, Jack Carson, Madeleine Sherwood.
- Suddenly, Last Summer**, Columbia, 1959, D: Joseph L. Mankiewicz, with Katharine Hepburn, Montgomery Clift, Mercedes McCambridge, Albert Dekker.

Scent of Mystery (Holiday In Spain in British release), Michael Todd, Jr., Productions, 1960, D: Jack Cardiff, with Denholm Elliott, Peter Lorre, Paul Lukas.

Butterfield 8, MGM, 1960, D: Daniel Mann, with Laurence Harvey, Eddie Fisher, Dina Merrill, Mildred Dunnock, Betty Field, Jeffrey Lynn.

Cleopatra, 20th Century Fox, 1963, D: Joseph L. Mankiewicz, with Richard Burton, Rex Harriosn, Hume Cronyn, Roddy McDowall, Martin Landau.

The V.I.P.s, MGM, 1963, D: Anthony Asquith, with Richard Burton, Louis Jourdan, Elsa Martinelli, Margaret Rutherford, Maggie Smith, Orson Welles, Linda Christian, Rod Taylor.

The Sandpiper, MGM, 1965, D: Vincente Minnelli, with Richard Burton, Eva Marie Saint, Charles Bronson, Eduardo Tirella, Tom Drake.

Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, Warner Brothers, 1966, D: Mike Nichols, with Richard Burton, George Segal, Sandy Dennis.

The Taming of the Shrew, Columbia, 1967, D: Franco Zeffirelli, with Richard Burton, Michael York, Cyril Cusack, Michael Hordern.

Doctor Faustus, Columbia, 1967, D: Nevill Coghill, with Richard Burton, Andreas Teuber, Elizabeth O’Donovan.

Reflections in a Golden Eye, Seven Arts, 1967, D: John Huston, with Marlon Brando, Brian Keith, Julie Harris, Robert Forster.

The Comedians, MGM, 1967, D: Peter Glenville, with Richard Burton, Alec Guinness, Peter Ustinov, Lillian Gish, Paul Ford.

Boom!, Universal, 1968, D: Joseph Losey, with Richard Burton, Noël Coward, Michael Dunn.

Secret Ceremony, Universal, 1968, D: Joseph Losey, with Mia Farrow, Robert Mitchum, Peggy Ashcroft, Pamela Brown.

The Only Game in Town, 20th Century Fox, 1970, D: George Stevens, with Warren Beatty, Charles Braswell, Hank Henry.

Under Milk Wood, Altura Films, 1971, D: Andrew Sinclair, with Richard Burton, Peter O’Toole, Glynnis Johns,

X, Y, and Zee (Zee & Company in British release), 1972, D: Brian G. Hutton, with Michael Caine, Susannah York, Margaret Leighton.

Hammersmith is Out, Cornelius Crean Films, 1972, D: Peter Ustinov, with Richard Burton, Beau Bridges, Leon Ames, George Raft.

Night Watch, Avco Embassy, 1973, D: Brian Hutton, with Laurence Harvey, Billie Whitelaw, Robert Lang.

Divorce His, Divorce Hers, ABC-TV, 1973, D: Waris Hussein, with Richard Burton, Carrie Nye, Barry Foster.

Ash Wednesday, Paramount 1973, D: Larry Peerce, with Helmut Berger, Henry Fonda.

The Driver’s Seat (aka **Identikit**), Avco Embassy, 1974, D: Giuseppe Patroni Griffi, with Ian Bannen, Guido Mannari.

The Blue Bird, 20th Century Fox, 1976, D: George Cukor, with Ava Gardner, Jane Fonda, Robert Morley, Cicely Tyson.

A Little Night Music, New World Pictures, 1977, D: Harold Prince, with Hermione Gingold, Lesley-Anne Down.

Winter Kills, Avco Embassy, 1979, D: William Richert, with Jeff Bridges, John Huston, Tony Perkins, Sterling Hayden, Eli Wallach, Dorothy Malone, Ralph Meeker.

The Mirror Crack’ed, EMI Films, 1980, D: Guy Hamilton, with Rock Hudson, Tony Curtis, Kim Novak, Edward Fox, Geraldine Chaplin, Angela Lansbury.

Malice in Wonderland, ITC,TV-, 1985: D: Gus Trikonis, with Jane Alexander, Richard Dysart, Joyce Van Patten.

There Must Be a Pony, Columbia TV, 1986, D: Joseph Sargent, with Robert Wagner, James Coco.

Il Giovane Toscanini, Cathago Films, 1988, D: Franco Zeffirelli, with C. Thomas Howell, Sophie Ward.

Sweet Bird of Youth, NBC-TV, 1989, D: Nicolas Roeg, with Mark Harmon, Valerie Perrine.

The Flintstones, Universal, 1994: D: Brian Levant, with John Goodman, Rosie O’Donnell.

These Old Broads, ABC-TV, 2001, D: Matthew Diamond, with Debbie Reynolds, Shirley MacLaine, Peter Graves, Joan Collins.

Edward Lyhr

CHAPTER ONE

Born Into a Ménage à Trois

BABY ELIZABETH

The chimes of Big Ben announced to London that it was two o'clock in the morning. At this cold moment in February, a pea-soup fog had fallen over the city, obscuring early morning traffic on the Thames. Prostitutes still walking the streets of Soho, in what is known as "the desperate hour," referred to it as "Jack the Ripper" weather.

In a black sedan, a doctor, Charles Huggenheim, sped rapidly north through nearly deserted streets. He was heading for Hampstead, where an urgent call had summoned him to the house of an American couple. A former stage actress was about to give birth.

With the screech of his brakes, the doctor parked and rushed to an open door at 8 Wildwood Road in Golders Green, where two anxious men stood. He did not have time to determine which one was the father, as the nanny directed him up the steps where the sounds of pain led him to the master bedroom.

A little baby girl, weighing 8½ pounds, entered the world at exactly 2:30 that morning. It was a relatively smooth delivery. Before the baby was born, the mother had told him, "Two years ago I had a boy. He was called a Botticelli angel. I know this one, boy or girl, will be even more beautiful."

Almost immediately after the delivery, Sara fell into a deep sleep. She didn't even see the child before the nanny took her away.

Dawn had broken across the London Heath before Sara woke up. The morning sun had chased away the nightmarish fog.

On her left, her husband, Francis Taylor, held her hand. "You've come through, precious one," he said in a soft voice. On his right, Victor Cazalet, a conservative Member of Parliament, held her other hand. "The three of us have a healthy baby daughter," he told her, squeezing her hand.

Francis was her husband, Victor was her lover. Not only that, but Victor was also the lover of her husband. She'd never known that any two men could be that devoted to each other. As only her closest confidants were aware, she did not really know which one was the father of her newborn.

In a weak but determined voice, she said, "For appearance's sake, Francis will be the father. As for you, Victor, we'll make you the godfather. I know that both of you will love the girl like she was your own blood." After receiving assurances from both men, she asked them, "Would you please bring in our little girl?"

Francis went for the infant in the nursery. While he was gone, Victor leaned over and kissed Sara on the lips.

"Oh, my darling man, you've given Francis and me such a wonderful life. You've made us a part of your world. You're the only person Francis has ever loved. He's devoted to you and your every wish. I, too, love you with all my heart. I know you'll bestow your love on our beautiful daughter and take care of her, too."

"That I promise, and I don't have to tell you and Francis that I'm a man of my word."

As he was saying that, Francis came back into the bedroom, holding the newborn girl swaddled in a pink blanket. At bedside, he stood beside Victor, giving him a long, lingering kiss. "Okay, Daddy, present our girl to its mother."

Victor very gently took the baby and lowered her to Sara's outstretched arms. "May I present Elizabeth Rosemond Taylor Cazalet?" he asked.

The morning sun streaming in had brightly lit the bedroom. Sara reached for her newborn, taking her in her protective arms.

For the first time, she gazed lovingly into her baby's face. Suddenly, her own face became one of shock and horror. "Take her away!" she shouted at Victor. "It's not my daughter. The hairy little thing is the newborn of a money at the zoo!"

Victor quickly retrieved the bundle and passed her immediately to Francis, who carried her from the bedroom back to the nursery and the nanny.

"The doctor assured me she won't always look that ghastly," Victor said. "In a few months, all that hair will fall from her body—at least that's what happens in most cases. Nature itself will cure these genetic defects."



8 Wildwood Road in Golders Glen,
Hampstead, near London, site of Elizabeth
Taylor's birth in 1932

The cries coming from the nursery sounded more like a screaming rage.

Only a handful of people took note of the historic date of February 27, 1932, and that birth of this ghoulish little girl. But this pathetic little creature with a head far too big for its narrow shoulders would eventually be hailed as "the world's most beautiful woman."

A lifetime of tragedy and triumph awaited her in the more than seven decades that followed, decades that would evolve into a new millennium not yet born.

Elizabeth Taylor would both enchant and appall the world she'd so awkwardly entered.

Besides her unusually colored eyes—a curious shade of violet—she would become known for her breasts. A Welsh actor and her future husband, Richard Burton, would refer to them as "apocalyptic. They will topple empires before they wither!"

When Elizabeth Taylor became an international star, Sara vicariously lived her daughter's life. Stardom had been the dream of Sara herself.



A THESPIAN MOTHER: Views of **Sara Warmbrodt** (aka Sara Sothern) in 1916 (top photo) and 1926 as *The Little Spitfire*

Born Sara Viola Warmbrodt on August 21, 1896, she was the daughter of Samuel Warmbrodt, an émigré laundry manager who'd been trained as an engineer. In the milltown of Arkansas City, Kansas, he'd married Anna Elizabeth Wilson, a talented singer and pianist, whose own dream of an artistic career had been abandoned when she became a housewife.

By the time Sara was only eight years old, Samuel claimed that his beautiful daughter had a "bloodthirsty ambition." Dropping out of high school, she set out to pursue her goal, taking the train to Los Angeles and changing her name to Sara Sothern, "because it will look better on a theater marquee."

In California, she met a "swishy actor" [her words], Brooklyn-born Edward Everett Horton, who had established a stock company presenting theatrical performances in Pasadena. He would become famous in the movies of the 1930s, for which he was known for saying, "Oh, dear," in numerous films. His face, with its beaked nose, looked "in perpetual pain," as the critics said, and he had a jittery voice.

Horton cast Sara in a minor role in *The Sign on the Door* (1922), a play by Channing Pollock. In 1929, the drama would be adapted for the screen and retitled *The Locked Door*. It included a role for Barbara Stanwyck as one of her first films.

Pollock was so impressed with Sara's acting that he cast her in a key role in his next play, *The Fool*, (1922-23). She played a fifteen-year-old crippled girl, Mary Margaret, a modern-day interpretation of Mary Magdalene. The play was about faith healing, which appealed to Sara, who had been brought up by her mother as a Christian Scientist. At the finale, a crippled Sara throws her crutches away and shouts, "I kin walk!"

The critics attacked it, but evangelical audiences adored it. The play received so much attention that it attracted Alla Nazimova as a member of the audience. Nazimova was enjoying a brief reign as "The Queen of MGM" in spite of her gunboat feet and pumpkin-shaped head. Born in the Ukraine, she lived in a mansion on Sunset Boulevard called "the Garden of Alla."

Backstage, after one of Sara's performances, Nazimova swept down like a bird of prey onto the more innocent Sara, dazzling her with her appearance in a peacock gown. "I saw a brilliant actress in the making on the stage tonight," she told Sara.

By that weekend, Sara was living with Nazimova at the Garden of Alla. The movie queen was known for seducing young women. Some of her earlier involvements had included sexual and emotional flings with Natacha Rombova, wife of Rudolph Valentino, and Dolly Wilde, the niece of Oscar Wilde, described as "the only Wilde who likes women."

Nazimova arranged a screen test at MGM for Sara, which she directed herself. Although at the time, she still had considerable influence, no director found Sara worth even a minor role in any of their silent films.

Through Nazimova, Sara met her first "beau," Franklin Pangborn, a member of Nazimova's stage company. The effeminate actor would enjoy a long career in films, becoming known for his droopy puss and his "hands on his hips" style of acting, indicating his disapproval of the antics being played out before him. Critics called him "the screen's most effete fussbudget."

There couldn't have been much of a romance between Sara and Pangborn, as he was known as one of Hollywood's most stately homos. Nazimova disapproved of the relationship. "What do you want with that mincer? My more masculine actors go to his dressing room for fellatio."

By modern standards, Pangborn is hailed as "a gay stereotype of the 1930s." Over the years, Sara occasionally encountered him in Hollywood. The actor lived in Laguna Beach with his devoted mother and his partner, Gavin Gordon.

As the years went by, Sara would have a number of discreet affairs with women, although she confined most of her adulterous relationships to men.

Nazimova liked to dominate her young protégées, and Sara was a very self-determined woman with an independent streak.

When an offer arrived to star opposite James Kirkwood, Sr. on Broadway for a repeat of the role she had played in *The Fool*, Sara told Nazimova goodbye and took the train East.

Kirkwood had made his film debut in 1909, and was both a director and an actor, playing leads for D.W. Griffith and later directing Mary Pickford, who also became his lover. Before his death in 1963, he would be involved with more than two hundred films, either as an actor or as a director.

[Ironically, Kirkwood Srs.' son, James Kirkwood, Jr., would one day write a novel, *There Must Be a Pony*, in which Elizabeth would star, in 1986, for Columbia TV, opposite Robert Wagner, her former lover.]

Critics labeled *The Fool* as "religious buncombe" and even attacked the audiences who went to see it. "Their favorite tune is *Onward, Christian Soldiers*," wrote one columnist. In time, however, five million devout believers would attend performances of *The Fool*.

The play became so successful that it was taken to London, opening in September of 1924 at the Apollo Theatre, starring Henry Ainley, the lover of a very young Laurence Olivier. Sara retained her role as the crippled girl. The critic for *The Times* attacked it as a "religious orgy."

On Sara's free night, she went to see "the toast of London," *Miss Tallulah Bankhead*, starring with Nigel Bruce and C. Aubrey Smith in *The Creaking Chair*. The noted playwright, Emlyn Williams, said of Tallulah's voice, "It is a timbre steeped as deep in sex as the human voice can go without drowning." Sara came backstage to congratulate Tallulah on her performance, and they were seen an hour later driving out of town together in Tallulah's new emerald-green and cream-colored Talbot Coupe, heading to a country house in Surrey that C. Aubrey Smith allowed Tallulah to use for sexual trysts.

Sara arrived at the theater the following night "a little worse for wear."

Ironically, Sara's future daughter, Elizabeth, would take over roles previously performed on Broadway by her mother's lover, Tallulah.

Later in life, when Francis Taylor met Tallulah, the outspoken Alabama belle said to him, "I've had your wife."

You're next!"

During her London stay, although Sara did not build up the massive lesbian cabal of fans that Tallulah did, numerous female admirers awaited outside the theater door for a glimpse of her every night.

As the playwright, Channing Pollock said, "These baritone babes were clamoring for bits of Sara's frock or locks of her hair as souvenirs."

When *The Fool* closed in London, Sara went back to New York, where her career wound down as she appeared in one flop after another. In the late summer of 1925, she starred on Broadway as Colette in *The Dagger*, a play which critic Alexander Woollcott defined as "childish rubbish."

Meanwhile, Pollock had written a new play called *The Enemy*, and Sara desperately wanted to play the lead. But Pollock preferred Fay Bainter instead. Sara sent him what Pollock later called "the most vulgar, venomous, and vicious letter in the history of the theater." Perhaps daughter Elizabeth inherited her famous potty mouth from her mother.

In October of 1925, Sara appeared in a featherweight musical called *Arabesque*. Bela Lugosi was ridiculously cast as a lecherous sheik, for which he was laughed off the stage. But in 1931, he made a marvelous film comeback as *Dracula*.

Three days before Christmas of 1925, Sara opened in *Fool's Bells*, which ran for five nights. It was a fantasy in which she played a character trying to bring solace to a hunchback, evocative of Charles Laughton in *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. Unwilling to abandon her hopes of working as an actress, she made two more attempts at stardom, opening on February 22, 1926 in *Mama Loves Papa*, a matrimonial farce that was ridiculed in the press. Her final stage appearance was in August of 1926 when she starred in a pallid comedy called *The Little Spitfire*. It sputtered out at Broadway's Cort Theater.

By then, Sara had decided that she wanted to play another role—that of the wife of a successful man. Nearing thirty, she went with her roommate, Leatrice Loyale, to *El Morocco*, a nightclub where wealthy clients pursued showgirls.

In the club, she was seated two tables away from a handsome man about her own age and an older, distinguished-looking gentleman who appeared to be his patron, possibly his lover. She studied the younger man's face carefully, as it looked familiar. She finally concluded that it was Francis Taylor, whom she'd known back in Arkansas City.

Tugging at her roommate's sleeve, she said, "The night is young, but I'm getting older every minute. Let's go over to that table and say hello to these guys. I know the younger one. He doesn't know it yet, but I'm going to marry him."

Francis Lenn Taylor, who may have been the father of Elizabeth, was born in Springfield, Illinois on December 18, 1897, the son of Francis Marion Taylor and Elizabeth Mary Rosemond. Later, his parents moved to Arkansas City, Kansas. To earn a living, the senior Francis became what was known at the time as "a commercial gent" (i.e., a traveling salesman). Eventually, he left the road to settle down in Arkansas City, where he opened a lucrative private express mail messenger service.

Young Francis inherited the good looks of his tall, rugged father, who had a bloodline that was both Scottish and Irish. Unlike his more outgoing father, the son was shy and introverted.

In school, many girls found him very good-looking and tried to strike up a conversation with him. He was polite but definitely not interested. Any free time he had was spent with football hero Randolph Parrafin, whom he affectionately called "Randy." Three years older than Francis, Randy had almost a devoted slave in Francis, who spent whatever money he had on presents for the football athlete. On many days, Randy ate both his own packed lunch and part of Francis' paper-bagged lunch as well.

One summer, Randy took Francis for a six-week camping trip through the Ozarks. But for his senior year, he dumped Francis and took up with the school's beauty queen, Marcia Rothermere. Randy had no more time for Francis. After he was graduated from school, the older boy married Marcia and moved with her to Kansas City.

Sara, a year older than Francis, befriended him. Romance didn't seem a factor. Sara seemed to console

Francis, as each of them plotted various ways to get the hell out of this bleak Kansas landscape. Each of them dreamed of life in Hollywood or New York.

Sara was the first to leave, abandoning Francis, who felt lonelier than ever. But he was rescued by the arrival of his uncle, Howard Young. Uncle Howard was a rich art collector, who had married Mabel Rosemond, the younger sister of Francis' mother.

Howard had made a small fortune from his lucrative business of retouching and tinting family photographs and selling them in gold-colored oval frames. With the profits, he'd invested in the booming oil well business of Texas and Oklahoma.

Newly rich, he'd opened an art gallery in St. Louis, specializing in Old Masters from Europe, which he sold to the nouveaux riches of the Middle West. For some reason, Howard took to Francis, virtually adopting the sixteen-year-old. "He became like the son I never had," Howard said. "When you looked into the sparkling blue eyes of his, the day was yours. He was a handsome and charming boy, but he knew nothing of art. I talked to him about art for hours at a time, and he absorbed everything I said like a sponge."

Before Howard ended his family visit, he'd convinced Francis to drop out of school and go to St. Louis with him as his secretary.

Francis' parents were jealous that Howard had taken their son from them, but his mother said, "Howard can give you all the advantages in life we can't."

The father was more cynical. "There's something about your brother...well, something unnatural," he said to his wife. "I can't put my finger on it."

"Don't be a silly old goose." Elizabeth Mary responded. "Howard was always artistic."

Francis learned how to run an art gallery so quickly that Howard invited him to come and live with him in New York, and help him operate the Howard Young Art Gallery at 620 Fifth Avenue.

As an art dealer, Francis was an immediate success. Many of his older women clients preferred to be waited on by him, and he was often presented to their eligible daughters, but he showed no interest.

Howard objected to the nights when Francis would disappear into the taverns of Greenwich Village, often not arriving back home until nearly dawn.

Francis admired his uncle and listened to stories of how he'd come out of Ohio, arriving in New York without a penny. By the time he was eighteen, he'd accumulated half a million dollars, which was a fabulous fortune in those days. Eventually, he found himself in the position of selling Old Master paintings to the Ford and Fisher families of Detroit.

At the time of Howard's death in 1972, he left an estate of \$20 million, none of which went to Elizabeth. He claimed that his movie star relative already knew how to make her own money.

When he wasn't working, Francis lived in luxury, visiting his uncle's vacation homes in Westport, Connecticut, and in Minocqua, Wisconsin. In winter, he made frequent visits to Howard's mansion on Star Island, Florida. Various young men from New York also accompanied him on his vacation trips. On one trip to Florida, Francis met one of Howard's closest friends, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Back in New York, Howard told Francis that he wanted to expand his galleries and was negotiating for a location in the exclusive Mayfair district of London. He wanted Francis to manage it, but only if he'd break from running around with a "rough gang of boys from the Village" and take a wife, presumably as a means of settling into marital bliss. "As the director of a major gallery in Mayfair, you must look very respectable to the rich Brits who are investing thousands of dollars in a piece of art," Howard advised.

That night, Howard invited Francis to El Morocco to celebrate. With the challenge of a marriage in front of him, Francis was dressed immaculately for the occasion, sporting a pair of horn-rimmed glasses and a well-tailored suit in midnight blue with gray pin stripes.

When Sara and her friend, Leatrice, came over, Francis, of course, remembered her from their days together in Arkansas City. Both Sara and Francis had changed and matured.

At first, after learning that she was an actress, Howard objected to Sara, even though she told him that she was giving up the theater.

Sara and Francis resumed the friendly intimacy they'd enjoyed as teenagers, and began to date each other after their reunion at El Morocco. He took her to the theater, to art exhibitions, and for long walks in Central Park. The pressure to marry was strong for Francis, who talked it over with Sara. In fairness to her, he warned

her that it might be a marriage based on love and respect, but she was told not to expect passion—"Perhaps sex every three months or so." Attracted to the idea of the good life he held out for her, and having no other career options, she eventually accepted his proposal of marriage.

They were married at the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, with Howard standing in as best man. The date was October 23, 1926.

After a brief honeymoon, the couple moved into a Manhattan apartment Howard rented for them at 55 West 55th Street.

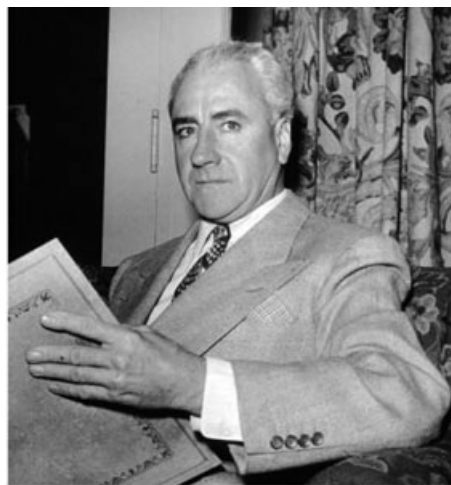
Sara was dazzled to learn that Howard was going to finance a three-year honeymoon for them. With the understanding that the newlyweds would be based in London, Howard would orchestrate, and pay for, an extended tour of the capitals of Europe, including Budapest, Paris, Rome, Vienna, Berlin, Florence, and Venice. They were instructed to purchase Old Master paintings, with the understanding that they'd be shipped back to New York, where Howard would peddle them to wealthy art collectors at inflated prices.

Sara by now had informed Francis that within the confines of their marriage, she would be the boss. When she became angry with him, she reminded him that she could have been a great star had she not abandoned the theater to marry him.

During their long, drawn-out honeymoon, Sara spent many a night alone in her hotel suite, as Francis sampled the night life of various capitals, often in the company of handsome young men.

On one occasion, Howard joined the newlyweds in Paris. His nephew was candid in his confession, telling his uncle that he was experiencing sexual difficulties with Sara. "I find men exciting, but I am not excited by the female body, except when it is depicted in art. We do go to bed on occasion, but it is not something I look forward to."

One of their sexual unions was fruitful, however. When Sara and Francis settled more permanently in London, she announced that she was pregnant.



Francis Lenn Taylor later in life. He had been described as having "a leonine head, lake-blue eyes, and thick dark lashes that spoke of adventure in faraway lands."

After settling into an unsuitable residence, Sara found her dream house on the edge of Hampstead Heath. She recorded in her diary that in the yard, "the tulips were almost three feet high, with forget-me-nots, yellow and lavender violas, flaming snapdragons, rich red wallflowers, and a formal rose garden terraced down to the Heath."

Their first child, a startlingly beautiful boy, was born in 1929. They named him Howard in honor of their patron, Howard Young.

At 35 Old Bond Street, Francis had immediate success with his art gallery, often catering to rich American tourists visiting London. Among less important work, he was selling paintings by Constable, Reynolds, and Gainsborough.

One slow, rainy afternoon, a handsome, gregarious bachelor, politician, sportsman, and art collector came into Francis’ gallery. He seemed to exude charm.

“Mr. Taylor, I presume,” he said in a cultured, aristocratic British accent. “I am Victor Cazalet. I collect art.” He paused, studying Francis carefully. “And other things that amuse me.”

Those who believe in love at first sight can point to Francis Taylor and Victor Cazalet to prove their case. Victor admired the paintings in Francis’ gallery so much he purchased three valuable ones that afternoon. Victor’s political enemies also spread the rumor that he purchased Francis, too.



Victor Cazalet A Member of Parliament

After Francis closed the gallery, he had drinks with Victor at The Dorchester, followed by a lavish dinner at a private supper club in Mayfair. Francis called Sara, telling her that he wouldn’t be home that night, as he was spending it with a very important new client.

At Victor’s flat the following morning, his butler served his boss and Francis breakfast. Francis was attired in one of Victor’s satin robes. Apparently, the conservative Member of Parliament and the art dealer found in each other what each of them had been searching for for such a long time. From that morning forth, until World War II drove them apart, Victor and Francis became almost inseparable.



and his sister, **Thelma Cazalet-Keir**

That night the two new lovers dined with Sara in Mayfair, Victor finding her a total delight. He obviously was pleased at how accepting she was of his newly formed relationship with her husband. Victor had a small bisexual streak in him, and soon he was bedding both Francis and Sara, but not at the same time. Most of his nights were spent in the arms of her husband.

"My brother practically adopted Sara and Francis, and they were seen everywhere together," claimed Victor's sister, Thelma Cazalet-Keir, who was also a Member of Parliament, one of the first women to occupy such a position. Advanced in thinking and outlook for a woman of her time, Thelma was understanding about her brother's need for love, either from Francis or Sara. She never disapproved of his friendship with the Taylors, and often spoke of it to family and friends. It is because of her that future Elizabeth Taylor fans have an insight into what was going on before her birth.

Victor introduced both Sara and Francis into the closed door world of tout London, as they met financiers, politicians, the literati, theatrical stars, and the ruling class of lords and ladies. "My brother took Francis everywhere—and sometimes Sara was included," Thelma said. "They visited great country houses of Victor's friends. Francis—and Sara, too—got to see a slice of Britain that would more or less disappear when World War II came. Victor lavished presents on Francis, even giving him a red Buick when you didn't see any red vehicles on the road, except for fire trucks.

Victor stood only five feet three and since childhood had been nicknamed "Teenie." Even though short of stature, he was a towering figure in Britain, numbering Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden among his closest friends, and Queen Victoria herself as his godmother. When Elizabeth was born, Churchill, at least on one occasion, bounced her on his knee. When she met Eden, she would invite him to ride her favorite horse. The horse objected, tossing the famous British leader into a rose bush.

One morning, Victor invited Francis to a junk shop along Kings Road in Chelsea. It was one of those occasions that happens about as often as the average person wins Lotto.

With his keen eye for art, Francis spotted a portrait of a man which appealed to him. Victor purchased it for him for five pounds.



Portrait of a Man by Frans Hals the Elder

The next week, Francis called in three experts who examined the picture, Portrait of a Man, and defined it as having been painted by Frans Hals the Elder (c. 1580-1666), a Dutch Golden Age painter who is best known today for his portraits.

The valuable painting, years later, was owned by Francis' daughter, Elizabeth Taylor, who was advised by art experts to value it at \$2.3 million. Portrait of a Man became the cornerstone of her personal collection of world-class masterpieces.

Victor was a close friend of Dame Rebecca West (1892-1983), who was defined by one writer as "the greatest

woman since Elizabeth I." During her youth, West was a fiery suffragette and socialist, and, as she matured, she became one of the foremost publicly famous intellectuals of the 20th Century.

When Victor invited Francis to spend an afternoon with Dame Rebecca, she later said, "Francis was one of the handsomest men I'd ever met—a leonine head, lake-blue eyes, and thick dark lashes that spoke of adventure in faraway lands."

In the late 1930s, Victor took Francis and their newly born daughter, Elizabeth, to spend an afternoon in the country with Dame Rebecca. Elizabeth always remembered meeting this formidable woman. In later life, after Elizabeth had become a public advocate in the struggle against AIDS, she said, "Dame Rebecca was a kind of role model for me. I decided that before I died, I wanted to be known for something other than collecting diamonds."

Victor became so enamored of Francis, and of Sara as well, that he presented them with a country home, Little Swallows, which was a fourteen-room, 16th-Century gatekeeper's lodge located on his 3,000-acre country estate, Great Swifts, near Cranbrook, Kent. The home had been named after the birds that lived outside young Elizabeth's bedroom window. Locals referred to it as a haunted house, and it was immortalized in the Jeffry Farnols novel, *The Broad Highway*.

When Howard Young flew to London and learned about Francis' close relationship with Victor, he invited both young men to go with him on an art-buying spree in Paris. Howard joined them on wild nights on the town, as they patronized such clubs as L'Elephant Blanc, Scheherazade, and Monseigneur.

"Those two couldn't hold their firewater," Howard later revealed to his close friends in New York. "They kissed and held hands. They giggled and nibbled ears. They even danced together. Their behavior was acceptable for Paris, but, as I warned them, such antics surely would not be tolerated in Britain, where Victor was a leading member of the Conservative Parliament. What would Winston Churchill say?"

During a visit to Little Swallows, the distinguished art critic, Charles R. Stephens, said, "Victor and Francis were very, very close. One would start a sentence and the other would finish it. It was all too apparent that these two men were in love, but in the art world of London, I was accustomed to such liaisons."

Allen T. Knots, who worked at the time as an editor at Simon & Schuster in New York, visited Little Swallows as a house guest. "In the middle of the night, I got up to use the bathroom. Out in the hallway, I saw both Victor and Francis chasing after each other. Each of them was totally drunk and jaybird naked. Victor and Francis occupied the master bedroom, and Sara slept in an adjoining room." This was revealed by Knots to Robert Rhodes James, Victor's biographer.

Often, Victor was away on some political event. When he was not in London, Francis was seen with a tall, handsome, blonde-haired twenty-year-old, Marshall Baldrige, who worked as his assistant in Francis' art gallery. Francis was about twenty-five years older than Baldrige.

During the late 1930s, Dame Rebecca said, "Victor was a man of great charm, but as an intellect, he was definitely a featherweight. He could be incredibly naïve." She cited his strong support of General Francisco Franco and his Fascists during the Spanish Civil War.

In Rome, Cazalet said, "I'm very impressed with Benito Mussolini. The government of Italy is a one-man show, and law, order, and prosperity reign supreme today." In 1937, he visited a concentration camp in Bavaria, and later cited it for being "quite well run with no undue misery or discomfort. The prisoners seemed quite content."

But after that, just before the outbreak of World War II, Cazalet, along with Winston Churchill, opposed the appeasement of Adolf Hitler by Britain's Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. Victor also became the leading exponent in England for the promotion of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. He was most sympathetic to the plight of the Jews throughout history. He wrote, "If I were a Jew, I would cling onto the idea of a sovereign state for all I was worth."

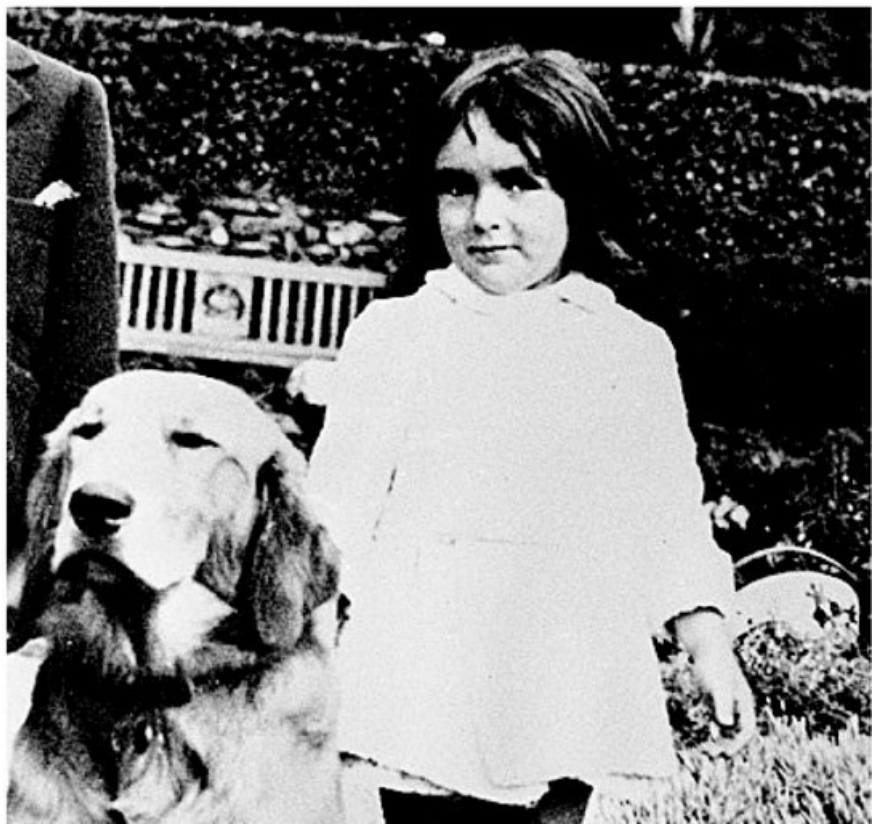
Often, Victor and Francis preferred to spend weekends in London, with Sara and their son, Howard, stashed in Kent. The two men attended concerts together and often saw plays in the West End.

On one occasion, they met a handsome and charismatic young actor, Laurence Olivier, and became intimate friends with him. A bisexual, Olivier often spent nights with Francis and Victor in their London flat. Olivier's envious chief rival, John Gielgud, spread stories about how the three young men were involved in a *ménage à trois*.

When he heard these rumors, Victor denounced Gielgud as "a silly old queen. He's no doubt jealous that he's not included."

During the summer of 1931, Sara prepared a special dinner for Victor and Francis in London at the home near Hampstead Heath. She had an announcement to make.

At the end of the dinner, when the men sat in the library enjoying their brandy, she came in to tell her secret. "I visited the doctor today. We are going to have an addition to our family. Surely no little infant in all the world could be blessed to have two such wonderful fathers."



top photo: Baby Elizabeth, Sara, and brother **Howard** bottom photo: **Baby Elizabeth** with a guardian.

CHAPTER TWO

The Girl With the Violet Eyes

Sara Taylor completely distorted her version of Elizabeth's birth when she wrote an article for McCall's in 1954. "As the precious bundle was placed in my arms, my heart stood still. There, inside the cashmere shawl, was the funniest looking baby I had ever seen! Her hair was long and black. Her ears were covered with a thick black fuzz and inlaid into the sides of her head. Her nose looked like a tip-tilted button, and her tiny face was so tightly closed it looked as if it would never unfold."

Sara also declared that Elizabeth went ten days before opening her eyes. "That's poppycock," claimed Thelma Cazalet-Keir, Victor's sister, who had been appointed as the child's godmother. "I visited the day after the birth. Her eyes were not only wide open, they were as blue as a summer day."

In time, the child would become celebrated for her violet eyes.

After leaving the Taylor home, Thelma reported back to the Cazalet family. "That is definitely Victor's child. I think she should be named Elizabeth Taylor-Cazalet."

The little girl was born with a genetic mutation—distichiasis, aka a double set of eyelashes. Child actor Roddy McDowall would later recall that during the making of *Lassie Come Home* (1943), the director called out, "Get that girl off the set—she has too much eye makeup on, too much mascara."

Back in the makeup department, it was ascertained that Elizabeth was wearing no mascara at all. "That double set of eyelashes was the real thing," Roddy said.

Elizabeth also had a localized form of hypertrichosis, which in the cases of most babies with the condition disappears after they're three months old. However, in Elizabeth's case, this chromosomal abnormality would sometimes reoccur, especially on her arms, and she'd have to have excess hair removed by electrolysis. One morning, her then-husband, Richard Burton, said he woke up in the dark and reached for his wife. "Bloody hell, I thought I'd gone to bed drunk with a fucking monkey."

The excess hair on Baby Elizabeth's body soon faded away, and she began to be viewed as a very beautiful young girl, except for her big head. When she was old enough to form an opinion of herself, she said, "What a podge! A big head set on a dumpy body." And although her adult face would be universally applauded, her body often drew mixed reviews.

Her birth in 1932 was registered in the very unfashionable blue collar district of Hendon, bordering chic Hampstead. Years later, Elizabeth would claim that she had been born in Hampstead, although her future husband, Richard Burton, would remind her, "Ducky, you were just a low-rent girl from Hendon."

As she grew older, her brother Howard called her "Lizzie the Lizard." From then onward, she always hated to be called "Liz." All of her friends knew to refer to her as "Elizabeth." She was furious in 1995 when C. David Heymann published a thick (and well-respected) biography of her and entitled it *Liz*.

An art patron, Philip Beaver, purchased two valuable paintings from Francis at his Mayfair gallery and was invited back to Golders Green for dinner. He recalled the night. "I saw them socially, and both Sara and Francis looked unhappy. Francis drank a lot. I don't think he wanted to be a family man. He spent most of the evening talking about Victor Cazalet. There was a story making the rounds of Mayfair that Francis had once been arrested in a gents' toilet for inappropriate behavior. Their son, Howard, was a classic beauty. I was shown Elizabeth in her cradle. She was a strange little thing, with lashes so long they'd have looked more appropriate on a Soho tart. She still had her baby hair and a thick downy pelt. Who would have thought that such a little creature would grow into one of the world's most glamorous women?"

As each passing year went by, Elizabeth grew into the dark-haired beauty that she was to become. Victor doted on her, buying her expensive presents. In many way, he seemed more like a father to her than Francis.

When Elizabeth turned three years old, she came down with her most serious illness to date, a harbinger of many afflictions that would haunt her for the rest of her life.

Hearing that she'd been running a fever of 103°, and how desperately ill she was, Victor drove through

"buckets of rain" for ninety miles to reach her side. He stayed with her, often sleeping with her in his arms and doctoring her himself, until her fever broke. According to his biographer, Robert Rhodes James, after three weeks by her side, ignoring his commitments, both business and political, he finally left. But he formed a bond with her that would last forever, even beyond his death.

With money provided by both Victor and Howard Young, now back in New York, the Taylor family lived an upperclass life, with a full-time chauffeur, three maids, a private chef, and a nanny. Victor and Francis made frequent commuter flights to Paris, where they bought fashionable frocks "for our little daughter."

When Elizabeth was old enough, Victor bought her her first horse, which she named "Betty." She rode it around his 3,000-acre estate. Later, she would claim that, "My greatest happiness as a child was riding Betty through the woodlands of Kent."

"I had the best of both worlds," Elizabeth later said. "The lovely countryside of Kent and that beautiful home in London where I would wander through the Heath every afternoon."

In a touch of irony, the Hampstead house where Francis and Sara lived had previously been owned by Augustus John, the Welsh painter who before World War I was known as the leading exponent of post-Impressionism in Britain.

In London, his work was compared to that of both Matisse and Gauguin. A great deal of his fame rested on his style of portraiture, which was both imaginative and extravagant. By the 1920s, he'd become Britain's leading portrait painter, interpreting subjects who included T.E. Lawrence (the famous Lawrence of Arabia), Tallulah Bankhead, George Bernard Shaw, and Thomas Hardy.

When Augustus John moved out of his Hampstead house for other digs, he'd abandoned several of his paintings, leaving them still hanging on the walls. Francis seized them as his property and shipped them to New York, where Howard Young sold them at exorbitant prices.



Acclaimed English portraitist **Augustus John** (right figure, above) with the then-toast of London, **Tallulah Bankhead**, and his portrait of her

Francis and Victor often visited John, who had a habit of not finishing and discarding paintings that displeased him. Several times, Francis discreetly rescued them from the garbage and quietly sent them to New York where they, too, brought high prices. Francis, in fact, is interpreted today as the dealer who was most instrumental in making John famous among consumers and critics in America.

In spite of Francis' exploitation of John, the two men became friends. Francis was astonished at John's "insatiable sexual appetite," as the artist himself defined his condition. "My appetite has destroyed the women who love me best," John told Victor and Francis. As art critic Brian Sewell said, "He was driven to draw the women whom he bedded, and bed the women whom he drew."

Many of John's drawings were of beautiful nudes. Introduced to Elizabeth when she was six years old, he asked Sara and Francis if he could paint her. Both of them were overjoyed, and so was Victor. However, when

Sara learned that Elizabeth would have to pose in the nude, she objected.

Years later, in Hollywood, Elizabeth would express her deep regret. "I should have posed bare ass for Augustus. My God, that painting today would be worth millions."

When she came of age, Elizabeth attended school at Byron House, which was known for being "snobbish and strict" and reserved for children of only the finest families. She rebelled at the green cotton smock she was forced to wear like the rest of the girls. "I don't ever want to dress like the rest," she told her teachers. "When I grow up, I will wear only clothes designed just for me."

Elizabeth also studied dance at the Vacani Dance School on Brompton Road, run by Pauline Vacani and her daughter, Betty. Years later, in Hollywood, Elizabeth claimed that she attended school with the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret Rose. But that wasn't quite true. For the royal sisters, a private instructor was sent to teach dance to the girls at Buckingham Palace. Betty denied that Elizabeth ever studied ballet at the school, as she'd later tell interviewers. "We didn't teach ballet to girls that young. Elizabeth learned dance routines such as tap, polka, and such social dancing as the waltz."



The **Duchess of York** (Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, later Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother) in 1935 with her daughters, **Elizabeth** and **Margaret Rose**

Members of the royal family did, however, attend an end-of-semester recital. The Duchess of York (later to become Queen Elizabeth, wife of George VI) attended, bringing the royal daughters, Elizabeth and Margaret Rose. After her presentation, Elizabeth (Taylor), dressed as a butterfly, remained on the stage by herself, curtsying and taking bows until the stage manager was forced to draw the curtain. Sara later recalled the incident. "I had given birth to a ham."

Before she left England for America, Elizabeth did meet Margaret Rose on two other occasions when they were very young. "She gave me my first cigarette—called a fag—to smoke. I smoked it, or rather choked on it, and we talked about boys. Margaret and I were very advanced for our age, and we were thinking about the opposite sex when most girls our age were still nursing their dolls."

Sara noticed this early interest in boys. "Elizabeth was maturing too fast."

Francis told both Victor and Sara, as well as Thelma, that there was no cause for alarm. "Haven't you heard of childhood sexuality? Five-year-old kids can show an interest in sex. If you don't believe me, go sign up for a session with Anna Freud. She practices in London and is said to be an expert on child sexuality."



Top photo: Young **JFK** in 1937, and (bottom photo) the future Ambassador to the Court of Saint James's, **Joseph Patrick Kennedy** ("Papa Joe") and his wife, **Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy**, in 1938

Elizabeth and Margaret Rose would meet again officially on several more occasions.

In addition to introducing Francis and Sara to leading members of English society and politics, Victor also introduced them to prominent Americans living in London. In 1939, none was more famous than Joseph P. Kennedy, U.S. Ambassador to the Court of St. James's.

At one point, Victor had suggested to Ambassador Kennedy that he should have his portrait painted by Augustus John. Victor invited Rose Kennedy and the Ambassador for a visit at Francis' Mayfair art gallery, knowing that he could make the arrangements for such a portrait.

A deal was never struck, but Francis bonded with the Ambassador and Mrs. Kennedy. The expatriate Americans got along so well that the ambassador invited Sara, Francis, and Victor to a lavish party at the American Embassy on Grosvenor Square in Mayfair.

This was reciprocated by an invitation from Victor for the Kennedy family to spend a Sunday at his sprawling estate in Kent. It was on this occasion that a seven-year-old Elizabeth Taylor met the handsome and charismatic John F. Kennedy, who was twenty-two years old at the time.

Elizabeth would often discuss that afternoon with her friends in Hollywood. "I thought Jack was handsome,

tall, rich, and on the prowl. For the first time, I cursed myself for being so young. When he flashed that smile at me, I melted."

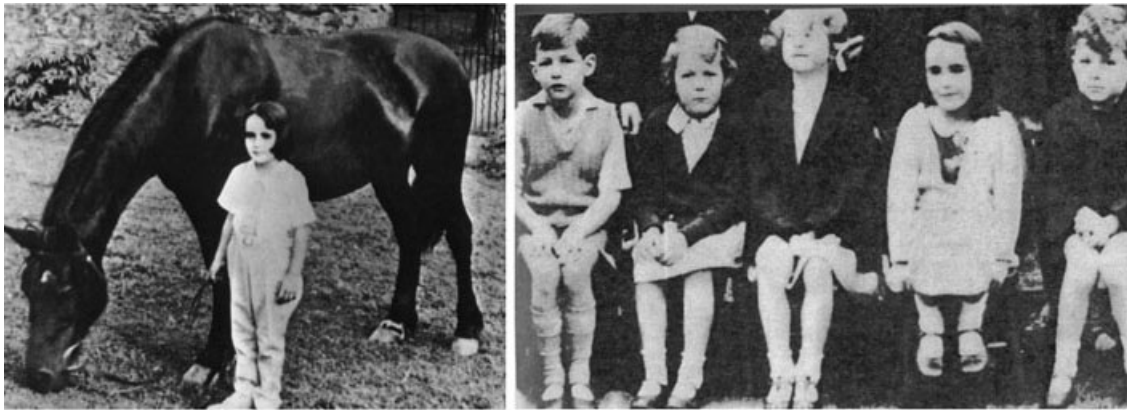
JFK and the young Elizabeth went horseback riding together. "I knew he wanted to be spending his Sunday with an older and more beautiful girl, but he was very gracious to me, although I could see that the look in his glazed eyes was far away."

Elizabeth later said that before the day ended, "I became very bold. Before we got back to Victor's home for dinner, I said something that must have amused him to no end. I told him that when I grew up, and that would be sooner, not later, I planned to marry him. When he looked at me with a most doubtful expression, I told him 'Even if you've not the kind of man who wants to get married, I plan to make you my boyfriend.'"

"You mean, you and me...lovers?" he asked.

"That's right. "You and me."

In spite of her young years, Elizabeth turned out to be clairvoyant.



Two views of **Baby Elizabeth**: left photo: Intuitively preparing for National Velvet, and right photo: a class portrait from 1937. Five-year-old **Elizabeth** is the fourth figure from the left.

CHAPTER THREE

Elizabeth's Imaginary Parents: SCARLETT AND RHETT

When the British government, in the spring of 1939, began passing out gas masks to Londoners, Sara Taylor decided it was time for Francis to evacuate Elizabeth and Howard to the relative safety of "Fortress America." Even Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy at London's American Embassy advised them to leave as soon as Francis could close down his affairs.

Francis could not stand the thought of being torn away from Victor Cazalet, but his British lover demanded that he go. Victor's close friend, Winston Churchill, had told them, "Hitler will not be appeased even if we offered him Southeast England. He'd then demand all the British Isles." Francis agreed to send Sara and his children back to the U.S., but told Victor that he wanted to stay with him in London during the upcoming war, which Victor was convinced could break out at any minute.

Victor and Francis were at London's Victoria Station to escort Sara, Howard, and Elizabeth off on the first stage of their departure aboard the SS Manhattan, scheduled for an eight-day crossing to the port of New York. Elizabeth always remembered her last Sunday in London, as Victor held her hand, showing her the trenches being dug around Hyde Park.



Baby Elizabeth with her older brother,
Howard

Aboard the vessel, Elizabeth, her mother, and her brother were made painfully aware of the oncoming war. Most of their fellow passengers were Jews fleeing the Nazis in Austria and Germany. Elizabeth heard much talk of Hitler's takeover of the hopelessly outmaneuvered Czechoslovakia.

Before her departure from London, Elizabeth had cut out a picture from The Times showing three smiling faces—the Joseph P. Kennedys, Sr. and Jr. and the dashing John F. Kennedy. She took her mother's scissors and cut away the ambassador and his oldest son. She then attached the picture of young JFK to her cabin wall.

Noticing this unprecedented interest, Sara penned a letter back to Francis in London. Before the ship reached New York, she'd write him a total of eight letters, each posted upon the ship's arrival in the New World.

In one of them, Sara wrote, "Elizabeth is not only showing an interest in boys, but in young men such as that divine Jack Kennedy, the ambassador's son. What happened on that horseback ride they took? At Elizabeth's

age, I was not interested in boys, but in my new doll, or in my new dress. I fear we can expect the announcement of an early marriage for our only daughter. As for Howard, he is so beautiful, I have to keep a constant watch on him to protect him from some of the passengers, who appear to me to be pedophiles.”

For Elizabeth, a life-changing event occurred as the SS Manhattan sailed across the watery North Atlantic grave of the Titanic. As part of their onboard entertainment, the passengers were shown a film, *The Little Princess* (1939), starring Shirley Temple, then one of the world’s leading box office sensations. It was the story of a motherless daughter placed in an exclusive girls’ school while her father goes off to fight the Boers. After his death, the money for her school is cut off, and she is relegated to the role of a servant.

Throughout the film, seven-year-old Elizabeth sat mesmerized, watching Temple. Over breakfast the next morning, Elizabeth announced to Sara, “When we get to Hollywood, I plan to become a child star. I would be so much better than that goody-goody, curly haired, chubby-cheeked lollipop sucker. She just cries out, ‘I’m adorable...Don’t you think so too?’ She makes me sick at my stomach. I read in a movie magazine that she’s four years older than me. That means she’ll soon be too old to play the part of a five-year-old. Someone’s going to replace her. You’re looking at her—namely, me. I’ll give the little tart one thing, though. Her legs are better than mine.”



Diva rage from a seven-year-old:
Shirley Temple as *The Little Princess*

Apparently, Sara was shocked at such talk from one so young—and by such determination and ambition.

Arriving in glamorous pre-war New York, Elizabeth was enthralled. No one seemed to be worried about war clouds looming over Europe.

After four days, the Taylors traveled by train to California.

Sara had faced a choice of living in California or New York, and she’d already had the experience of living in both states. Her happier and better days had been spent in Los Angeles, where she’d enjoyed her greatest success as an actress. She still associated Broadway with her series of theatrical flops. Publicly, she said that she wanted to be close to her family, who had moved to California. But there was apparently another reason, a secret she may have kept to herself. She wanted to help her strong-willed daughter in rising to the rank of a child star.

Once there, they were driven to a chicken farm owned by Sara’s father in San Gabriel. Neither Sara nor Elizabeth could tolerate the place, both of them longing for the excitement of urban life. “After we left,” Elizabeth recalled, “I swore I’d never look at another egg as long as I lived.”

Sara’s father drove Elizabeth and Sara in a pickup truck to Los Angeles, where they found a temporary house rental for \$75 a month. Elizabeth later jokingly recalled to her friends, “I made a grand entrance into Hollywood smelling like chicken shit.”

Sara was later accused of becoming a stage mother from hell, pushing her daughter into a film career. Sara

denied that. "Later on, that might have been true, but in the beginning, my daughter was determined to become the next child star, replacing Shirley Temple. It was her idea. She turned on the charm with anybody who might help her. I wrote Francis that our daughter was seven years old going on thirty."

Francis eventually managed to tear himself away from Victor and their life together in London and departed to join his family in California. Reunited at last, Francis opened a branch of his increasingly well-known art gallery at the Château Élysée in Hollywood, but soon moved it to the dramatically more up-scale Beverly Hills Hotel, on its the lower level, with easy access to the hotel's outdoor swimming pool. Art lovers Vincent Price and Edward G. Robinson were among his early patrons.

Elizabeth settled into a daily routine: After finishing classes at The Willard School, a private day school near Pasadena, Elizabeth was driven to the gallery, where she studied her lessons, hoping to spot movie stars out by the pool. She remembered that James Mason was the first film star she spotted. He was a bit tipsy when she went up to him. "You're very beautiful," he told her. "Come back in ten years, and I'll make mad, passionate love to you."

The talk in Hollywood at the time involved the filming that had recently begun on *Gone With the Wind*. The novel the movie was based on was a bestseller by Atlanta's Margaret Mitchell.

After the producer, David O. Selznick, evaluated such stars as Ronald Colman, Errol Flynn, Gary Cooper, Basil Rathbone, and (unbelievably) Humphrey Bogart, he'd settled on a reluctant Clark Gable for the male lead of Rhett Butler.

Selznick's search for the film's heroine, Scarlett O'Hara, had ignited a nationwide talent hunt. Many of the contenders were already established stars, and included an aging Tallulah Bankhead, Miriam Hopkins, Paulette Goddard, Joan Crawford, Katharine Hepburn, Joan Bennett, Joan Fontaine, Susan Hayward, and (unbelievably) Lucille Ball.



Gone with the Wind and the role
Baby Elizabeth didn't get:

Two views of Victoria Regina Butler
("Bonnie Blue") as played by
Elizabeth's rival, **Cammie King**.

Top photo: With **Clark Gable** and
bottom, with a disinterested
Vivien Leigh

Finally, Selznick discovered "my Scarlett," in the person of a relative newcomer to U.S. audiences, Vivien Leigh, a British beauty and a lover of Laurence Olivier, who was also in Hollywood at the time, preparing for his signature role in *Wuthering Heights*. Elizabeth had previously encountered Olivier in London, where he had often been intimately associated with Victor and Francis.

In her (very vanilla) memoirs, published in 1964 under the title of *Elizabeth Taylor* by Elizabeth Taylor, she said, "I would be out with my mother shopping, and people would come up and say, 'Your daughter looks so much like Vivien Leigh! Go to Selznick's studio and have her tested for Vivien Leigh's daughter.' Of course, each time, I was thrilled."

Elizabeth learned that the role of Victoria Eugenia, also known as "Bonnie Blue," the daughter of Rhett and Scarlett, had not yet been cast. When she learned that the role involved riding a pony, she said, "The part is mine. I know how to ride. MGM won't have to give me riding lessons."

Elizabeth was encouraged and, to some degree, sponsored in her bid for the role by three famous Hollywood players—Vivien Leigh, Greta Garbo, and gossip maven Hedda Hopper.

Knowing how much his daughter wanted the role, Francis telephoned Olivier, his former lover, and invited him to visit, with Vivien, the Taylor family at their home in Beverly Hills.

Although they arrived an hour late, "Larry and Viv" dazzled seven-year-old Elizabeth. Years later, she would often recall meeting this romantic couple. "Each one, both Larry and Vivien, was more beautiful than the other. I could-n't decide. Right there and then, I wanted to grow up to look just like Vivien."

Over drinks, Vivien told Elizabeth's parents, "Your daughter is stunningly beautiful. If I had a daughter, I would want her to look just like Elizabeth. I'm going to beg David Selznick and George Cukor to cast her as Bonnie Blue."

Olivier had brought along a script that laid out the young character's part. Elizabeth might have been disappointed at how small the role was, but she thanked Olivier and Vivien profusely and said she'd await word about whether MGM would grant her a screen test.

Elizabeth was told that within the context of the film, Rhett Butler would kiss Bonnie more frequently than he'd kiss Scarlett. "I know what I'm going to do," Elizabeth told Sara. "When Clark Gable leans over to kiss me good night, I'm going to grab his cheeks and give him a sloppy one. I know the director will cut it out of the picture, but for the rest of my life, I can claim that I got my first screen kiss from Clark Gable himself. I hope his mustache doesn't scratch me."

Nothing ever came of Vivien's offer, and Elizabeth harbored a grudge against her for the rest of her life.

Many years later, Elizabeth felt a sense of triumph when she was called in to replace an emotionally unstable Vivien Leigh in *Elephant Walk*, most of which had already been filmed in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) before Vivien had a complete mental breakdown. Released to theaters in 1954, the film still depicted Vivien in its long shots, with all of the close-ups rather awkwardly completed, months later, by Elizabeth.



Greta Garbo (photo above) to young Elizabeth: "You're the only girl in Hollywood I would even consider."

A few days after her inaugural meeting with Vivien at her parents' home, Elizabeth was in her father's gallery when Greta Garbo walked in to evaluate the kind of art Francis was selling.

Noticing Elizabeth, Garbo turned to Francis and said, "What a divine child you have. She is far too beautiful for the movies."

Hearing that, Elizabeth approached Garbo. "Oh, ma'am. My father took me to see you and Robert Taylor in *Camille*. You are the most beautiful woman in the world."

"How very kind, in spite of your misjudgment," Garbo responded.

"If you ever make a movie that calls for your daughter, let me play her," Elizabeth pleaded.

"You're the only girl in Hollywood I would even consider," Garbo said. "But I think, at the moment, you'd be ideal cast as Vivien Leigh's daughter in *Gone With the Wind*. Tomorrow morning I will call Louis B. Mayer and recommend you."

"Oh, thank you, thank you," Elizabeth said, kissing her hand.

"What lovely manners," Garbo said to Francis. "Your daughter must have grown up in Europe."

Elizabeth never knew whether Garbo recommended her or not. At the time, Garbo was filming *Ninotchka* (1930), with one final movie to go, the disastrous *Two-Faced Woman* released in 1941 as her farewell to the screen. Neither of these movies contained a suitable role for Elizabeth.

Elizabeth would encounter Garbo again. In 1958, shortly after the death of Mike Todd, Elizabeth's third husband, the widow was receiving mourners in the den of her home. Suddenly, Garbo appeared before her. She placed a gentle hand on the new widow's. Into her ear, she whispered, "Be brave!" before disappearing.

The columnist, Hedda Hopper, remained young Elizabeth's last chance for the role of Bonnie Blue. Hopper was a friend of Victor Cazalet and his sister, Thelma Cazalet-Keir.

Hopper was already throwing business toward Francis, having herself purchased one of Augustus John's study of gypsy heads. She introduced him to Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Nelson Eddy, and David O. Selznick, who purchased a drawing by John for \$150, for which Francis had paid nothing. Elizabeth was sick that day and had not attended school, nor had she been at the art gallery at the day's end. "It was one of the disappointments of my life that I was not at the gallery the day Selznick arrived."

Nonetheless, Hopper suggested in her column that Elizabeth was a dead ringer for the role of Scarlett O'Hara's daughter, adding, "although she has never acted professionally." But as events unfolded, the dream of transforming Elizabeth into a juvenile replacement for singing star Deanna Durbin and/or Shirley Temple backfired, at least temporarily.

Sara had maneuvered Hopper into inviting Elizabeth to her home for an audition in her drawing room.

In a memoir, Hopper later evaluated the audition like this: "The young girl, her face clouded with worry and tears about to fall, sang a sweet song, 'The Blue Danube,' in a weak and thin voice. As she sang, she nervously fingered her hair and stared into space. It was one of the most painful ordeals I have ever witnessed. Finally, I

told Sara to let the child be a child, and not try to force her into the movies.”

Despite that pronouncement, Hopper would later take credit for “discovering Elizabeth Taylor.”

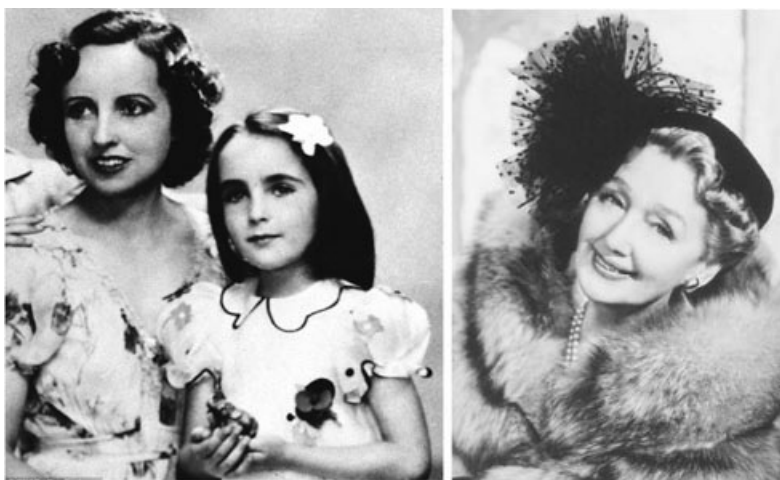
With money coming in from the gallery, and still subsidized to some degree by Howard back in New York, Francis eventually moved his family from Pasadena to the more fashionable community of Pacific Palisades, where their neighbors included Norma Shearer, the former queen of MGM, and Darryl F. Zanuck. In Elizabeth’s dancing classes, she made friends with Judy and Barbara Goetz, the grandchildren of Louis B. Mayer, who would soon become her boss.

In Sara’s words, Elizabeth ended up with a broken heart when Selznick and George Cukor cast four-year-old Cammie King in the small but pivotal role of Bonnie Blue.

In 1944, five years after the elaborate 1939 release of *Gone With the Wind*, Cammie’s mother brought her daughter for a visit with her movie star friend Irene Dunne during the filming of *The White Cliffs of Dover*. Alongside Dunne, Elizabeth Taylor was appearing in that movie with Roddy McDowall.

Cammie recalled, years later, “When I met Elizabeth, I realized what a rude and ill-mannered girl she was. She looked me straight in the eye and told me, ‘I could have played Bonnie Blue so much better than an ugly, gawky thing like you.’ Then she turned and walked away.”

In the mid-1990s, in a glut of regional nostalgia, the 60-something-year old Cammie King was signing autographs, dressed in an antebellum hoop skirt in the parking lot of a supermarket in the town of Washington, Georgia. There, the author of this book asked her about Elizabeth Taylor coveting her iconic role of Bonnie Blue. Cammie responded, “Even as a young girl, Elizabeth Taylor was far too brazen to play an innocent girl like Bonnie Blue. She was much more at home cast as a whore in *Butterfield 8*. Esther Williams, not Elizabeth Taylor, was my screen idol.”



THREE HOLLYWOOD PLAYERS: A ferociously ambitious stage mother (**Sara**; left figure above); **Baby Elizabeth** groomed and camera-ready; and (right figure) the infamously egomaniacal gossip columnist and former B-rated actress, **Hedda Hopper**.

Ironically, in 1957, MGM tried to replicate the box office bonanza associated with *Gone With the Wind* with the release of the big-budget Civil War epic, *Raintree County*, starring Elizabeth and Montgomery Clift. For her efforts, Elizabeth won an Oscar nomination as Best Actress, but *Raintree County*, beset with troubles throughout its filming, never approached the pathos and popular appeal of *Gone With the Wind*.

Despite her loss of a role in *Gone With the Wind*, Elizabeth continued to follow, with deep interest, the career of Clark Gable, and reciprocally, he saw most of her pictures, including *National Velvet*. To the press, he later defined her role as “The best ever performance given by a juvenile.”

By the late 1940s, Elizabeth was voicing violent objections to anyone daring to call her “a juvenile.” She wanted to play adult roles opposite MGM’s leading males. She desperately wanted to escape that awkward period that Shirley Temple had endured between playing pre-teen girls and becoming an adult.

Louis B. Mayer became aware of how Elizabeth had filled out, and how she appeared on screen as an actress far more mature than her actual age. An audacious idea was proposed: Elizabeth would appear on screen opposite Clark Gable as his love interest in an upcoming picture. But Mayer needed to be convinced, and he

persuaded Gable to appear in a screen test to see how the unlikely pair would emote.

Later, after Mayer viewed the results of that test, he referred to it as “grotesque,” and ordered all copies of it burned.

That screen test, however, lay in Elizabeth’s future as a late teenager. Back with her parents in Hollywood during World War II, she became a fast-rising child star, graduating not only from young girl roles but from Hollywood boys to Hollywood men.

It would be an arduous journey.

CHAPTER FOUR

Mother's Little Dividend INVADES HOLLYWOOD

Film critic Barry Monush accurately described the decades-long film career of Elizabeth Taylor like this: "For the most part, she was merely competent, sometimes inadequate, and now and then above average, with occasional instances where she rose most brilliantly to become something special."

But how did it all begin?

Elizabeth made her first appearance on the screen in a highly forgettable B-list comedy, *There's One Born Every Minute*, released by Universal Pictures in 1942. From such a box office disaster, one of the most publicized movie careers of all time was launched.

Before signing with Universal, she'd toured the studios at MGM, comparing it to a garden party with "happy child actors running and playing." She wanted an association with the top-tier MGM instead of with some second-rate studio turning out B-list comedy/horror films like *Abbott and Costello's Hold That Ghost* (1941), which she'd recently seen. Sara, however, had warned her, "Sometimes, movie stars don't have a choice of studios, but take what is offered, including pictures they don't want to make."

Elizabeth's career got a jump start when Andrea Cowden—the wife of J. Cheever Cowden, CEO of Universal Studios—made a happenstance visit to the Howard Young Gallery in Beverly Hills, where she met Francis. Through Francis, she purchased \$20,000 worth of Augustus John sketches and paintings, some of which Francis had stolen from the trash can of the Welsh painter.

On the wall of the gallery, Sara had affixed a photo of her daughter next to a photographic portrait of Vivien Leigh. Andrea commented on the similarities of their features. That casual remark catalyzed an invitation from Sara to the Cowdens for tea at the Taylor home in Beverly Hills. "Tea" turned out to be filet of beef Wellington with caviar, followed by a fresh raspberry parfait.

Dressed in frilly clothing, Elizabeth was brought out after dinner. Sara had spent most of the day grooming her. J. Cheever Cowden seemed stunned, pronouncing her "the most beautiful girl I've ever seen."

Francis later recalled, "Cowden put his money where his mouth was." On April 21, 1941, he signed Elizabeth to a five-month contract at Universal, with a salary of one-hundred dollars per week.

In the project that evolved out of all this, *There's One Born Every Minute* (1942), Elizabeth appeared briefly onscreen with the film's star, Carl ("Alfalfa") Switzer, a refugee from the *Our Gang* comedies. In the 1970s, decades later, on television's *The David Frost Show*, Elizabeth claimed that in her screen debut, "I played a beastly child who runs around slinging rubber bands at fat ladies' bottoms."



Top photo, inset: **Carl Switzer ("Alfalfa")**
 "He taught me every curse word I'd need."

Lower photo: **Baby Elizabeth**, aged ten, in
 There's One Born Every Minute

Known for his specialty of singing off-key, Switzer ("Alfalfa") was dark haired, freckle faced, and known for his foul mouth. He taught Elizabeth "every curse word I'd need until the end of my days." Perhaps Alfalfa should be blamed for the origins of her soon-to-be-infamous potty mouth.

Alfalfa was the first to experience what became known in Hollywood as "the Liz Taylor curse." In the years ahead, many of her co-stars would die prematurely. Of course, Elizabeth had nothing to do with these early deaths, including those of Montgomery Clift and James Dean. Even so, gossips labeled her as "The Black Widow." Hedda Hopper once wrote, probably with bitchery, "The best way to die before your time is to get cast in a Liz Taylor picture."

Years after his career had peaked, on the night of January 21, 1959, the forty-year-old Switzer went to the Mission Hills, California, home of Moses ("Bud") Stiltz as part of an effort to collect a \$50 reward that Stiltz owed him for retrieving his lost dog. Both men had been drinking, and the encounter ended in a single gunshot wound. Switzer ("Alfalfa") was fatally wounded as a bullet desecrated his genitals.

In the enquiries and trials that followed, Stiltz was absolved of all charges, claiming he'd killed the actor in self-defense.

Dan Kelly, the casting director at Universal, sat through Elizabeth's film debut. He reported back to his

bosses, "Her eyes are old, and she just doesn't have the face of a kid. In fact, she has nothing at all. Give me Margaret O'Brien any time." On Kelly's recommendation, Universal did not renew Elizabeth's contract after the inaugural five months.

The Taylor household was a sad and gloomy place during the early 1940s. After the U.S. officially entered World War II in December of 1941, affluent patrons no longer invested heavily in art. The Taylors hoped that their daughter's acting career might recoup some of their much-needed income.

At this point, Howard Young, Francis' uncle and patron, no longer contributed to their welfare, although he did offer a twenty percent commission on any art work Francis sold within his gallery. Otherwise, he did not send checks, perhaps figuring it was time for the Taylors to survive on their own merits.

The mood brightened when Victor Cazalet announced that the British government had instructed him, as part of a secret mission, to visit New York and California during the late spring of 1943. Francis flew from Los Angeles to New York to be on hand to greet Victor. The two men booked a suite at Manhattan's Waldorf Astoria Hotel, where neither of them emerged for the first twenty-four hours.



Casting director at Universal,
about Baby Elizabeth: "Give
me Margaret O'Brien any
day."

Above: **Margaret O'Brien**

After concluding his business in Manhattan, Victor accompanied Francis to Los Angeles, where Sara met them at the airport with hugs and kisses. Victor was taken to their new home in Beverly Hills, where he moved into a bedroom with Francis. Sara had her own bedroom.

Elizabeth's "Daddy" was as loving as ever to "my precious daughter" when she arrived home from school. Victor seemed delighted when Sara falsely told him that Elizabeth had signed a lucrative seven-year contract with Universal. "She also has a spectacular film coming out." Elizabeth's picture with Alfalfa had not yet been released.

When Francis wasn't monopolizing Victor, Elizabeth doted on him, hugging and kissing him and sitting on his lap. Francis had recently tended to be cold and distant to her, sometimes slapping her when he got drunk. Victor was just the opposite, showering affection on her. He'd just arrived from war-torn London, but still, he had brought her some of her favorite sweets, purchased at Fortnum & Mason's before his departure.

During his days in Los Angeles, Francis drove Victor around for various speaking engagements where he reported on the progress of the war.

Victor's speeches, based partly on his standing as a godson of Queen Victoria, drew A-list audiences, members of which included English-born Greer Garson, who was at the time the virtual Queen of MGM, as well

as Mary Pickford, Basil Rathbone, and Robert Montgomery.

During their evenings together, Victor urged all of the Taylors to return to London when the war ended, assuring them that victory was almost certain, even though at that time in 1943, the war was going badly for the Allies.

Victor assured Elizabeth that the British film industry would undergo a great renaissance after the war ended. "You'll be an even bigger star in England than you would here in this horrible town dedicated to glitz and glamour."

Elizabeth would always remember Victor's tearful farewell. "Father just clung to him like he'd never see him again. I felt sorry for him that day and in the days to come. I knew how much he loved Victor. He never shared that love with Sara or me, but gave it all to Victor." Even though she was only nine years old, Elizabeth was a very perceptive child. She told Sara that "Victor and Francis are stuck together like glue."



Victor Cazalet (left figure in foreground) on May 24, 1943, six weeks before his death, receiving Polish government documents from Stanislaw Grabski (right), an outspoken opponent of the Nazis and a key figure in Poland's government-in-exile.

That was not said with any disdain. From an early age, Elizabeth seemed very accepting of homosexuality, although she surely knew little about the inner workings of such relationships. She'd later say, "Love of one's fellow man is too precious a gift to be outlawed in any way."

Her knowledge of heterosexuality was also extremely limited during those days as well, although that was about to change.

A few short weeks after Victor's return to a war-torn Europe, the Taylors were notified of his death. On the foggy morning of July 12, 1943, his Liberator bomber, returning from a trip to the Middle East en route to London, stopped for refueling at Gibraltar. The plane crashed almost immediately after takeoff, going down in the harbor. On board was General Wladyslaw Sikorski, the Prime Minister of Poland in exile. Victor was functioning at the time as his aide. Charges of the plane's sabotage were never proven, although speculation was rampant.

Victor's death made headlines in London's Daily Mail, with journalist Ward Price writing that Victor "was one of the gayest and most versatile figures in public life."

Throughout the rest of her life, Elizabeth maintained her contacts with members of the Cazalet family. Victor's niece, Sheran Cazalet, asserted, "Elizabeth always arrives dressed in black in honor of Victor's long-ago death. No plunging décolletage—she knows I don't allow that."

No one missed Victor more than Francis. After Victor's death, he retreated to his blackened-out bedroom, surviving mainly on whiskey and an occasional cup of broth. Both Elizabeth and Sara could hear his cries of anguish at night. On two occasions, Sara had to summon doctors when he threatened suicide. After Francis emerged from his dank cell, he was colder and more distant than ever. He would never allow the mention of

Victor's name within earshot.

To Sara, Francis seemed a lost cause. She turned all her energy toward the promotion of Elizabeth's stalled career, inviting any possible contact she'd made with members of the film industry to their home in Beverly Hills, into which they'd moved after a brief period in Pacific Palisades. The Mediterranean-style villa would be Elizabeth's final residence before she left home to marry Nicky Hilton.

While Sara worked behind the scenes to promote Elizabeth's career, she, along with her brother Howard, attended Hawthorn Elementary School, a short distance from her house. Fellow classmates mocked the British accents of both brother and sister.



Francis Taylor with four-year-old **Baby Elizabeth** in 1936 on the sands at Brighton

Elizabeth's agent, who believed in her as "yet-untapped talent," was none other than Myron Selznick, the brother of David O. Selznick, who had rejected Elizabeth as a candidate for the role of Bonnie Blue in *Gone With the Wind*.

On her tenth birthday, Elizabeth invited some of her friends to her parents' home, where Sara had purchased a large birthday cake. As Elizabeth blew out the candles, she said, "Here I am, only ten years old, and already washed up in the fucking movies."

Sara seemed (or pretended to be) shocked at the use of Elizabeth's language. But she'd have to get used to it. One of the film industry's most unrepentant potty mouths was coming into bloom.

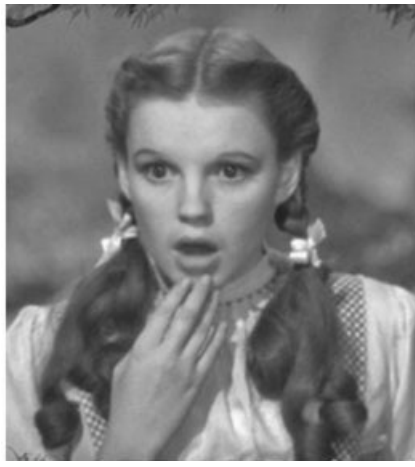
Every morning over breakfast, before Elizabeth went off to school, Sara told her, "You're going to be a movie star. Any day now, we're going to meet the right man who will award you a contract. You're growing more beautiful every day. Someone in Hollywood is going to take note, someone, somebody, some day."

Sara spoke the truth to her ten-year-old daughter. Her stardom at MGM, a studio that had previously rejected her, was growing brighter and more visible. It came about through a chance encounter.

Samuel Marx, a producer at MGM, lived on the same street in Beverly Hills as the Taylors. At night, he was an air-raid warden supervising government-mandated blackouts which were regularly enforced in an era when air attacks from Japan were envisioned and feared. Francis also volunteered for duty, and he and Marx often talked about Francis' daughter, Elizabeth.

One night, Marx told Francis that he'd had to fire a young Maria Flynn, who had previously appeared with Ingrid Bergman in *Intermezzo* (1939). Flynn had, prior to her dismissal, been scheduled for a role in a movie, at the time under production, called *Lassie Come Home*. As it happened, the role of Priscilla, the granddaughter of an English duke (played by Nigel Bruce), was up for grabs.

Describing Flynn, Marx told Francis, "When we filmed a test, she (Flynn) stood a foot taller than our young male lead (Roddy McDowall)," Marx said. "We can't have that. I've seen your daughter, and she seems right, if she can act. Another thing...The part calls for a British accent. That, Elizabeth has."



Baby Elizabeth: "I could have done it better as Dorothy." Photo above: "that horrible" **Judy Garland** from The Wizard of Oz

Francis hurried home that Friday afternoon and told Sara, who immediately dressed Elizabeth for a visit to MGM. It was nearly 6pm when they arrived for a meeting with the film's then-novice director, Fred Wilcox, but Sara couldn't wait for Monday morning.

On the way to MGM, with Sara piloting a secondhand Chevrolet with a weak battery, Elizabeth kept saying, "Oh Mommy, Mommy, I'm going to be a bigtime movie star. MGM has all the big stars—Clark Gable, Greta Garbo, Katharine Hepburn, Spencer Tracy, and that horrible little girl, Judy Garland, who did such a bad job in The Wizard of Oz. I could have done it so much better as Dorothy."

Wilcox always remembered Elizabeth's arrival on a set at MGM. "Her mother had dressed her in a purplish cape, which colored her eyes," he said. "I may have started all this shit about her eyes being violet. She was beautiful, very dramatic, very theatrical. I cast her on the spot. I was doubly lucky when I saw how she bonded with Lassie. She just assumed it was a female dog. But Lassie was a male dog named Pal. The collie became known on the MGM lot as the only star who could play a bitch better than Bette Davis."

"I thought the mother, Sara, was a nanny," Wilcox said. "I'd heard that Sara was once a great beauty, but she looked like the stocky matron type in 1942."

"The collie was getting ninety dollars a week," Wilcox said. "We raised the dog's salary to \$250 a week. We signed Elizabeth for \$75 a week."

Louis B. Mayer approved of the arrangements, although his early assessment of Elizabeth was dismal. "No dimples like that Shirley Temple twat. No voice like the Judy Garland lez. No voice like the goody-goody Jane Powell, who sings so sweet on radio. And Taylor can't cry on command like Margaret O'Brien. But sign her up anyway. We'll see what the limey little bitch can do."

Rare for a B picture, Lassie Come Home was shot in color. Neither Marx nor Wilcox liked the way Elizabeth looked in color. Marx wanted to dye her hair blonde. "In color, her hair photographed as blue-black. She wore too much mascara, or so I thought. Actually, they were her real lashes. I told Sara to pluck them, but she refused. I also wanted to remove that mole on her face. I even wanted to change her name to Virginia Taylor. But Sara and Elizabeth refused all my requests. Finally, I said 'to hell with it. Photograph her the way she is.'"



Lassie and **Roddy McDowall** in *Lassie Come Home* (1943)

On the second day of shooting, ten-year-old Elizabeth met another child actor, Roddy McDowall, who, at the age of fourteen, had already been in a hit called *How Green Was My Valley* (1939).



E.T. and **Lassie** in *The Courage of Lassie* (1946)

"That god damn collie is going to steal the picture from us," were his first words to her.

The friendship that formed between Elizabeth and Roddy would last a lifetime. Each of them shared their most private secrets with each other, and as the years went by, those secrets became more scandalous than ever.

"I was enchanted with Elizabeth the moment I saw her," Roddy later recalled. "What a beautiful child, but her head was almost that of a young woman, an incredible sight. I introduced her to fellow cast members Elsa Lanchester and Dame Mae Whitty, two old ball crackers."

Elizabeth told Roddy that, "My mother, Sara, will stop at nothing until I'm a household name. My brother Howard is even more beautiful than I am. At first, Sara tried to promote him as a child star. She and my father, Francis, got into a bitter fight. He accused her of trying to peddle Howard to a producer who is known for molesting children. Howard would have none of it. The Botticelli angel shaved his head bald the day he was to be screen-tested."

Jerry O'Connell, a friend of Roddy's and a journalist for *Show* magazine, later said, "With gay men later in her life, Elizabeth would play a mothering role, but with Roddy, he was the one she could lean on."

Sara allowed Elizabeth to attend weekend parties at Roddy's house, where she would sip lemonade and talk to his friends. They included a young Robert (R.J.) Wagner, her future lover and co-star.

Elizabeth confided to Roddy, "I stopped being a child the moment I started making movies. I became the bread-winner in the family. When Francis got drunk, he batted me around quite a bit, taking care not to ruin my face for the camera, though. I think he was jealous that I was bringing more money into the family than he was."

When not working on the MGM lot, Elizabeth as a budding child star appeared in newspaper and magazine ads promoting Lux Soap, Whitman's Sampler Chocolates, and Luster-Creme Shampoo.

After screening an early version of *Lassie Come Home*, Mayer called Elizabeth into his office, instructing Sara to wait outside. "I sat on his knee," Elizabeth later told Roddy. "His chubby hand traveled north to Alaska."



John Derek

Roddy was delighted with such sophisticated dialogue from “a child who grew up before her time, as I did.”

Mayer signed Elizabeth to a seven-year contract at MGM, with a salary which started at \$100 a week and which steadily increased to \$750 a week.

“That’s just the beginning,” Sara told her daughter. Clairvoyantly, she predicted that one day, Elizabeth would be earning a million dollars per picture.

Roddy was among the first to whom Elizabeth would confide her sexual secrets. She told Roddy that she’d fallen in love with “the world’s most beautiful boy,” at school. He was six years older than her. His name was Derek Harris, and he wanted to become an actor, too.

“He’s the most gorgeous thing God ever put on this planet,” she told Roddy. “One day, we’ll be the screen’s greatest team of lovers.”

One weekend, in desperation, Elizabeth turned to Roddy, who had already told her that he was sexually mature for his age. He’d been having sexual relations with older boys since he’d turned twelve.

“I’m going to lose Derek if I don’t start having sex with him—he warned me,” she said. “I want so much to hold onto him, but I don’t want to have a baby.”

“Yes, having a baby at the age of eleven would be a scandal, wouldn’t it?”

“You’ve got to help me,” she pleaded. “What am I to do?”

“Don’t despair,” he told her. “There are ways to keep a guy satisfied without getting pregnant. I’ll show you how I satisfy guys. I do certain things to a boy, and they really enjoy it. You can, too.”

“Show me what to do,” she said. “I’ll do anything to hold onto him...anything but that.”

“We’ll go upstairs to my bedroom, where we can have some privacy,” he said. “Believe me, I’m not into doing this with a girl. Just imagine me as a teacher. Better yet, imagine we’re two actors rehearsing for a role. After you’ve learned your lessons, you can invite Derek over, and you guys can slip away to the cabana out back. That way, you can put to use what I’m about to teach you.”

“Oh, Roddy, show me...show me,” she pleaded. “I’ll always be grateful to you.”

And so she was.



Myron Selznick, agent
and talent scout, recognized
E.T.'s talent



Louis B. Mayer, head of
MGM, did not

WHEN INGÉNUE DIVAS CLASH

(THE NIGHTMARE OF TRANSITIONING TO ADULTHOOD)

The Crushes and Romantic Sagas of the teenaged Elizabeth seemed to closely parallel those of the adolescent

SHIRLEY TEMPLE.

Was the competition deliberate, and who was the predator?



Starlettes
at War



Four views of **Shirley Temple** with (clockwise from upper left): **Ronald Reagan**, **John Derek**, her philandering husband **John Agar**, and **Clark Gable** Inset photo: Shirley's nemesis, **Elizabeth Taylor**

CHAPTER FIVE

And They Called It "Puppy Love"

LOLITA DOES HOLLYWOOD

After shooting *Lassie Come Home*, MGM had no immediate film for Elizabeth. To make money on the studio's \$100-a-week investment, she was hired out to 20th Century Fox for \$150 a week. MGM profited \$50 weekly from the exchange. Fox was remaking the Charlotte Brontë classic, *Jane Eyre*, having scheduled it for a 1944 release. An earlier version, starring Virginia Bruce and Colin Clive, had been shot ten years before at (the relatively unfashionable and usually low-budget) Monogram Pictures.

The Fox version of 1944 would star Joan Fontaine as the mature Jane Eyre, with Orson Welles co-starring as Rochester, his part greatly enlarged from that of the original character as envisioned in the novel by Brontë.

Jane Eyre is the Victorian Gothic tale of an orphan girl who grows up to become a governess in a mysterious (and mysteriously tormented) household in an isolated manor house on the moors of northern England. At Fox, it was helmed by Robert Stevenson, an English film writer and director who is best remembered today for the Julie Andrews musical *Mary Poppins* (1964), for which he was nominated for an Oscar as Best Director.

Elizabeth was cast opposite other child stars who included Margaret O'Brien (who played the role of Adele Varens) and Peggy Ann Garner, who was cast as Jane Eyre as a young girl. Elizabeth was not impressed. She surprised Stevenson with her rather adult pronouncements about each of her rivals. Elizabeth referred to Garner as "a blonde wisp of nothing," predicting she'd soon fade from the screen and would end up selling real estate in the San Fernando Valley. A critic had defined O'Brien as "desperately appealing." Elizabeth satirized that assessment: "She's desperate all right. Her phony French accent is ruining the movie."

Because, like many other child actors at the time, she had dropped out of public school as a means of fulfilling her film commitments, Elizabeth was forced to attend MGM's one-room schoolhouse on the studio lot. "I hated it," she later recalled. She also didn't like being bossed around. Even as a twelve-year-old, she referred to Louis B. Mayer as a tyrant. "Everybody was afraid of him. Not me. I defied him and refused to let him push me around. Judy Garland never talked back. She just followed studio orders. They pumped pills into that poor girl to keep her awake or to put her to sleep—and to keep her slim. Judy was an eager, loving person and went along with their plan, which ultimately destroyed her. I wasn't going to let Mayer do that to me."

Elizabeth was cast as Helen Burns, a pre-teen who became a friend of the young Jane Eyre (as played by Garner) in the orphanage. Sara fought with Stevenson to get Elizabeth's part enlarged. He complained to Fox about it, and as a reprimand to Sara, the studio dropped Elizabeth's name from the film's credits. A critic for *The Hollywood Reporter* later interpreted that omission as "regrettable."

Years later, when Elizabeth showed the movie to her children on TV, she painfully ascertained that her role, and all the footage associated with it, had been cut to make way for commercials. Elizabeth's performance was restored in later releases, and many diehard fans still remember her portrayal of the tiny, sickly, orphaned waif.

As writer Gina Barreca put it:

"Elizabeth Taylor was no Helen Burns. It seems as if she did every damn thing she ever wanted to do: Made soap-opera appearances as well as defining the characters of Tennessee Williams so entirely that every actress following her in these roles has had to wrestle with Taylor's portrayals; she married the men she wanted, some times several times; she ate what she wanted and had clothes made to fit her rather than trying to fit into some outfit a thirteen-year-old waif who weighed as much as Helen Burns could wear; she was amazing in *Butterfield 8*, even though the rest of the cast was awful; she made her way, barging through life (even when she wasn't playing Cleopatra) and made the world hers."



Young Elizabeth (right) interprets a small role in Jane Eyre. **Peggy Anne Garner** (left) snagged the bigger role, playing Jane Eyre as a young girl.

In Jane Eyre, Elizabeth, as punishment, had her hair cut on screen for the first time, and she portrayed her first deathbed scene.

She would always remember the first day Orson Welles showed up on the set, arriving with his entourage four hours late. Evoking a 16th-century European monarch, he referred to his staff as “my minions.”

Elizabeth told Garner, “In a few years, I’ll follow Orson’s example, arriving on set with my hairdresser, my secretary, my make-up artist, my costume designer, perhaps a paid lover, and most definitely, one of the many husbands I plan to marry. I’ll put on a bigger show than Orson.”

Welles was introduced to Elizabeth, finding her utterly fascinating. As he’d later recall, “When I read Vladimir Nabokov’s Lolita, I understood his characterization because of my contact with Elizabeth Taylor as a child. I had never encountered anyone like her. She was unbelievable.”

He invited her to sit on his lap, and they chatted pleasantly. When it was time for her to go, he grabbed her and slop-pily kissed her, inserting his tongue into her mouth. As she’d later tell Roddy McDowall. “I’ve never tasted a man’s tongue before.” Welles would be the first of many more male tongues she’d taste in her future.



Two views of **Orson Welles** Top photo:
in 1938 Lower photo: in 1949

As Elizabeth was leaving, Welles called to her, "Come back and see me in three or four years."

He was sincere about that invitation. After she'd evolved into a "full-busted woman" in Welles' view, after she'd celebrated her fifteenth birthday, he spotted her in the MGM commissary. "I have never found myself attracted to young girls." Perhaps his memory was sketchy. He seemed to have forgotten that he'd first seduced Judy Garland when she was only fifteen, and he'd also seduced a very young starlet who had recently changed her name to Marilyn Monroe.

"Elizabeth Taylor had something that transcended age," Welles claimed. "I will never forget how she moved down the commissary table, holding her food tray. I lusted for that young girl and felt, for the first time in my life, like a dirty old man."

As Elizabeth would later tell Roddy, "Orson invited me back to his dressing room that afternoon in 1949. He said he was going to make a new film, and he had a role in it that would be my most important part to date. I guess I knew what he was going to do. I wouldn't call it rape, but he forced himself on me. I didn't enjoy the experience. Actually, he hurt me."

Years later, in 1969, when Elizabeth was dining with Welles at Maxim's in Paris, both of them laughed at that experience of long ago.

"I did to you what I had done to me when I was a teenager," Welles told her. "From my earliest years, I was the Lillie Langtry of the older homosexual set. Everyone wanted me. I'm sorry that film role I held out for you didn't come about. But you must understand: I always seduce actors I plan to work with. I make them fall in love with me."

"You didn't in my case, Big Boy," she told him. "I don't mind a certain exchange of body fluids when a man and woman are making love. But a whole bucket of spit—that's a bit much."

"Rita always liked it," he said. He was referring, of course, to his second wife, screen goddess Rita Hayworth.

He spent the rest of the evening in the belle époque setting of Maxim's telling her about his recent adventures. "I just returned from Morocco where I seduced the number one concubine of the Pasha of Marrakesh. Then I stopped off in Rome, where a gypsy taught me how to walk with a chicken between my legs."

One snowy night in 1996, at the Palace Hotel in Gstaad, in Switzerland's Bernese Oberland, Elizabeth Taylor was hosting a drunken dinner party that lasted until two o'clock in the morning. She was, as she put it, entertaining "a cabal of European trash."

As the champagne flowed after dessert, she proposed a party game. Each of the guests would describe his or her first sexual experience. "Tell it like it is, good or bad, male or female," she instructed. "I'll be the last. It's the privilege of the host."

Many of the men relayed the details of an early homosexual encounter; three of the women named dear old Dad, and one Austrian countess cited a rape from a German baron.

When it was Elizabeth's turn, she mocked her biographers, who had claimed that she had been a virgin at the time of her wedding to her first husband, Nicky Hilton. "Like hell I was. I was already a regular little Lolita before then. I got broken in by an actor, Derek Harris. You know him as John Derek. I think I was about twelve years old, but John has always been famous for his taste for 'quail.'"

In her informal 1964 memoir entitled *Elizabeth Taylor*, Elizabeth was more delicate: "At school, I had my first crush. There was the most beautiful boy—to me, then, like a god. One day, we were going down the corridor, and he tripped me, then picked me up and said, 'Hi there, beautiful.' Oh, you can't imagine. I was in such ecstasy. I went to the girls' room and just sat there dreaming. His name was Derek Harris. Later, he changed it to John Derek."

At her Gstaad dinner party, she continued her confession:

"The event occurred in a little dressing room Roddy McDowall had beside his pool," Elizabeth said. "All his other guests were in the main house enjoying Roddy's Sunday buffet. John slowly removed my clothes. He marveled at the size of my breasts, which would have put a grown woman to shame. Then he did a striptease for me. My heart was beating practically out of my chest. For the first time, I was confronted with a male penis. Remember, we didn't have porn on TV in those days. I was flabbergasted."

Sipping her champagne and enjoying center stage, she said, "John told me 'if I'd play with it, it would grow.' He didn't lie. It grew and then grew some more. Roddy had sorta warned me what to expect, but that was nothing compared to experiencing the real thing. John was a master teacher. He told me to 'make like it's a lollipop.' In less than fifteen minutes this rock hard toy I had just discovered—the male penis—erupted with all this white sticky stuff. I didn't want to get it all over me, much less taste it. But John could be very commanding. During all the time I knew him back then, we never did it in the missionary position. Another young man would have the honor of deflowering me. Sunday afternoons in Roddy's cabaña became a ritual for Derek and me. I learned how to do it without choking. But, alas, my competition moved in, although I had a hell of a lot more to offer."

Producer David O. Selznick had already locked both Derek and Shirley Temple under contract. He cast them in two of his most popular movies. In *Since You Went Away* (1944), Derek played Temple's boyfriend. The picture was a big hit, starring Claudette Colbert, Jennifer Jones, and Joseph Cotten. Selznick also cast Temple and Derek in his next picture, *I'll Be Seeing You* (1944), starring Ginger Rogers and—once again—Joseph Cotten. Whereas Elizabeth at the time was still a juvenile, she nonetheless coveted both roles, Temple was struggling to move beyond her image as a child star into more mature roles.

Temple, at age sixteen, was four years older than Elizabeth, but Elizabeth was confident that she could summon the reserves to play an older girl. Selznick, motivated perhaps by the fact that he had Temple already "locked down" and under contract at the time, turned Elizabeth down once again, having previously rejected her for the role of the daughter of Rhett Butler and Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*.

"I'm growing more beautiful every day," Elizabeth told her parents and studio officials at MGM. "Temple has

lost her cuteness. A few years from now, I'll look even more gorgeous, and she'll look like a housewife from Pasadena."

Suddenly, Derek was no longer available for his Sunday afternoon sex trysts with Elizabeth. He hardly saw her anymore. Roddy told her that Selznick had ordained that his two rising stars be seen together in public for publicity purposes, and that Derek was dating Temple both privately and publicly, escorting her to events which included movie premieres.

"Derek has become a male whore, selling it for ten dollars a session," Roddy claimed. "Spencer Tracy is one of his best customers."

At first, Elizabeth seemed shocked. "Don't be a silly goose. Only women are whores. How can a man be a whore? It's impossible."

"Elizabeth, my dear, we have to continue with your sex education," Roddy said.

To Roddy, she admitted that she was heartbroken. "When I turned sixteen, I planned to marry Derek. I didn't count on Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm taking a sail on The Good Ship Lollipop. Damn the bitch!"

Sara showed Elizabeth an item in the paper, in which Selznick described how Temple was in the process of entering the second phase of her career. He predicted that as an adult performer, she would exceed her box office success as a child star.

"That's bullshit!" Elizabeth said. "I will grow out of my child star roles and become the biggest box office attraction in the world. I'll become on the screen what Louis B. Mayer likes to call a 'siren.'"

In 1988, when Elizabeth read Temple's memoirs, *Child Star*, she became seriously "pissed off" at what the former 1930s box office champion had written about John Derek.

Temple had referred to him as "a self-important young man who had pleasing features, perhaps a little too sensitive for my taste. With a shock of dark hair cascaded artfully over his forehead and his suit shoulders padded to disguise a rather delicate frame, he made a highly photogenic companion."

"To hell with her," Taylor said about Temple. "I knew every inch of John's body. Take it from your mother. That young man didn't need padding anywhere on his body."

In her memoirs, Temple had other observations to make about Derek, dismissing his acting and comparing it to "a wooden post." She did admit to engaging in necking with Derek, but claimed that she soon grew weary of it. "I was not courageous enough to enter into a sexual liaison."

Derek continued to function as Temple's escort, however. She recalled that on her fifteenth birthday, he took her to lunch at the expensive Rue Restaurant. "But when the bill arrived, he excused himself to go to the men's room." According to Temple, Derek inaccurately asserted that he was the illegitimate son of Greta Garbo, but Temple knew differently. His mother was Dolores Johnson, a minor actress married to Lawson Harris, a songwriter.

As Temple relayed in *Child Star*, Derek would occasionally use a dangerous-looking knife to furiously stab the air, supposedly aiming it at invisible enemies. Years later, in a summation of her relationship with Derek, Temple claimed, "Not every girl gets to neck with a knife-wielding bastard."

Despite her rejection of him, Derek really didn't want to give up on Temple. She recalled that he once pursued her when she went on a family vacation to Palm Springs. "He was like a stalker, spending the night in a sleeping bag in the desert near where I stayed. He was lurking around possessively to see who I was dating."

Actually, it was Derek's presentation of two oil paintings—one offered to Elizabeth, another to Temple—that ended both relationships. Temple recalled that her oil painting was "a macabre gift—a bluish face entwined in a surreal-istic background of green seaweed. In his mystical, watery depiction, Mother instantly saw a symbolic likeness between the disembodied face and mine. She forbade me to see John again."

Elizabeth was given an even more ghoulish painting. Her severed head was floating underwater in a bed of slimy seaweed, the victim of a flesh-eating octopus who was devouring what was left of her nude corpse. When Sara discovered the picture hanging in Elizabeth's bedroom, she ripped it from the wall and burned it.



Watching as the competition
burns and sinks:

(photo above) **Shirley Temple** in
1944, at age 16, before retiring
completely from films in 1950
at the age of 22

"I don't want my daughter dating such a sick young man," Sara told Elizabeth and Francis. "He looks like such a clean-cut young man, but I fear he's really a psycho."

Derek's parents also became alarmed at their son's "dark side," and sent him to a psychiatrist. Reportedly, the analyst determined that Derek harbored a secret desire for sex with very young girls—definitely under-age—and that he suffered from a distinct sense of sexual confusion, based perhaps on his pastime of renting his body to older homosexual men.

Although Temple dropped Derek, Elizabeth furtively continued her encounters with the handsome young actor during the next two years. It was "a sometimes thing," Roddy said. "They often saw each other at my house and never went out in public together. She kept it a secret from Sara, who seemed terrified of Derek."

Years later, Derek would surface once again in Elizabeth's life during the late 1950s. Having lost his allure as a matinee idol, he wanted to reactivate a fading career. He approached Elizabeth, asking her to use her clout to get him cast as the second male lead in *Butterfield 8*.

She recalled spending a night with him. "After all those years, we finally got around to doing it in the baby-making way," she told Roddy. "He screwed the hell out of me, and I loved it. I wanted to keep him on for an occasional roll in the hay, but he got really pissed off at me when I recommended Eddie Fisher for the role he wanted in *Butterfield 8*. My loss."

For the rest of his life, Elizabeth followed Derek's career, including his marriages to Ursula Andress and Linda Evans. He entered another phase of his career when he met a sixteen-year-old, Mary Cathleen Collins, whom he later married and renamed Bo Derek. She achieved fame in Blake Edwards' film *10*. During the course of his respective marriages, Derek photographed all three of his wives for their appearances in Hugh Hefner's *Playboy*.

As a mature woman, at one of Roddy's drunken parties, Elizabeth laughed about her relationship with Derek. "He didn't mind sharing the charms of his young wives with a wolf pack of horny males. But I'll always be grateful to him for teaching me how to suck cock."

In the mid-1940s, Elizabeth appeared briefly in *White Cliffs of Dover* (1944), the story of an American, Susan Dunn, a role played by Irene Dunne, still a big star at the time, who headed a cast that included such formidable talent as Dame May Whitty and Gladys Cooper. Dunne (as Susan) visits England, falls in love with and marries Sir John Ashwood, played by Alan Marshal, "the poor man's Ronald Colman." World War I breaks

out and, pregnant, she loses her husband, and shortly thereafter gives birth to a son (played by Peter Lawford). During World War II, her son is wounded at Dieppe. As American troops march victoriously through London, her son slips into a coma and dies. Directed by Clarence Brown, it was definitely a weeper.

Elizabeth had only two scenes in this tribute to British heroism in wartime, most of them played opposite Roddy McDowall. He played Susan and Sir John's son as a young boy. In the movie, Roddy falls in love with Betty Kenney (Elizabeth), the daughter of tenant farmers on the Ashwood estate.

During the filming, even at this early age, Elizabeth developed a crush on Peter Lawford, a romantic complication which would gnaw at her throughout most of the 1940s, especially when Lawford began an eight-month affair with Lana Turner. Elizabeth told Roddy, "He looks handsome in his pictures, but he's much prettier in real life."

"I'm warning you," Roddy said to her, masking jealousy with a smile. "Keep your hands off him, bitch. He's mine!"

"All yours and Lana Turner's," she said.

Lawford was the latest of Turner's many lovers. They included or had included Robert Taylor, Clark Gable, Victor Mature, Tony Martin, Howard Hughes, Buddy Rich, and Frank Sinatra, as well as two future U.S. presidents, John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan. At nineteen, she'd married bandleader Artie Shaw and filed for divorce four months later. With her latest husband, Steve Crane, Turner had given birth to a daughter, Cheryl. Having husbands, however, never stopped this femme fatale from enjoying affairs on the side.

Lawford, a bisexual, was also having an affair with Roddy, but during the course of the filming, he also began a long-enduring affair with Tom Drake, a wholesome-looking "boy next door" type who played a dying American soldier in *The White Cliffs of Dover*.

The entire cast, especially Clarence Brown and his co-producer, Sidney Franklin, gossiped at lunch about the many young love affairs blossoming around the set. Irene Dunne and Alan Marshal were also keen observers of the mini-dramas. Elizabeth usually remained silent, but eagerly absorbed whatever was indiscreetly revealed in her presence.

The gossip, especially its gay variations, particularly intrigued another actor, Van Johnson, who played a minor role in *The White Cliffs of Dover*. Before the shoot was over, he, too, managed to attract the sexual and romantic attentions of Lawford.

British-born Jill Esmond, playing a minor character, Rosamund, in the film, had recently been dumped by her husband, Laurence Olivier, in favor of Vivien Leigh. One day, at lunch, she told Elizabeth and Dunne, "My advice to established actresses or to aspiring ones is to never marry an actor. It's bad for your health."

When Elizabeth heard that Clarence Brown's next project involved directing *National Velvet*, she diverted her attention away from Lawford to focus on him directly. Enid Bagnold's novel, *National Velvet*, originally written in 1935, had been kicked around MGM for years.

The story's theme celebrates the capacity of ordinary people, especially women, to accomplish great things. Set in the 1920s, it's the story of a 12-year-old English girl named Velvet Brown, who rides her horse to victory in the Grand National Steeplechase. Velvet, in the novel, at least, is a high-strung, nervous child who passes credit for her eventual victory on to the horse she famously rides through various obstacles both on the racecourse and off. At one time, *National Velvet* was viewed as a possible vehicle for thirty-year-old Katharine Hepburn, who would, it was believed, convincingly portray a twelve-year-old.

Margaret Sullavan was also considered for the role, as was Vivien Leigh. Finally, MGM settled on Elizabeth's nemesis, Shirley Temple, but Darryl F. Zanuck at Fox wouldn't release his money-maker from her contract.

Elizabeth read Bagnold's novel five times, telling Brown, "I was born to play Velvet Brown. I've been riding horses since I was four years old. And I've spoken with a British accent most of my life."

When Valentine's Day came, according to Brown, Elizabeth sent him a "mushy" card. "The little Jezebel pubescent was practically making herself available to me in case I harbored secret desires as a child molester. Of course, I knew what the card meant: It meant she wanted me to star her in *National Velvet*."

To her horror, Elizabeth was shown an item in *Variety* which asserted that Pandro S. Berman, the producer of *National Velvet*, was going to order a nationwide talent search for a young girl to play the title role. He predicted that the search would be as big as that of the national hunt conducted in the late 1930s for an actress

to play Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*.



Studio executive **Pandro Berman** (top photo) gets bothered by a Hollywood Lolita

lower photo: Horsing Around with Velvet left to right: **Jackie Jenkins, Elizabeth Taylor,** and Mickey Rooney

The perky young Elizabeth swung immediately into action, demanding that Sara drive her to MGM. When she got there, she instructed her mother to remain outside as she barged into Berman's office without an appointment. "What's this shit about a nationwide search to find some snotty-nosed kid to play Velvet? You're looking at Velvet right now."

As Berman would later tell Brown and Louis B. Mayer, "The force and power in that voice—and the language she used—was like no eleven-year-old girl I knew. I suspect that Elizabeth Taylor is a midget disguised as a young girl."

Berman told her she was wrong for the part. "You're too small for the role, much too short. Maybe if you could grow three more inches in height...And I'm afraid I have to bring up a delicate point. During the steeplechase, Velvet is disguised as a boy, but the audience has to know she's really a girl. How shall I put this diplomatically? We need to cast a girl with some semblance of tits on her."

"I couldn't believe what happened next," Berman told Brown. "That young girl standing before me ripped open her white blouse. She wasn't wearing a training bra, and she flashed her bosom in front of me. Jane Russell in *The Outlaw* had bigger breasts, but this little vixen had a small pair of world class knockers on her at her age. I'm a tit man myself, and I know women's breasts. I'd guess a size B cup."

"But it's what she said that floored me," Berman claimed.

"I've got the boobs, you fucker, and I'm going to star as Velvet Brown."

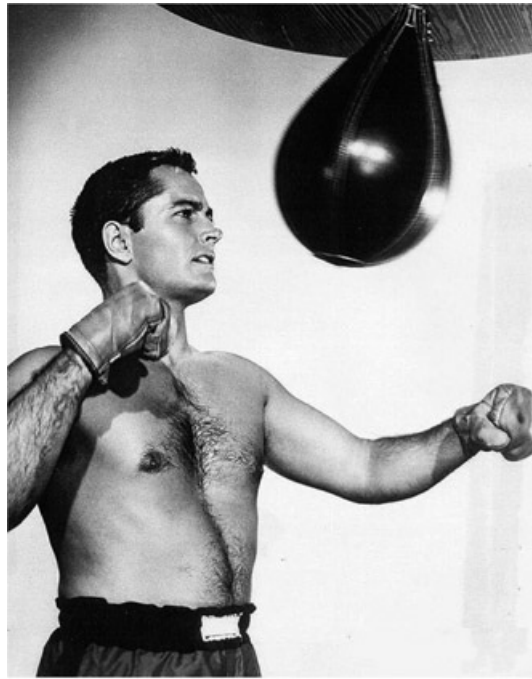
"And so you are," I told her," Berman said.

The next day, MGM announced that Elizabeth Taylor had been granted her first starring role as Velvet Brown in the upcoming motion picture, *National Velvet*.

The beginning of one of Hollywood's most enduring legends was birthed that day.



Velvet Goes National **Elizabeth Taylor** with
Mickey Rooney



John Derek in 1956: "Thank Heaven for
Little Girls"

Hollywood News of 1944!!

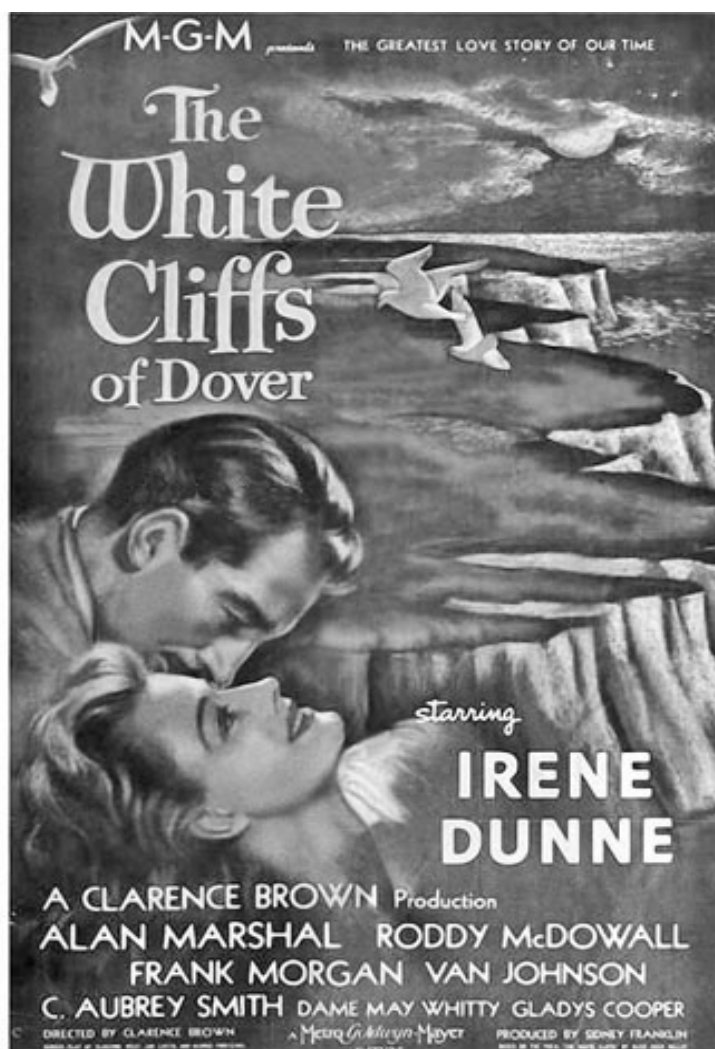
Starring with the Stars in White Cliffs of Dover!

The eleven-year-old Anglo-American ingénue

ELIZABETH TAYLOR



Irene Dunne



Alan Marshal



Dame May Whitty



Gladys Cooper

White Cliffs: "The sentimental tale of one woman's unwavering courage in the face of two world wars."



Elizabeth Taylor exchanging secrets with Roddy McDowall

CHAPTER SIX

How Hollywood's Last Superstar Made HER DEBUT

There is a moment within her 1944 film, *National Velvet*, when Elizabeth Taylor, playing Velvet Brown, and disguised as a male jockey, faints after learning she has won the legendary Grand Steeplechase in an English racing event attended by the Queen.

Summoned to the scene, a doctor unbuttons her racing silks. With no hint of the irony of the famous cleavage to come, he pronounces to bystanders, "It's a girl!"

The story may be apocryphal, but pint-sized Mickey Rooney, her co-star, was said to ask, "Where did a little girl like you grow boobs?"

"They didn't grow on trees," was Elizabeth's sharp response.

Rooney could hardly have been impressed with Elizabeth's boobs-in-the-making. He'd just emerged heartbroken from a marriage with the sultry MGM beauty, Ava Gardner. To a journalist on the *Hollywood Reporter*, he'd rhapsodized over Ava's breasts. "She had these big brown nipples which, when aroused, stood out like some double long golden California raisins."

To fill out for her role, Elizabeth had put herself through a hard regime, using "fast-grow creams" and performing rigorous daily exercises. She was aided not so much by Sara, but by Liz Whitney, who was married to the industrialist and socialite, Jock Whitney, known for seducing some of the most famous women of the 20th century, including Tallulah Bankhead.

"I was like a surrogate aunt to the eleven-year-old," Liz Whitney said. "In Hollywood, we were called 'Big Liz' and 'Little Liz.' To play the role of Velvet, Elizabeth desperately wanted to increase her bust size more than she worried about her horse-riding scenes. In addition to a truckload of cosmetic creams, she ate huge meals. She also read avidly from the dozen or so books I gave her on chest development."

In her 1987 memoir, *Elizabeth Takes Off*, the star recalled those heavy breakfasts she used to eat at Tipps Restaurant in Los Angeles: Two fried eggs, hamburger patties, hash-brown potatoes, and a stack of silver-dollar pancakes covered with maple syrup. And I never put on an ounce."

In the three months that preceded the actual filming of *National Velvet*, which began shooting in February of 1944, Elizabeth claimed she grew three inches and put on ten pounds of weight, which contradicted her claim of not adding an ounce.

"I willed myself to grow into the part."

When shooting began, she found that Clarence Brown once again had been assigned to direct her.

Brown had been personally selected by Louis B. Mayer. Previously, Brown had guided Greta Garbo through seven of her films. Of Elizabeth, he said, "There's something behind her eyes you can't quite fathom. Something Garbo had."

Sara and Elizabeth tangled with Brown during the first week of the shoot when he demanded that she cut her beautiful long hair. Both mother and daughter refused, but Brown insisted.

In desperation, they turned to Hollywood's best-known hairdresser, Sidney Guilaroff, who would later loom large in the life of Marilyn Monroe. Author Ellis Amburn called Guilaroff "the crotchety, queenly, Metro makeover genie, who'd given Garbo, Greer Garson, Joan Crawford, and Norma Shearer their distinctive looks while serving as their father-confessor."

Guilaroff saved the day by concocting a perfect wig that matched Elizabeth's hair color. He was able to fit it tightly over her scalp. When she showed up on the set, Brown gave her his hearty approval and continued with the picture. He learned the truth when she appeared at the wrap party with her hair down to her shoulders. He knew, of course, that she didn't grow that long hair overnight, and that he'd been tricked by a clever hair stylist.

"Are the boobs fake, too?" he asked her.

"That's all me," she told him. "Feel them if you don't believe me."

"A brazen little thing," Brown said. "At times this twelve-year-old sounded like a tart on Times Square."

Rooney, twenty-three at the time he met Elizabeth, was the former box office champion at MGM, known especially for his Andy Hardy series. In spite of her age, Rooney was rumored to have begun an affair with Elizabeth.

This appears not to be true. If Rooney had seduced Elizabeth, as some reporters maintain, he might have written about it in his candid memoir, *Life Is Too Short*, unless he wanted to face a belated charge of child molestation. Rooney was very outspoken about admitting previous affairs, and was, perhaps, the only star to praise Marilyn Monroe as "a great cocksucker" in a memoir.

A lot of the gossip may have stemmed from an item in Sheilah Graham's column. A rival of both Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper, Graham was the first columnist to cite Elizabeth, in print, as part of a romantic link.

Graham claimed that two very young MGM stars, Elizabeth Taylor and Judy Garland, had lost out to another MGM star, Ava Gardner, in the race for Rooney. She claimed he was "one of Hollywood's most prized lovers." This incited a rival columnist, James Bacon, to suggest, "Maybe everything about Mickey isn't sawed off."

What is strange about Graham's column is that Ava and Rooney had already married and separated, and that she was already deep into a pattern of dating other men. Surely, Graham must have known that, yet the item ran in newspapers across the country anyway.

On meeting Rooney, Elizabeth had seemed to measure her new height against his shortness. She told Brown that she was glad he was only "titty-high," which was a gross exaggeration, of course, but showing what, as the years passed, evolved into a wicked sense of humor. The director was amused with her choice of words. After making that remark to him, he called her "Sugartit" throughout the remainder of the shoot.

On the set, Elizabeth bonded with "King Charles," the horse she would ride in the film. Named "Pi" in the movie, he was a splendid, chestnut-colored gelding that was the grandson of the famous Man o' War. He wore a white star on his forehead and had three "white socks." Rooney warned her that the horse was downright mean, but Elizabeth wasn't afraid. She even took to riding him bareback.

The script called for her to take a fall off Pi. She insisted on doing the scene herself, but she hit the ground with such a thud that she bounced back off the turf. This accident would cause her tortuous pain throughout the rest of her life, and it was not treated properly on the set of *National Velvet*. Three years later, when she took another fall, a spinal X-ray revealed that two of her vertebrae had jammed into each other because of that initial impact in 1944.



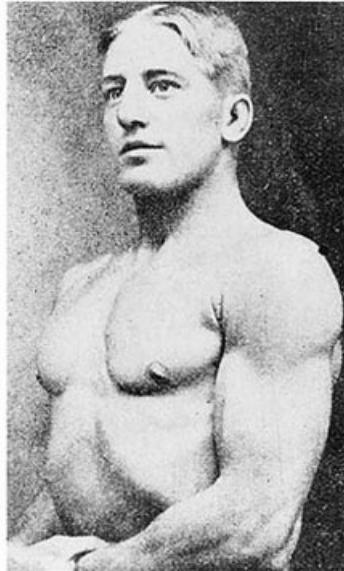
Gossip columnist and former mistress of F. Scott Fitzgerald, **Sheilah Graham**

In snagging the role of Velvet, Elizabeth and Sara had exaggerated her ability as an equestrienne. "She had trouble staying seated on an active mount," claimed Egon Mertz, and instructor at the chic Riviera Country Club, where Elizabeth took lessons. "She was much better riding Snowy Baker."

Mertz was referring to Reginald Leslie ("Snowy") Baker (1884-1953), the Australia-born actor matinee idol

and former champion boxer, who in semi-retirement worked at the Riviera. He would get down on his hands and knees on the floor of the clubroom. A red leather saddle would be placed on his back, and he'd put a rope into his mouth instead of reins. Elizabeth would mount him and crack her crop on his muscled back, and he'd bolt ahead like a racehorse. "She'd ride him screaming like a drunken cowboy at the rodeo," claimed Mertz.

Irene Dunne, who had appeared with Elizabeth in *The White Cliffs of Dover*, had been invited to the Taylor home on Elm Drive for tea. "I was flabbergasted," she later recalled. "There were large framed pictures of Elizabeth in every room, and just tons of mother-daughter photographs. At least ten scrapbooks lay on the coffee table filled with interviews and photographs of Elizabeth. In the hallway and in the living room were mounted costumes on store mannequins that Elizabeth had worn in films. I couldn't imagine what all this adulation was going to do to the poor child. In spite of all this praise and attention, she still had beautiful manners and was so polite, a lovable youngster."



top photo: Australian boxing champ **Snowy Baker**, "the first male Elizabeth ever rode." lower photo: **Irene Dunne**

Elizabeth got along with her co-stars, except for Anne Revere, who would win a Best Supporting Actress Oscar for portraying Velvet's mother. According to Revere, as stated to Clarence Brown, "This Taylor girl reminded me of a mechanized midget with buck teeth, content to go through the motions without the slightest hint of feeling."

Although Revere was not impressed, Sara noted that a lot of other women were paying "undue attention to my daughter."

Sara began to follow Elizabeth into the women's toilet, fearing that one of the lesbians working at MGM would attempt to molest her daughter. Elizabeth rebelled at such strong parental control, later claiming, "I felt like I was living under a microscope."

Fortunately, Elizabeth had Roddy in her life. Knowing that he was a homosexual, Sara trusted him to be alone

with her daughter. When Elizabeth wanted to slip around and see a boy, Roddy served as her "beard."

Ironically, attempts at child molestation were not unfolding within the ladies' toilets at MGM, but right from within the Taylor household.

Roddy had been a frequent guest at the Taylor home in Beverly Hills, but during her filming of *National Velvet*, he'd stopped coming over and met with Elizabeth only at his own home. One Sunday afternoon at one of his cookouts, she asked him why he no longer visited.

He bluntly told her why: He said that one Saturday evening when the Taylors were entertaining guests, he went to their bathroom to take a leak. "As you know, there are no locks on the door. As I was pissing, the door opened. It was Francis. I thought he wanted to use the bathroom and that he'd excuse himself to wait until I had finished by business. Hell no! He barged right over to the toilet bowl and stared at me in mid-piss. He'd told me he'd always wanted to see my dick, which he'd heard was one of the biggest in Hollywood. He propositioned me and asked me to go with him to the bushes in your backyard for a quick blow-job."

"If it had been anyone but your father, I might have said yes," Roddy told Elizabeth. "I rarely turn down a blow-job. But I just couldn't do it with the father of my best friend. The thought made me sick."

He might have been surprised at how calmly Elizabeth received the news. She later told him, "I've known about my father for a very long time. You were a guest in our home. I must apologize for him."

After Roddy confessed what had happened with Francis, Elizabeth showed up on the set of *National Velvet* looking rather dour. Her spirits were brightened when she was invited to lunch with the novelist Enid Bagnold, who had created the original character of Velvet. Enid later said that she found Elizabeth "a sheer delight, but very, very old for her age."

Enid told Elizabeth that she had originally sold all rights to *National Velvet* to Paramount for a flat fee of \$8,000. "Not realizing that I'd have to pay American taxes, I spent all the money and then ended up having to shell out \$2,000 to the U.S. government."

At the end of the shoot of *National Velvet*, Elizabeth approached Pandro S. Berman and asked if he would make her a gift of the horse, King Charles, to whom she had become attached. He explained to her that since it was the property of MGM, he would have to ask Louis B. Mayer. At that point, based on having watched *National Velvet*, Mayer was convinced that Elizabeth was going to become a big star. "She could play Dracula's daughter and people would line up at the box office," the studio mogul predicted. "Give her the god damn horse. I heard it's become lame anyway."

Presented with the horse, Elizabeth decided to make permanent her policy of asking rewards at the end of filming. In the future, she'd request an expensive gift from the producer, and she usually got it.

One day, the columnist Sidney Skolsky asked her about this. She was very blunt in her answer, knowing that he wouldn't dare print her response. "One night after William Holden fucked me, he told me that all actors are whores, selling their bodies. Well, this is one whore who is not opposed to a few gratuities."

The gift of the horse occurred in 1944. Elizabeth thanked Berman profusely. However, years later, at the debut of discussions about producing *Butterfield 8* in 1959, he encountered a very different Elizabeth, a woman jaded and sophisticated. "Aren't you the guy who gave me that horse I rode in *National Velvet*?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm afraid I am," he told her.

"You son of a bitch," she said. "I'm still paying for feed for that god damn nag."

After her encounter with Berman, Elizabeth told Sara, "I've heard that MGM without Berman has been compared to an American flag without the stars. But frankly, to me he looks like Mr. Magoo wanting to throw me down on the casting couch."

Opening during the Christmas season of 1944 at Radio City Music Hall in Manhattan, *National Velvet* was a smash hit. Although Rooney was the star, Elizabeth garnered most of the praise.

Time magazine commented on her "pre-adolescent sexuality" on the screen. As far as it is known, this was the first time the press had discussed sexuality as it related to underage Elizabeth. Before her death, half the trees in Canada would fall to create the newsprint absorbed by articles addressing her sexuality.

Enid Bagnold attended the premiere of *National Velvet* in London, describing it as "a glossy version of my story." Later, she was horrified to read reviews of her work in the American press. One journalist asserted that "National Velvet is about sex, the story of a virgin on the dawn of puberty, who is in love with her horse."



Enid Bagnold, horrified at the reviews generated by the filmed version of her novel, *National Velvet*

Another book critic referred to the novel as “juvenile pornography” and cited a passage from the book to prove his point:

“The horse sprang to the surge of her heart as her eyes gazed between his ears at the blue top of the flint wall. She bent slightly and held him fast and steady, her hands buried in the flaming mane, firm on the stout muscles of his neck.”

In her eighties at the time, Bagnold was appalled by such observations. “Balderdash!” she said. “What’s next? They’ll be talking nonsense about girls and goats.”

Regardless of one’s individual perception of *National Velvet*, the movie was a smash hit—and so was its star, Elizabeth Taylor.

From coast to coast, and abroad, especially in war-torn England, the word was out: MGM had a new star shining to prove its claim that it had more stars than there are in Heaven.

As Elizabeth entered her teens, she spent most of her time concentrating on becoming a woman. To capitalize off the box office success of *Lassie Come Home*, Mayer forced her to film a sequel, *Courage of Lassie*, which was released in 1946. Director Fred Wilcox helmed a cast that included Frank Morgan, Harry Davenport, and George Cleveland. Elizabeth related particularly well to the distinguished white-haired “old man” of the Silent Screen, George Davenport, who had played Dr. Meade in *Gone With the Wind*, back in 1939.

During the filming of *Courage of Lassie*, Elizabeth was reunited with the collie, Pal, which was actually a male dog playing a bitch. Originally, the film was entitled *Hold High the Torch* and later renamed *Blue Sierra* until Mayer found out. “You fuck!” he told Wilcox. “Get Lassie in the title.”

Before the summer of the film’s release in 1946, it had been retitled *Courage of Lassie*.

During his reprise movie, “Pal” was assigned the name of “Bill” and arrives onscreen shell-shocked after accompanying British troops into the trenches of World War I. “Most of my dialogue consisted of me standing around crying out, ‘Oh Bill’ every ten seconds,” Elizabeth remembered, years later. “It was my last movie with a quadruped as my co-star. I wanted to appear opposite hot, hung, and hunky he-men.” [Roddy had recently taught her the meaning of the word “hung,” which subsequently became one of her favorite words.]

In the film, she was cast opposite Tom Drake, who had had a brief role in *The White Cliffs of Dover*. Since then, he’d achieved fame as “the boy next door” opposite Judy Garland in *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944). In the reprise of the *Lassie* movie, he played the soldier who had trained “Bill the Collie” to become a killer.

Elizabeth might have preferred a more virile beau, but Drake was handsome enough. We can assume that Elizabeth was indulging in hyperbole when she used the word “spread-eagled” in what she said about him later: “He was very sweet and soft-spoken. I did go after him, but he wouldn’t kiss me even when I spread-eagled myself before him.”

At Roddy's Sunday afternoon barbecue, she poured out her frustrations to her trusted friend and confidant. She'd later recall, "I've never seen Roddy so angry. I thought he was going to burst several blood vessels."

"That bitch!" Roddy shouted. "That cunt! That WHORE! I'd love to cut off his balls if I can find them. Guess what Miss Priss has done? He stole Peter Lawford from me. Those two get oral with each other night after night."

She was shocked. Not only did she learn that she didn't have a chance with Drake, but that he was sleeping with the handsome young actor upon whom "I have the ultimate crush." She commiserated with Roddy throughout the rest of the afternoon. "Ah, Hollywood. What's a girl to do? For Peter, I've had to compete with Lana Turner and you, my dearest friend. That's painful enough. Now Tom Drake. In the future, when I fall for a guy, I've got to be realistic. In Hollywood, with the most beautiful girls and the most beautiful boys in the world, it's doubly hard for a girl in love to battle both guys and dolls for her man."

"Get used to it," he warned her. "Hollywood is the most competitive town in the universe. The only time we can be sure that the object of each of our affections isn't sleeping with someone else, male or female, is when we're actually in bed alone with them."

"I can't wait to grow up," she said. "I'm so fucking young, my age is against me. Why aren't there more child molesters out here?"

"Don't rush it," he told her. "Wait just three years, and then every guy in Hollywood will want to plug you."

"Three fucking years?" she asked. "Are you out of your bloody mind? I can't wait that long. I want it now!"

She urged Roddy to line her up with a hot date. She'd been attracted to a young actor, Darryl Hickman, at one of Rodney's Saturday afternoon cook-outs. "Give him my phone number, and see if he'll ask me out on a date. Tell him I'll let him fuck me if you'll go out with me."

Ever since Hickman had appeared in *Grapes of Wrath*, Elizabeth had had a fantasy about him.

Roddy called her two nights later. "Forget about Darryl. He told me he's considering entering a monastery. Those monks aren't even allowed to jerk off."

"Oh, fuck that!" she told him. "In all of Hollywood, aren't there any real he-men who lust for a hot young pussy?"

"Oh, Elizabeth, I'll have to wash out your mouth," he said. "No wonder Sara makes you wear a chastity belt."

In her 1987 memoir, *Elizabeth Takes Off*, she wrote, "I wanted to be a woman. I had a small waistline which I'd squeeze even smaller, knowing that it accentuated my bust and hips. I flaunted an hourglass figure at a stage when most young girls were still developing."

Sidney Guilaroff, her hairdresser, testified to her success. He recalled eating lunch with Pandro S. Berman in the MGM commissary a year after casting Elizabeth as the little girl in *National Velvet*. "When Elizabeth walked in to have her lunch, Berman was flabbergasted at the transformation of her body. Seeing her new look, he told me, 'I think I could go to jail for that!'"

That afternoon at the commissary, Elizabeth was still at the stage where she was going around the tables asking for autographs from all the big MGM stars, such as Lana Turner (who drove her into jealous fits), Judy Garland (whom she envied), and Hedy Lamarr (who she wanted to replace as the most beautiful woman in the world). She spotted Katharine Hepburn involved in a deep conversation with Spencer Tracy. She walked over to her table and asked, "May I have your autograph, Miss Hepburn?"

She recalled Hepburn's reaction. "She granted me the autograph, but did not stop talking. Nor did she even look at me. The lezzie [a new word taught to her by Roddy] would later want to have a lobotomy performed on me."

Elizabeth was referring, of course, to her 1959 picture, *Suddenly, Last Summer*, in which she co-starred with Hepburn and Montgomery Clift.

"That was the last day I ever asked anyone for an autograph," Elizabeth said. "From then on, I let other people ask me for an autograph. There was no reserved seating in the commissary. I ended up sitting at table between Clark Gable, my idol, and Marjorie Main. I felt that both of these established older stars would like to get into my panties, which at the time were pink silk."

The domestic details of Elizabeth's home in Beverly Hills changed in 1944, as she found out when a studio limousine deposited her at Elm Drive. Usually, Sara was with her, but not today.

Going into the living room, Elizabeth found Sara busily reorganizing their possessions. "We're moving out this weekend. I have rooms for us at the Riviera Club until I get our beach cottage in Malibu in order."

"Have we lost the house?" an alarmed Elizabeth asked. She'd later relate the details of this dramatic saga in her life to Roddy.

"For the moment," Sara said, "Francis and your brother, Howard, will stay on here. You see, my dear, Francis has found a replacement for Victor Cazalet. He's fallen in love with Adrian, and they are going to live together." Like the rest of Hollywood, Elizabeth was aware of Gilbert Adrian, the legal husband of the film star, Janet Gaynor, whom he'd wed in 1939, entering into a "lavender marriage" with the costume designer.

Elizabeth knew Adrian because he'd designed the famous costumes for The Wizard of Oz. In time, over the course of a long and celebrated career, he would design gowns for more than 250 films.

At MGM, he'd earned his fame by designing gowns for Greta Garbo, Norma Shearer, Jeanette MacDonald, Jean Harlow, and Katharine Hepburn. He'd designed costumes for Joan Crawford in twenty-eight films, creating those signature outfits with large shoulder pads, launching a nationwide fashion trend.



The Grand Days of Hollywood
Couture:

top photo: Francis Taylor's
new love interest, **Adrian**,
and

lower photo, a "**fitted suit**"
the designer conceived and
commercialized in 1947.

"Oh, Mommy, I want to meet him!" Elizabeth said, offering no sympathy that Francis had walked out on his family for the love of another man. Perhaps because of her father's long relationship with Victor, Elizabeth was accustomed to such an arrangement.

"Your father wants you to come over Sunday to have lunch with him and his new friend."

"What should I call him?" Elizabeth asked. "I called Victor 'Daddy.'"

"Think of Adrian as a surrogate stepfather," Sara said. "In his case, 'Daddy' would not be appropriate. Perhaps 'Uncle Adrian.'"

Sara may have been surprised at how casually her daughter treated the news of her separation from her father. Later, Elizabeth would tell Roddy, "It was no big deal for me, no special loss. Hell, I've been fatherless for years anyway. I'll not miss his slapping me around. I don't know this Adrian person, but in a way, I can't blame my father."

"And why not?" he asked.

"Who wouldn't like cock?"

"Elizabeth, the way you talk sometimes makes me forget you're still a little girl."

Before the afternoon ended, Sara delivered another bombshell. "Tonight, I'm entertaining a gentleman caller for a light supper. I'd like you to make an appearance, looking your very best, and then I'd like you to toddle off to bed. You can eat before he gets here."

"Do I know him, Mommy?" she asked.

"No, darling, but you will. He's Michael Curtiz, the director."

"I know him," she said with a certain glee. "He won an Oscar directing Bogart in Casablanca. He was married to Errol Flynn's wife, Lili Damita. God, how I wish I could marry Errol."

"I already know that," Sara said. "In your bathroom, I noticed that those pictures of Clark Gable have gone down and were replaced by pictures of Mr. Flynn. You and he might hit it off. He's famous for seducing underage girls."

"Oh, Mommy, Mr. Curtiz directed that wonderful film, The Adventures of Robin Hood. Errol looked wonderful in those green tights. I think he's the handsomest man who ever lived. Do you think Mr. Curtiz will introduce me?"

"You little vixen," Sara said. "You'll meet Errol Flynn over my dead body."

"Oh, Mommy, you try to spoil every thrill for me," Elizabeth said. "I hope I'm not going to have to remind you that I've become the bread winner of the family."

Those words, painful as they were, must have hurt Sara a great deal. But she moved ahead, issuing orders and clarifications to Elizabeth: "Michael is married to Bess Meredyth, an unhappy union like mine with Francis. She's an actress—not much of one—and a screenwriter...ghastly."

Elizabeth spent what remained of the afternoon preparing for her "audition" in front of Curtiz. Over the previous few weeks, she'd brought home various cosmetic creams, shades of lipstick, and face powders from the makeup department at MGM. She'd also borrowed three gowns from wardrobe that were adjusted to fit her perfectly, in case a boy called to ask her out. One was a strapless black velvet evening gown that plunged practically to the crack of her buttocks. Roddy referred to that dress as "anal-colletage." She'd also, since discovering the joys of perfume, made off with three expensive bottles of it, including Chanel no. 5.

For the finishing touches, she painted her fingernails and toenails scarlet. She chose golden earrings the size of curtain rings. "They bring out the gypsy in my soul," she said. She tightened a black patent leather belt around her waist so snugly, she could hardly breathe, but by doing that, she made her rapidly growing breasts

so much larger.

Curtiz arrived on the doorstep carrying the present of a toy doll, but when he first gazed upon Elizabeth, he met what he later remembered "as a former child star hell bent on becoming the next Hedy Lamarr. She'd made herself up like the most expensive whore in a bordello, catering to those Johns who liked their fresh flesh." He'd meant to say "their flesh fresh," but he often juxtaposed words.

As she sat in the family's living room with Curtiz, Elizabeth ignored Sara's signals to get up and leave.

"I loved Mildred Pierce," she told Curtiz. "You're such a brilliant director. Getting a good performance out of Joan Crawford...what a miracle man you are."

Curtiz appeared startled at the words coming out of Elizabeth's mouth. Her line about Crawford was something Bette Davis might say, not a little girl.

"I'll always regret that I was not old enough to play Vida in the film," Elizabeth said. "I know I could out-bitch Ann Blyth. I felt she was very sweet and just play-acting at being a bitch."

Still ignoring Sara's signs of dismissal, Elizabeth pumped Curtiz for information about Errol Flynn: "He's my favorite movie star. He's so dashing, so handsome, so athletic. Could you tell me about him?"

"I'm afraid all the stories I know about Flynn don't belong in a children's verses of book."

"He means, 'book of verses,'" Sara said.

"I know what he means, Mommy!" Elizabeth said, growing impatient with her mother. "Would you introduce me to him?"

Curtiz looked at Sara. "That depends on your mother."



How to Handle One's Parents: **Michael Curtiz** (top photo) at around the time he began dating **Sara Taylor** (right figure in lower photo), who's helping her daughter, **Elizabeth**, accessorize.

"Let's make a deal," Sara said. "You won't get to meet Flynn, but I'm sure Michael can get you an autographed photo to put over your bed."

"That I can do," Curtiz said. "It's safer that way. After all, Flynn is always going around singing, 'Thank God for Little Girls.'"

Elizabeth must go to bed now," Sara interjected. "It's way past her bedtime."

As she was practically shoved out the door, Elizabeth made one last request. "Oh, Mr. Curtiz, would you please see that a role for me is written into your next picture?"

"My dear, sweet girl, I fear I don't direct pictures for child stars."

Ironically, one of Elizabeth's upcoming movies would be directed by none other than Curtiz.

At her Sunday lunch with Francis and Adrian, her brother, Howard, was nowhere to be seen, and she didn't ask about him. Throughout the meal, she virtually ignored her father and concentrated on the costume designer instead. He won her heart when he told her, "I can't wait for you to grow up so I can start designing gowns for you."

"The sooner the better," she told him, "and don't be afraid of a little décolletage. I've been introduced to Edith Head. The lez taught me the word décolletage."

"I've stuffed many a brassière in my time, but in your case I don't think I'll have to."

She was eager to hear his stories about working with all the big stars. Whatever name she brought up, he had to story to tell.

"It was because of Garbo that I said goodbye to Louis B. Mayer and MGM," Adrian claimed. "When the war came and her lucrative European market dried up, Mayer wanted to convert her into a sweater girl, a real American type like Lana Turner. I told Mayer that 'when the glamour ends for Garbo, it also ends for me. She has created a type. If you destroy that illusion, you destroy Garbo on the screen.' Garbo bolted from MGM, and I went with her."

"As for Joan Crawford, she begins every fitting the same way. She strips off all of her clothes and says, 'Okay, Big Boy, here's what you've got to work with.'"

"As a man, you must be so tempted," Elizabeth said.

"Kid, you've got a lot to learn," Adrian said. "Give me Francis Taylor any day."

Francis seemed embarrassed at this kind of talk, and tried to change the conversation to Elizabeth and her career.

An hour later, Adrian informed Elizabeth that his wife, Janet Gaynor, would be arriving soon with her "husband," Mary Martin.

If Elizabeth was shocked by the use of the word "husband," she tried not to show it. She couldn't wait to tell Roddy about this luncheon. Her friend and confidant would want to know every juicy tidbit of gossip.

Elizabeth had heard of Janet Gaynor, who stood only five feet tall, but had never seen any of her movies, including *A Star Is Born* (1937). She'd been told that Gaynor had won the first Oscar for Best Actress in 1928 and had appeared in Silent Pictures.

When Gaynor and Martin arrived, Elizabeth tried to ingratiate herself with both women, focusing first on Gaynor and making use of her recently acquired information.

Gaynor looked astonished when Elizabeth told her, "Francis said you were the youngest actress to win an Oscar and that you were only twenty-two. I will wait until I'm twenty-three to win my first Oscar so I won't beat your record."

"That is so kind of you, you adorable thing," Gaynor graciously responded.

When Elizabeth talked to Martin, she discovered that she had another husband, Richard Halliday, yet was herself sometimes identified as the "husband" of Gaynor. Roddy would have to explain all these grown-up relationships to her more thoroughly.

After lunch, Elizabeth sat with Martin, the Broadway singing star, in the garden, while the other three made

lemonade. "I hear you're a fabulous singer," Elizabeth said. "There's a rumor I'm going to sing in my next picture. Perhaps you'll give me singing lessons?"

"Just listen to Bing Crosby records," Martin advised. "That's what I did. Hollywood doesn't know quite what to do with me. I'm in town to make a picture called *Night and Day* (1946).

"Is there a part in it for me?" Elizabeth asked.

"Not that I know of," Martin said. "But I can offer you something else. A real prize. I have a divine boy, Larry Hagman, by my first husband. I think you and he would make an ideal couple.

"I'd like to meet him," she said.

"He has great legs," Martin added.

"If only I did." Elizabeth would later tell Roddy that whereas the legs of the female are usually commented on, those of males elicit less scrutiny. He'd inform her that in Hollywood, a man's legs often get as much attention as a woman's, at least during private encounters.

"I'll have Larry call you sometime," Martin said. "You're old enough to date now. When Larry turned fourteen—he's two years older than you—I sent him to boarding school. But he started drinking a quart of whiskey a day. He's on this ranch right now, being rehabilitated."

Elizabeth seemed generally pleased with her father's new living arrangements, but as noted by all the adults who knew her at the time, she always tried to press for a favor from any actor, director, or producer she met. Adrian was no exception.

When Francis was talking in the garden with Martin and Gaynor, Elizabeth moved in with a very special request. "I've given you Francis," she said, perhaps shocking Adrian at how brazen she was for one so young. "Now I want you to give me something. I want you to duplicate those red-sequined ruby slippers you made for Judy Garland in that *Oz* picture. Please, pretty please!"

Within a month, the red slippers arrived and Elizabeth loved wearing them. Then one night after Sara had a bitter fight with Adrian over Francis, she tossed the slippers into the garbage.

As late as 1990, Elizabeth was still lamenting the loss of those ruby slippers. "My god, the damn things would be worth a fortune today, and Sara threw them in the garbage."

In 1949, when Elizabeth, with Nicky Hilton, attended one of Martin's signature performances of *South Pacific* (1949) on Broadway, she went backstage to congratulate her. Upon leaving, and out of earshot of Nicky, she whispered to Martin, "I've seen your son's picture. He's gorgeous. Tell him I'm still waiting for that phone call from him."

"But you've got the Hilton boy now for a beau," Martin said.

"A girl can't have too many beaux," Elizabeth said. "When you wear one out, there's always the next in line."

"Smart thinking, girl," Martin said, kissing her good night.

After the commercial success of *National Velvet*, both Sara and Elizabeth expected that she'd be besieged with film offers, but nothing was forthcoming. A rumor floated around the studio that Louis B. Mayer was about to cast Elizabeth in a musical.

Growing impatient, Sara took Elizabeth to Mayer's office, where they met Ida Koverman, his executive assistant, who had previously functioned as former U.S. President Herbert Hoover's campaign secretary in California. She was to some degree like a gatekeeper protecting Mayer from unwanted intrusions. However, the studio mogul agreed to see Sara and Elizabeth.

He was in a bad mood that morning.

In a memoir, Elizabeth recalled, "Mayer looked rather like a gross, thick penguin. He had huge glasses, and he had a way of looking at you that made you feel completely squashable. You felt his vitality, but you also felt his enormous arrogance, his ego, his overbearing, his driving personality. To know him was to be terrified of him."

Elizabeth's memory and her reality of that era didn't match. That morning, she was not yet terrified of Mayer, and at her young age, she dared to confront him.

Sara launched into the meeting by immediately saying that she'd heard that her daughter was going to be cast in a musical that required her to sing and dance. "I think you should hire a singing coach and a dancing coach for Elizabeth right now, since all her time is going to waste."

Mayer tossed aside the contracts he was reviewing and turned on Sara. "How dare you come into my office and tell me how to run my business. You and your daughter are guttersnipes. I took you out of the gutter, and I can send you back there. You're so god damn stupid you don't even know the day of the week."

Then the unthinkable happened. Not since John Gilbert slugged Mayer had an MGM star confronted him. Elizabeth barged over to his desk. "Don't you dare speak to my mother that way. You can go to hell and shove MGM up your dirty asshole."

Then, in tears, Elizabeth ran from the office. Outside, she collided into the arms of Richard Hanley, Mayer's devoted homosexual secretary.

He held her in his arms and comforted her. "Now, now, Elizabeth," he said. "Whatever happened will fade away. Why don't you take the advice of Scar-lett O'Hara and think about it tomorrow?"

He escorted her to her dressing room, firmly holding her hand. Once in the room, he dried her tears and kissed her forehead. "If something goes wrong tomorrow, you can always count on me. I'll be there for you."

"I'm going to hold you to that promise," she said. Perhaps without realizing it, Elizabeth had just begun one of the most vital relationships of her life, having discovered a friend and a confidant "until death do us part."

In the meantime, Mayer had summoned Koverman to his office and told her what Elizabeth had said to him. Koverman heard Sara pleading with the mogul not to fire her daughter. "She's just an impetuous little girl," Sara said.

"Bring that nasty little brat back in here," Mayer ordered Koverman. "Tell her I'm demanding an apology—not tomorrow, not later, but NOW! Get to it."

Koverman trailed Elizabeth to her dressing room, where she was preparing to leave the studio. "Mr. Mayer demands that you come back and apologize."

"Why don't you tell your Mr. Mayer to kiss my ass," she said. "On second thought, not that. That would get him too excited."

"Why you little bitch," Koverman said. "Mr. Mayer never forgives, never forgets. You're washed up at MGM. Too bad you couldn't keep your damn trap shut. He could have made you a big star. Now he'll see to it that no other studio hires you."



Louis B. Mayer with **Elizabeth Taylor** In spite of her demure smile, she detested the mogul.

Shocked, startled, and filled with horror, Elizabeth faced the reality of what she'd done to herself. She ran into her toilet, slamming the door behind her. Koverman heard the sound of glass breaking.

Having previously been involved in some fifteen suicide attempts at MGM, Koverman knew what the sound of breaking glass meant.

Elizabeth Taylor was slashing her wrists.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Coming of Age: WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

In the ambulance on its way to the hospital, Dick Hanley was at Elizabeth's side after she'd slashed her wrists in the dressing room at MGM.

"I'm here for you," he whispered in her ear. "You'll pull through."

Rushed into emergency, Elizabeth was resting in her private room only an hour later. Her wounds were superficial. The doctor told Hanley that she'd merely "scratched" her wrists with the glass and that the wounds would soon heal.

As Dick sat by her bed, Sara barged into the hospital room. "Oh, my darling, my poor darling! They didn't tell me right away."

Very patiently, Dick explained Elizabeth's condition to Sara, who at first seemed to resent his intrusion into her daughter's life. But when he was interrupted by a call from Louis B. Mayer, and when Sara overheard Dick's remarks to the studio mogul, he won Sara's heart.

When he was able to speak, Dick explained how he had the situation at the hospital under control. "Under no circumstances can we let the press find out that Elizabeth slashed her wrist because she was fired. God, I can just see what the press would make of that. But I'll see that they don't find out."

"I'll get MGM publicity on it to squelch this thing," Mayer shouted.

"In case anybody asks, we can say it was Elizabeth's first onslaught of menstruation. No one had explained to her what that meant. She panicked. She's no longer a little girl, and no one instructed her about the changes likely to occur in her body."

"I'll buy that god damn lie," Mayer said. "The papers won't print it. Stay at the hospital. Don't let anybody see her, and don't allow her back on the lot until her wrists have healed. Who in hell does she think she is? Lana Turner? Tell her that her suicide attempts should come when, say, Frank Sinatra leaves her standing pregnant at the altar and her career is about to go up in flames."

During the next forty-eight hours, the only person Dick let into Elizabeth's room included Sara as part of regular afternoon visits; a very concerned Francis; brother Howard, who told his sister she was crazy; and Roddy McDowall.

Roddy liked Dick so much he even made a date with him for sometime "after this blows over and Elizabeth is safe and stable again."

Roddy sternly lectured Elizabeth. "Don't you ever let me hear you pulling shit like this again?"

When Sara came to visit during her final afternoon in the hospital, Elizabeth used her suicide attempt to demand concessions from her mother. Whereas Sara would have kept her in child roles for as long as possible, Elizabeth was demanding more grown-up parts. Elizabeth told her that as the breadwinner of the family, she could no longer be chaperoned day and night. She announced that she was going to start dating and that she would refuse any curfew imposed upon her.

Sara was more or less forced to give in to her, but warned her daughter, "You must not have sex with these boys coming into your life. Perhaps a kiss on the cheek when they're saying good night on your doorstep, but it mustn't go beyond that in any way."

Later, Elizabeth confided to Dick, "Roddy has taught me how to have sex with boys without getting pregnant."

"Roddy should know," Dick said with a wink.

She smiled at him and took his hand. "So, your date with Roddy last night was successful?"

"And how!" he said. "God has been very good to Roddy."

During her incarceration in the hospital, Elizabeth got to know her new friend. At the time Elizabeth met Dick,

he was in his mid-thirties, having come to Hollywood from Indianapolis, where his Irish father worked for the railroads. "I came to Hollywood because I fell in love with Clark Gable on the movie screen and wanted to meet him," Dick said. "One day at MGM, I found myself standing next to Clark at a urinal. That day, I lost my passion for him."

"My passion for Clark has dimmed, too," she said. "After seeing Errol Flynn as Robin Hood, he's become my imaginary new lover."

While Elizabeth was still in the hospital, Dick picked up the phone to hear an unexpected caller. The phone call had originated in San Simeon, that multi-million dollar palace the press baron, William Randolph Hearst, had built for his mistress, actress Marion Davies, on a mountain overlooking the California coast.

Through her close link with the Hearst gossip maven, Louella Parsons, Marion had learned that Elizabeth was in the hospital.

"This is Marion Davies," the voice on the phone said to Elizabeth, "calling to wish you a speedy recovery and also to congratulate you. Last night, Willie and I saw National Velvet. He adored the picture, but mostly, he adored you. You really touched the old man's heart. In spite of his reputation, at heart, he's a silly sentimental fool."

"Oh, Miss Davies, I'm so honored to speak to you. Roddy McDowall has been to San Simeon and told me so much about you."

"This empty shell!" Marion said. "It needs to be livened up on the weekends, and Willie wants to invite you up. Come Saturday morning, we'll send a limousine for you. And, for God's sake, bring a date—preferably a hot one—and not that mother of yours."

"A date? You mean a real date and not a chaperone?"

"Yeah, why not? Marion responded. "I hear you're grown up...well, almost."

"I'm getting there," Elizabeth said. "I know Mr. Hearst likes to run pictures of actresses in bathing suits in his newspapers. I hope in a few months, if my breasts keep growing at the rate they are now, that I'll be posing for one of his photographers."

"I'd bet my left tit that you will. It's time you got out in the world. Hell, when I was your age, I'd have five beaux a week on Broadway. We called them 'Stage Door Johnnies.'"

"Oh, please, Miss Davies, tell me how I can go about getting beaux. I bet I could have no better teacher than you."

"Sure, kid, I know the ropes. Just ask Gable, Chaplin, Old Joe Kennedy. They'll tell you."

After chatting for another ten minutes, a thrilled Elizabeth put down the phone, turning to Dick, who had listened to every word. "I've been invited to San Simeon as the guest of Mr. Hearst and Miss Davies. It'll be my first outing as a grown-up. I'm allowed to bring a date, but don't tell Sara. I'll tell her I'm going there alone without her being my god damn chaperone. How am I to get my cherry popped when she's hovering over me?" She looked up at Dick with a great intensity on her face. "I've got to know something. Just how much power do you have with the young male stars at MGM? I mean, you being the one who decides who can go in to see Mayer."

"Except for the established stars like Gable, I can get the younger ones to unzip for me on request," he said. "They're usually willing to do anything to get ahead."

"That's what I thought," she said. "I want you to call Peter Lawford. Tell him he's going to be my date during our weekend trip to San Simeon. Tell him he'll also be sharing my bedroom."

"Your wish, my command!" Dick said.

Elizabeth always remembered the limousine Marion Davies sent to carry her, with Peter Lawford, to San Simeon to party with William Randolph Hearst. "It was large enough for eight couples to have intercourse, with

enough room for everyone to be comfortable while going at it," she'd later tell Dick.

En route, driving north from Los Angeles along the coast, Lawford entertained her with stories of the filming of *Son of Lassie* (1945). In this dog picture, he and June Lockhart had played the adult versions of the characters that Roddy McDowall and Elizabeth had portrayed in *Lassie Come Home*.

"I know the dog adored you, but to me, he was a vicious bastard," Lawford claimed. "That collie, playing a female in the picture, hated me and growled every time I came near him. But the script called for intimate scenes between us. The director ordered me to put raw meal under my arms and on my chest. My face was also rubbed with raw hamburger, freshly ground."



lower photo: Media baron **William Randolph Hearst**
with **Marion Davies**
upper photo: the Hearst Castle's entrance

"That's how I got the animal to show love for me. Love, hell! The god damn dog was eating me alive. He almost cannibalized me!"

As she would later tell Dick, Elizabeth learned for the first time that Lawford had very limited use of his right arm because of a childhood injury with shattered glass. "I did everything to hide that from the director," he said. "In *Lassie*, I even did my own swimming in the treacherous waters of the Columbia River. I was left to my own devices, although every safety precaution was provided for *Lassie* to keep him from drowning. I was housed in a bedroom that must have been a maid's closet, but *Lassie* was given a two-bedroom suite. Instead of *Son of Lassie*, Mayer should have titled the picture *Son of a Bitch*."

Speaking of bitches," he said. "When my mother, the divine Lady Lawford, went to see the movie, she said that because of my long shaggy hair, she couldn't tell me apart from the dog."

"That's all behind you now," Elizabeth assured him. "You're going to the top. I just saw the latest copy of

Modern Screen. You've been named the most popular actor in Hollywood."

"I know," he said. "I bought one-hundred copies of that magazine."

She wanted to get to know him better, and they shared their experiences of growing up in Britain. His memories were so very different from hers. He claimed he lost his virginity when he was only ten years old to a thirty-five-year-old governess who fellated him to climax. "Other governesses and two chauffeurs also used me for their sexual purposes," Lawford claimed.

He told Elizabeth how much he hated his mother, Lady May, who was known as "Mother Bitch" in Hollywood. "She once went to Mayer and told him that I was a homosexual and asked him if he could get 'treatment' for me. I had to bring in Lana Turner for confirmation that I was not a homosexual."

Elizabeth later told Dick, who confided to Roddy, "Since the talk had gone sexual, I told Peter that I was still a virgin, giving a broad hint that I was ready to change my status. To me, Peter was a gorgeous doll, the latest in the sophistication I long to acquire. Everyone in Hollywood knew I had a crush on him. I figured that since he'd been dumped by my friend Roddy, that he was up for grabs. But he didn't even hold my hand or try to kiss me. If I'd been a boy, I would have simply unzipped and said, 'Go for it, Peter!'"

When Dick first met her, he was astonished at Elizabeth's style of talking. "I think you're an old soul," he told her. "You've lived lives before. Cleopatra, Helen of Troy. Your love of horses must stem from your life as Catherine the Great. When the empress couldn't find men in the Russian army endowed enough to accommodate her, she went to the royal stables."



Julia Misbehaves: **Elizabeth Taylor** with **Peter Lawford**

"I was not the Empress of Russia, but I was Cleopatra," Elizabeth said. "I was also Madame de Pompadour."

Roddy revealed to her that Lawford had told him that he thought Elizabeth was beautiful. His exact words were, "Even at her age, Elizabeth is an exquisite creature. Everything about her face is perfect— those eyes, those long dark lashes, her smile, her hair. I'd be a liar if I denied a certain sexual attraction."

Armed with that information, Elizabeth decided to "take the bull by the horns" (her words).

"But what, exactly, does 'take the bull by the horns' mean?" Dick asked her.

"During my last week at MGM, I sat one early morning in make-up with Judy Garland," Elizabeth said. "I'd heard that Spencer Tracy had taken her virginity when she was only fifteen. Of all the women at MGM, Judy seemed the best person to ask for advice. 'Just how do you get a man to fuck you when you're still jail bait?' I asked her. She said she uses a technique that is almost certain to work unless a guy is homosexual. 'Just grope him! Start feeling him up. Under the table, at a restaurant, on the dance floor...anywhere!'"

"Since I was in this huge black limousine, and since I had a long drive ahead of me, I followed Judy's advice," Elizabeth claimed. "I groped Peter, and it produced the desired results. Before he knew what was happening, I was all over him, kissing him. Right there in that car, I lost my cherry, an expression I've only recently learned from Roddy."

"How did you like it?" Dick asked.

"Not all that much," she said. "It hurt at first, and it was real messy. I soiled my dress. We didn't have any protection. For all I know, I might be carrying Peter's child right now."

Dick told her not to worry about that, because at MGM, Mayer frequently assigned him the task of accompanying whichever of his female stars might at the time need an illegal abortion.

He also told her that from what he'd heard, Lawford was not an appropriate candidate for the assignment of taking her virginity. "A more skilled lover would have aroused more passion in you. George Cukor told me that Peter was a lousy lay. Intercourse doesn't interest him so much. He prefers oral sex instead."

Over the years, a long list of Lawford's intimates would agree with Cukor, including June Allyson, Noël Coward, Merv Griffin, Robert Walker, Lucille Ball, Anne Baxter, Dorothy Dandridge, Ava Gardner, Judy Garland, Rita Hay-worth, Judy Holliday, Van Johnson, Janet Leigh, Sal Mineo, Kim Novak, Lee Remick, Clifton Webb, Jane Wyman, and Keenan Wynn. Author Mart Martin also added some categories of other names to that list—"lots of college girls, starlets, 'beach bunnies' he met while surfing, and prostitutes who knew Lawford as an excellent \$50 oral sex trick, and 'call boys,' male hustlers, young male extras, and studio messenger boys."

Elizabeth promised Dick, "I'm going to try again and again. I realize now that the sex act should not be judged by just one bad experience. Perhaps it's like an actor's performance in a movie. Some men are great, some are mediocre, and some are rotten."

"By God, she's got it!" Dick said, kissing her lightly on the lips.

She told him that she still considered Lawford very attractive. "I'm not giving up on him. I'll pick up more experience with other men, and then maybe teach him a trick or two to make him a better lover."

"Good luck with that," Dick said.

When Elizabeth and Peter Lawford took that long uphill drive to San Simeon, both of them would witness the end of an era. Marion Davies and William Randolph Hearst were on the verge of abandoning their beloved castle. Its high elevation was bad for his failing heart.

They were already planning a move into a newly acquired mansion, details of which were being organized by Marion, off Benedict Canyon in Beverly Hills. Although Marion had arranged its purchase for only \$120,000, it had originally been built in 1927 by Milton Goetz for one million dollars.

Led to their sumptuously decorated bedroom by servants, Elizabeth and Lawford were told that Marion would receive them for lunch and both she and Hearst would enjoy their company at dinner too. In the meantime, a guide would be made available to show them around the grounds of the estate, including a chance to see the Hearst collection of wild animals.

This visit marked the first time that Elizabeth would sleep alone in a bedroom with a man other than her brother Howard.

The butler told her that their bedroom had once been occupied by Clark Gable and Carole Lombard. Later, a rather drunken Marion would give them more juicy details, claiming that Claudette Colbert and Marlene Dietrich had also spent the night in the same room, making wild, passionate love.

Both Lawford and Elizabeth were shocked when they greeted Marion at her luncheon, at which Hearst himself was conspicuously absent. The blonde, spunky star, a former beauty in the Ziegfeld Follies, was a ghost of her former self. She'd once captivated Winston Churchill and Lord Mountbatten, but now she was no longer mobile. She'd taken to heavy drinking again, which had caused her legs to give way. Two nurses attended to her.

William Haines was a fellow guest at the luncheon table, along with his lover, Jimmy Shields, a union which Joan Crawford had once described as "the happiest marriage in Hollywood." Elizabeth and Lawford didn't know who they were. Haines had to tell them that in 1930, he'd been the number one box office attraction in Hollywood.

"I'm an interior decorator now," Haines told her. "Louis B. Mayer fired me because I wouldn't give up Jimmy. I'm Cranberry's best friend. Mayer fired her, too. If you'd like to meet her, I'll arrange it."

Marion explained to Elizabeth that Cranberry was Haines' nickname for Crawford.

Haines was straightforward and rather bold. He said, "I'm predicting an early marriage for you two. I hope

you let me decorate your new home—that is, if you're partial to Empire furnishing and rococo accents. I owe everything to W.R.; he taught me about antiques. When I met him, I didn't know the difference between a jardinière and a pisspot."

Marion inquired about the accommodations of her guests. Elizabeth responded that she and Lawford were "living in luxury."

Haines said that he was happy with Jimmy now, but he recalled how displeased he was when Marion had first invited him to San Simeon back in the 1930s. "Marion extended an invitation to Gary Cooper and Anderson Lawler and assigned them a room together. She didn't know at the time that I was chasing after Coop. Anderson and I got into a big fight over who'd sleep with Coop. He won."

After a tour of the grounds and a siesta, Elizabeth woke up to discover Lawford performing oral sex on her. She offered to do the same for him, or at least that was what she later told Dick Hanley, but Peter responded, "later, tonight."

At long last, before dinner was served, they were summoned into the library to meet W.R. Hearst. She didn't know what to expect, but was shocked to see this once fabled press baron now moving deep into his 80s, and seemingly fading away. His eyes, which seemed to stare right through her, were surrounded by deep purple rings, which made them seem far larger than they were. The strain of a failing heart was clearly reflected in his withered face. Yet his mind was still sharp, and Marion told them that he still wrote a weekly editorial.

He praised Elizabeth's love of animals, as reflected by her performance in *National Velvet*, and she told him she was thrilled to see the animals on his estate, and how well they were being treated.



Disgraced matinee idol **William Haines** (left) with **Marion Davies**

"One of the reasons I fell in love with Willie was because of his love for animals," Marion said. "He once rescued an injured seal who'd washed up on the rocks right below the castle. One time he found a mouse trapped in a jardinière, and Willie brought it cheese and crackers until it ran away one day."

"I've seen all the stars of Hollywood come and go, and I predict you'll become one of the big ones," Hearst told Elizabeth. He made no such prediction for Lawford. "My only regret is that I will not be here to guide you through a spectacular career."

Elizabeth noted that Marion, in spite of her own physical wreck of a body, was very attentive and protective of Hearst. Years later, Elizabeth would tell Richard Burton that Hearst reminded her of King Lear from Shakespeare's play. At one point over dinner, he expressed his mistrust of his sons. "They're gold diggers, and I want Marion protected from these scheming beasts."

Marion seemed almost embarrassed that Elizabeth and Lawford were visiting during the final hours of their reign over San Simeon. At one point, she said that she and Hearst used to invite as many as fifty guests for the weekend. "Those were the days," she said. "Gloria Swanson, Louella Parsons, Jean Harlow, Norma Shearer, Irving Thalberg, Errol Flynn, Jack Pickford, Eleanor Boardman, Adolphe Menjou and his wife Katharine, Bebe Daniels, Damon Runyon."

Despite Hearst's obvious annoyance when she brought up the subject, Marion claimed that in 1934 during a visit to Berlin, Hearst had even invited Adolf Hitler for a visit. "Of course, that was before we knew what a mean guy he was, killing all those Jews."

"And all those poor homosexuals," Haines added.

Hearst retired to bed early, and Marion asked the two couples to join her in the library, where she amused them with stories about the Golden Years of Hollywood. "I saved John Gilbert's life one afternoon when he was going to walk into the ocean and drown himself after Greta Garbo dumped him."

"Tell them about all the men who seduced you," Jimmy Shields said to Marion.

"Oh, Jimmy, they don't want to know that. But, since you insist, I remember them all. Charlie Chaplin, Clark Gable, Joseph Kennedy...even Rudolph Valentino, but he was mostly into guys."

"I've had Gable, too." Haines added.

"Yes, we know," Shields said, frowning at him.

Marion continued: "I once asked that halo-haired Albert Einstein why he didn't get a haircut. At another time, Billy here challenged me to seduce Calvin Coolidge, and I took the bet. He was a teetotaler. When he came to visit, I offered him a glass of Tokay wine, telling him it was only fruit juice. He drank four glasses and told me it was the most refreshing beverage he'd ever tasted. I didn't really get him drunk enough to seduce him. But Grace Coolidge told me that the first time she spotted her future husband was through a bathroom window in a house in Northampton, Massachusetts."

"Grace told me that Coolidge was jaybird naked and shaving with his hat on, so his hair wouldn't fall down over his face," Marion said. "Grace also claimed that after her sighting of him that morning, she decided she was going to marry him. I was always told that still waters run deep, but in Silent Cal's case I never got to find out."

"But it certainly sounds like you weren't deprived," Lawford said.

Before midnight, all the guests retreated to their bedrooms. Lawford stripped down and joined a naked Elizabeth in bed, asking her to "Go down on me."

She obliged, as she would later confide to Dick Hanley.

After a Sunday morning breakfast at ten o'clock, both Elizabeth and Lawford thanked Hearst and Marion profusely. Elizabeth kissed Hearst goodbye on the lips, since she'd decided that physical intimacies between Marion and Hearst had ended before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Marion was wheeled out into the foyer for a final goodbye. She told Elizabeth and Lawford, "When you guys want some privacy, you can have the use of my guest cottage in Beverly Hills. No one will find you there. There's also a big swimming pool. You can invite your friends over to use it. I'm sure Willie would love to sit by the window, listening to the sound of young laughter again."

In the limousine retracing its steps south to Los Angeles, Lawford complained that visiting San Simeon was like a pilgrimage to a mausoleum.

Elizabeth differed, claiming, "I adored them. Let's don't be too harsh. I fully expect one day to end up in a decaying Hollywood mansion with pictures all over the place showing how I looked in the 1950s and 60s. Every evening, I'll show my old movies."

Without knowing it, Elizabeth had eerily evoked the plot of an upcoming film, *Sunset Blvd.*, in which Gloria Swanson played a faded star of the silent screen, Norma Desmond. But when Elizabeth made that prediction, *Sunset Blvd.* was only a germ in the brain of Billy Wilder.

Louis B. Mayer quickly rescinded his order to fire Elizabeth, and called Dick Hanley with the news. Mayer had been in serious negotiations with Sara. The end result was that Elizabeth would be lent out to Warner Brothers for a key role in *Life with Father* (1947), a film that would star William Powell and Irene Dunne. The director? None other than Sara's new lover, Michael Curtiz.

When Dick relayed this news to Elizabeth, she was delighted. She'd be reunited with the Taylor's family friend, Irene Dunne, and she'd be directed by the eccentric but well-respected Curtiz. "I'll force him to bring Errol Flynn onto the set!" Elizabeth vowed to Dick.

She was less than thrilled when she learned that her onscreen boyfriend would be played by James Lydon, a young actor known for his screechy voice and adolescent portrayal of Henry Aldrich in the Henry Aldrich movie series filmed throughout the course of World War II. She would later say, "Jimmy and I have about as much chemistry together as Marjorie Main and Clark Gable."

"Even before the filming of *Life With Father*, I had already switched my bobbysoxer allegiance from Frank Sinatra to Vic Damone. I had pictures of Errol Flynn pasted in my bathroom and a framed studio portrait of Vic Damone beside my bed. At night, I practiced French kissing Vic on my satin-covered pink pillowcase."

Between *Courage of Lassie* (1946) and the five-month shoot of *Life with Father*, Elizabeth breasts grew very large and very fast for a teenager as young as she was. "I wasn't quite up there with Jane Russell yet, but I came in with a 35" bust by the time I turned fifteen. I found that nothing excites a man, even a middle-aged man, more than a teenage girl with large busts."

"The 1940s after the war was a time of Pretty Girls and Varga Girls," Elizabeth recalled. "A girl was supposed to have melons for breasts and sticky sweet, scarlet-red lips, ideal for a man's cocksucking fantasies. Someone in makeup suggested that a 'Joan Crawford mouth' should be painted on me. Because Curtiz knew Crawford so well, I asked him if I could be introduced to her at some point. Who better to paint a Joan Crawford mouth on me than the star herself? Curtiz promised he'd arrange a meeting between us."

In *Life With Father*, Elizabeth found herself co-starring with Powell and Dunne in a comedy set in New York of the 1880s. MGM was getting \$3,500 a week from Warner Brothers for her services, five times her salary at MGM. Elizabeth played a girl who wins the love of the household's oldest son, Lydon, whom *Variety* would later describe as "effective as a potential Yale man."

Powell noted that Elizabeth was "swiftly maturing," and Dunne feared that "she is growing up too fast for her own good."

Elizabeth had her own comments about the stars. "Irene is a lovely creature, charming and polite. But it's time she started playing matrons. As for Powell, what in hell did Jean Harlow see in him?"

During filming, Sara hovered over Elizabeth as if she were a rare Tiffany gem. She even took her home when she developed a pimple or had the semblance of a cold coming on.

"Yet in spite of this, I managed to slip away from Sara enough to have a back alley life," Elizabeth told friends at one of Roddy's Sunday afternoon parties. "My mother never really knew what I was up to. Roddy was my beard on many an occasion. So was Dick Hanley. Sara knew they don't like girls. I also got help from 'mainstream adults' like Marion Davies and Michael Curtiz, who criticized my mother for holding on to me too tightly."

As Errol Flynn would tell anybody who asked, Curtiz was a tyrant on the set. One afternoon, when Sara was away, Curtiz was shooting a scene between Lydon and Elizabeth. "I told you not to eat lunch," he shouted at Lydon. "Actors who eat lunch are drowsy all afternoon." Then he not only denounced Lydon, but got so angry at him he kicked his ass, toppling the juvenile over a box.

"I nearly broke my spine," Lydon recalled. "What a bastard!"

Curtiz then turned his fury on Elizabeth, calling her a "big tit, two-bit whore." In tears, she ran screaming from the set to her dressing room, where she bolted herself inside. Curtiz stood before the locked door, calling in to her, "Son of a bitch, Elizabeth. Stop fucking crying. You break my heart. Cut the shit."

Fortunately, the director and his star had made peace by the time Sara arrived back from lunch.

Elizabeth didn't resent the affair of Sara with Curtiz. On many a night, Sara was away somewhere with her lover, leaving Elizabeth at home with a maid. Elizabeth quickly learned that the maid could be bribed, allowing her to slip away for some off-the-record rendezvous with her beau du jour, as she referred to the various young men she met secretly.

"I wanted a more grown-up role than the girl I played in *Life With Father*," Elizabeth said. "but since Mayer didn't fire me, I continued in that gauze-wrapped cotton candy cloud that was MGM in those days. Mayer remained a tyrant, but I never set foot in his office again after that fight we'd had. Even when he summoned me, I wouldn't go. I did, however, show up at his annual birthday bash at MGM with a fake smile plastered on my face. We both hated each other."

"I got by better than his gay actors did at the time," she said. "There was a whorehouse across from the studio. Mayer made the gay guys go over there and fuck the whores as a means of proving their manhood."

Writer Jhan Robbins summed up Elizabeth's life at this point. "She belonged less to her family than to a studio, to agents, publicity people, photographers, costumers, directors, coaches, makeup artists, fan clubs, and her huge, adoring, and insistent public. Elizabeth, one might say, no longer had a career— rather, the career had her."

Confronted with the absence of her real father, she turned more and more to her agent, Jules Goldstone, using him as a kind of surrogate daddy. "Unlike Sara, Jules was eager for me to play more adult roles on the screen. Off screen, he contributed to my juvenile delinquency. He was pinning most of his hopes on me to make it big, even though his other major client was my former director, Clarence Brown."

Goldstone also represented the humorist, James Thurber.

"Goldstone worked to get me roles and to arrange things. I wanted him to line up dates for me and to convince Sara that they were strictly for MGM publicity purposes. The first man Jules sent to my mantrap was a handsome young actor named Marshall Thompson."

Hailing from Illinois, Thompson was known for his boy-next-door good looks.

At first, Elizabeth didn't want to date Marshall because she'd read that he had wanted to become a priest. Elizabeth told Goldstone, "I don't want a date who'll listen to my confessions. I want a young man with whom I can commit sins."

For her first meeting with Thompson, she dressed to imitate Jennifer Jones in *Duel in the Sun*. She put on a large pair of hoop earrings, and wore a peasant blouse with a full skirt with a cinched waist. At some point later that evening, Thompson sang "Golden Earrings" to her, a song by Frankie Lane that around that time was on *The Hit Parade*.

Thompson was seven years older than Elizabeth. On their first official date—an attendance at the premiere of *The Yearling* (1940), a sensitive tale of a young boy's attachment to a deer—Sara insisted that Thompson's mother accompany them as a chaperone.

"We managed to dump his dear ol' mom early in the evening and sneak off together," Elizabeth said. "When he first kissed me, I practically had to blast open his mouth to get my tongue inside. He wasn't an expert on French kissing. But by the time Christmas came around and he took me to a Yuletide dance, we kissed beneath the mistletoe. God, had he learned his lessons. I felt his tongue at the bottom of my throat. After that night, I came up with a nickname for him: HOT LIPS!"

Later, Elizabeth was seen with Thompson dining at the Trocadero and dancing at the Cocoanut Grove. Sometimes at later sightings at that nightclub, they would have drinks with Peter Lawford, who seemed intent on seducing Thompson himself.

Photoplay, the most popular movie magazine of its day, staged a Hollywood party in honor of Elizabeth, who arrived with Thompson as her escort. Pictures of the party were lavishly featured in the magazine's next issue, which arrived on the desk of Louis B. Mayer. Examining the pictures of his rising young star, he exploded in fury. He called Dick Hanley into his office and dictated a memo to Howard Strickling, his chief of publicity.

"Miss Taylor with her plunging neckline looks like a teenage whore flaunting her wares. That is, of course, an accurate portrait of who she is, but it's not the squeaky clean image we're promoting here at MGM. See that this doesn't happen again. When Miss Taylor goes out in public, warn her that she must keep her tits covered."

Elizabeth and Thompson frequently talked about appearing as young lovers together on the screen. She discussed the possibility with her agent, Jules Goldstone, who presented it to Benjamin Thau at MGM. He told Goldstone that Thompson did not have "an image that's masculine and virile enough for Elizabeth. Mayer and I are thinking about co-starring her with either Clark Gable or Robert Taylor."

Goldstone reminded Thau that Taylor was nearly forty years old and that Gable had been born in 1901.

For the next few weeks, Elizabeth and Marshall showed up every Sunday afternoon at Roddy's house, retiring at around four o'clock to his cabana.

Then one afternoon, Roddy introduced her to one of his recent lovers, another handsome young actor named Richard Long. Roddy assured her, "Dick accommodates both sexes." Elizabeth soon realized that she was more attracted to Long than she was to Thompson, but she had to compete with Merv Griffin for Long's favors.

"I had to fight off Griffin to get my nails into Richard's gorgeous flesh," she told Roddy. "I got him before he ended up playing the son to Ma and Pa Kettle in all those hillbilly flicks. Dick was a real gentleman in bed, perhaps too gentle. I think that both Dick and Marshall represented the kind of all-American boys who girls were

marrying at the end of the war, heading for the suburbs to raise kids."

"In bed, both of these young men were sufficient in their way, but hardly adventuresome. No variation. Actually going to bed with either of them was like getting the same fuck twice."

"I drifted away from both Marshall and Dick when I found more intriguing partners," Elizabeth confessed.

After a brief fling with Long's gym buddy, Rock Hudson, an actor who would become Elizabeth's close friend, Long married Suzan Ball, a cousin of Lucille Ball. But Suzan died of cancer a year later.

Some time after Suzan's death, Long called Elizabeth, hoping to rekindle some passion in her, but she politely turned him down. Ironically, he married Barbara Thompson, and became the brother-in-law of his former competitor for Elizabeth's affections, Marshall Thompson.



Elizabeth with Marshall Thomson

In 1974, after multiple heart attacks, Long died at the age of forty-seven. Too preoccupied to attend the funeral, Elizabeth sent flowers.

"Marshall and Dick treated me well," Elizabeth recalled to Roddy. "They were boys you had a hot dog and a coke with and I was dreaming of champagne and caviar. Actually, I wanted men who stood for danger. Take Errol Flynn, for example. Dick or Marshall would take a girl to bed, perform adequately, and then want to go to a football game. I wanted to be ravished by a lover who would take me to darkest Africa and do unspeakable things to me."

"I knew both Francis and Sara Taylor," Thompson recalled years later to columnist James Bacon. "They trusted me. Perhaps that trust wasn't well founded, since Elizabeth and I were doing it. When Francis died in 1968, I went to the funeral. Elizabeth showed up with Richard Burton."

"Burton stormed over to me like he wanted a fight," Thompson said. "He was drunk. 'So you're the bloke who gave Elizabeth her first screen kiss,' Burton said. Then Elizabeth came up behind him. 'No, Richard, Marshall gave me my first offscreen kiss.' Then Burton glared at me. 'That makes it even worse,' he said."

"If looks could kill, I would have been buried that day with Francis," Thompson said. "I found it hard to believe that a world class whore like Burton, who had fucked half the pretty boys and half the beautiful women on the planet, would actually be jealous of me after all those years."

"After the funeral ended, I stood and watched as Elizabeth and Burton got into a long stretch limousine. At that time they were the most notorious couple on the globe. Why was Burton jealous of me? After she dumped me, she had a string of affairs and adventures with all sorts of men who would make our little fling look like a scene from Shirley Temple's Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm. Elizabeth, that darling little girl from National Velvet, had grown up to become a world class adventuress."

From March of 1945 until the summer of 1947, MGM had no film roles for Elizabeth. At this strategic stage of

her career, she was desperately searching for more mature roles and not just waiting around for MGM to assign her her next picture.

She telephoned her agent, Jules Goldstone, every day. If MGM didn't have a part for her, perhaps Paramount or Warner Brothers did. She was almost certain that Louis B. Mayer would lend her out, since MGM had previously made sizable profits by doing that.

One role that appeared on the horizon with a part she felt was suitable was *That Hagen Girl*, a script written by Charles Hoffman and based on a novel by Edith Roberts.

The soap opera plot involved a small town's small-mindedness. A teenaged girl, Mary Hagen, is ostracized because gossips think she is illegitimate. When a lawyer, an older man called Tom Bates, arrives in town, the gossips assume (incorrectly) that he is the girl's father.

A handsome young hunk, ultimately played by Rory Calhoun, pursues the Hagen girl, but she falls for the older character, the lawyer, instead. He rescues her from a suicide attempt after she jumps into a roaring river. Bates professes his love for her and gives her a reason to live.

Ronald Reagan, whose career at the time was in a steep decline, read the script and (wisely) rejected it. The casting department at Warners insisted, however, promising him that if he accepted the role of the lawyer in *That Hagen Girl*, they'd eventually assign him a lead role in another, yet-to-be-determined outdoor adventure picture. Despite his objections to playing romantic scenes with a teenager, (he was thirty-six years old at the time) Reagan accepted the deal.

Elizabeth wanted Goldstone to get her the role of the Hagen girl before filming on another project (*Cynthia* ; 1947) began. When she learned that Reagan's friend, actor/politician George Murphy would be cast in the film with her, she enlisted his help in her campaign to get the role opposite Reagan in *That Hagen Girl*.

A few days later, Reagan, partly because of Murphy's intervention, called Elizabeth and invited her to dinner at an apartment in West Hollywood. She noted that he pointedly did not invite her to his home, which he still shared with his estranged wife, Jane Wyman.

Elizabeth was picked up by her agent, Goldstone, and delivered to the apartment in West Hollywood. In distinct contrast to the plan which had been presented to Sara, Goldstone would not be at the dinner, but would retrieve Elizabeth shortly before midnight to take her back home.

Elizabeth would relay the details of what happened that night to dozens of her friends, but not until after 1980, when Reagan was elected president of the United States, beating the incumbent president, Jimmy Carter.

A few weeks after her dinner with Reagan—the details of which are relayed within this chapter's next scene—he called her with news that the studio had rejected her bid and had cast Shirley Temple, an older teenager, in the Hagen role instead. Temple would play the role as part of a loan-out from David O. Selznick.

"I was terribly disappointed that my nemesis had been cast opposite Reagan," Elizabeth said. "But it was only one of many casting disappointments I'd experience in my future."

She followed the news of this troubled film as it was made. She'd read that Temple interpreted her role as *That Hagen Girl* as "my lip-smacking chance," even though Shirley's domineering mother, Gertrude, had warned her that "Reagan is long on quips and short on talent."

Reagan's onscreen involvement with a younger actress was already raising concern, but at least some of his fears had been assuaged by Cary Grant, who had reminded him that earlier that year (1947), Grant had appeared in a romantic plot co-starring Shirley Temple in *The Bachelor and the Bobby Soxer*. Grant reminded Reagan that he was seven years older than he was. "And I pulled it off," he said.

Nonetheless, during the filming of *That Hagen Girl*, Reagan informed its director, Peter Godfrey, that he found it embarrassing to play a romantic lead opposite Temple because of the seventeen-year- difference in their ages. "I find such relationships repulsive."

Tersely, Godfrey reminded Reagan that "my own wife is young enough to be my daughter." In embarrassment, Reagan retreated.

One of his scenes required that Reagan jump into a roaring cold river to rescue Temple from her suicide

attempt. When he has her safely on shore, he declares his love for her. It was a difficult shot, requiring lots of time and several takes.



The role that Elizabeth was glad she lost, and the role that another child star was sorry she got: **That** (horrible) **Hagen Girl**

lower photo: Its co-stars, **Ronald Reagan** and **Shirley Temple**, who shocked viewers with its "appearance of unrebated incest."

In the wake of his immersion in the freezing waters, Reagan, hovering near death, was hospitalized at the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital with viral pneumonia and a constant temperature of 104°. Elizabeth sent flowers. During his hospitalization, Reagan received the unfortunate news that his wife, Jane Wyman, had suffered a miscarriage.

Temple, during the slowdown in filming caused by Reagan's hospitalization, despite strenuous dieting, kept gaining weight. Finally, a doctor informed her that she was pregnant.

That Hagen Girl had its sneak preview in Pasadena. In disguise, Elizabeth was escorted there by Marshall Thompson. She was hoping that the film would be a disaster, and her wish, indeed, came abundantly true.

During the scene in the movie when Reagan tells Temple, "I love you," the audience screamed, "OH NO!!" Because of their reaction, the studio opted to cut that pivotal scene from the film's final version.

Later that evening, Elizabeth told Thompson, "With me in the role, the audience would have believed that Reagan really loved the Hagen girl. But despite her age, her fans still think of Miss Temple as a little curly haired moppet. As I told Reagan, audiences won't accept a love affair between Miss Lollipop and him. I was right."

"I learned a lesson from watching That Hagen Girl," Elizabeth confided to Thompson. "Shirley Temple probably destroyed her chance to segue from being a child star to a teenaged actress. I'm not going to let that happen to me. Also, there is absolutely no chemistry between Reagan and her. Reagan knows, however, that there is chemistry between us—but I can't go into that right now. I don't want to shock you. You're far too young."

Time magazine denounced the picture, claiming, "Moviegoers with very strong stomachs may be able to view

an appearance of rebated incest as a romantic situation.”

Temple told the press, “As movie kissers go, Reagan was good.”

Reagan said, “After the cuts, it was left up to the audience to decide if I married Shirley, traveled with her doing naughties, or adopted her.”

Unlike Temple, based on the dinner she had shared with him in that apartment in West Hollywood, Elizabeth could evaluate firsthand Reagan’s performance in bed—and not just as a kisser. But she would wait for him to become President of the United States before she “dined out” on stories about his performance in the boudoir.

During the 1980s, Elizabeth did not like Reagan’s policies, and was horrified at his utter silence on the subject of the AIDS epidemic sweeping across the globe like the Black Plague of the Middle Ages.

For the first time, she began speaking publicly about his seduction of her when she was a teenager back in the Hollywood of the late 1940s. Often, under the influence of a champagne buzz, she’d have her dining companions laughing and amused at social venues that stretched from Rome to Gstaad, from London to New York and on to Los Angeles.

She recounted how her agent, Jules Goldstone, drove her to a secret little apartment in West Hollywood. “I never knew if this were Reagan’s fuck pad— or else the apartment of a friend of his,” she said.

Ostensibly, shrouded at the time in studio intrigue, she had arrived to lobby for the role of Mary Hagen in the box office disaster That Hagen Girl, a part that eventually went to the older Shirley Temple.

“I thought he might have invited me to a restaurant, but he preferred this small flat,” Elizabeth told Frank Sinatra’s guests in Palm Springs one night.

“Reagan opened the door wearing an apron. He complimented me on how beautiful I was—and how grown-up I looked. Then he offered me a drink and invited me into his dimly lit living room, where the music of Doris Day could be heard. I later found out he was also pursuing Miss Day.”

“The table was already set with candles. He invited me into the kitchen, where he’d made a salad. He pointed out five kinds of lettuce he’d purchased at the Farmers’ Market. Our meal that night included juicy hamburgers, his favorite. He told me he’d ground the beef himself.”

“Reagan was treating me like a grown woman, and that thrilled me,” Elizabeth said. “Of course, I was still a child at the time, but I didn’t want to be treated like one. Back in those days, he was still quite handsome and had a good body, at least according to the standards of the time, which were hardly the buff standards of today. A few years earlier, he’d actually posed for beef-cake photos.”

“I tried to act as sophisticated as I could, even though he was old enough to be my father. We talked a lot about the script of That Hagen Girl, and he had serious doubts about his own role within it. We bonded over our mutual concerns for our careers. I was trying to cross the bridge between child star and adult roles, and he was trying to hold onto his role as a leading romantic figure as he moved into middle age in the 1950s. Neither of us wanted to be a footnote in some survey of movies of the 1940s.”

“He was a pretty good cook, and he’d bought the world’s most delicious rum-laced chocolate cake with ‘drunken’ cherries on top. I volunteered to help with the dishes, but he told me a maid would come to clean up in the morning.”

“We sat on his sofa, and I could tell he wanted to get it on. But he seemed reluctant to make the first move, probably because of my age. I finally took Judy Garland’s advice and became the aggressor. God, I wished they’d been casting Lolita around that time...I could have won an Oscar playing the nymphet. When he found my tongue down his throat and my hand massaging his goodies, he was mine for the night.”

“Once I broke the ice, he took charge,” she claimed. “After a heavy make-out session on the sofa, with a lot of fondling of my breasts, we went into the bedroom, where he stripped me. He was somewhat reluctant, but he finally removed his clothing. When he dropped his boxer shorts, I was pleasantly surprised. By then, I knew that God did not create all men equally, and that he was hung better than average. He put on a condom—he called it a ‘rubber’—and assured me that it was the most expensive on the market, so I didn’t have to fear getting pregnant.”

“Let me give credit where credit is due,” she said. “It was the longest running fuck I’d ever had up to that

point. I didn't exactly time it, but it went on for at least forty-five minutes. It wasn't the greatest lay of my life, but it ranked up there with the best of them. He seemed very concerned with my own satisfaction, and I liked him for that."

"As soon as he'd shot off—finally—he rushed for the showers. He was the cleanest smelling man I've ever known, unlike Richard Burton, who was often smelly and stunk like a brewery. Reagan must have enjoyed it, because he called me ten days later for a repeat."

"I turned him down because at this point I had been introduced to the one star in Hollywood who was better in the sack than any other. But that's a story for another day."

Elizabeth's story has been dismissed by some of her critics and fans, some of whom believe that her oft-repeated recitation was a politically motivated fabrication intended to embarrass President Reagan.

However, when actress Piper Laurie published her memoirs, *Learning to Live Out Loud*, in 2011, Elizabeth's rendition became far more plausible.

In *Louisa* (1950), the then-teenaged Piper was cast as Reagan's daughter. She wrote that Reagan seduced her during the shoot. In her case, she was not only a teenager, but a virgin.

So the possibility of Reagan's seduction of young Elizabeth was not out of character. There were numerous other stories about Reagan's seductions of young women—girls, really—that circulated about him during his years in Hollywood, stories which were amplified and expanded after his election as President.



Piper Laurie

When Elizabeth's former lover, Frank Sinatra, got together for booze and laughs, he always told her that he'd seduced two First Ladies and that she'd been sexually intimate with two U.S. Presidents.

"The big difference between them," she jokingly recalled, "was how long each of them was in the saddle. I much preferred the second president's politics to those of Reagan. But, in all fairness to Reagan, this other president (JFK) had one big drawback. He was a two-minute man."

CHAPTER EIGHT

"The Most Beautiful Woman in the World"

The 1947 film, *Cynthia*, cast Elizabeth in her first role as a maturing adolescent, marking a major transformation from the child star of *National Velvet* to her emergence as a beautiful young woman—that is, a very young and a very beautiful woman. Beginning with this movie, two titles were bestowed on her by the Hollywood press machine: "Princess of Hollywood" and "The Most Beautiful Woman in the World."

For the first time, she appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine. Throughout her life, she would pose for more *Life* covers than any other actress. *Cynthia* would also mark her first screen kiss, a chaste smooch from James (Jimmy) Lydon, whose World War II Henry Aldrich film series had provided competition for Mickey Rooney, who, after his marriage to Ava Gardner, was hardly convincing any more as the youthful, innocent Andy.

Cynthia, whose story was based on Viña Delmar's Broadway flop, *The Rich, Full Life*. was promoted as "a teenaged version of *Camille*." Its plot centered around a sickly, sheltered teen beauty who rebels against overprotective parents, played by Mary Astor and George Murphy. *Cynthia* finds a boyfriend, Lydon, who takes her to the senior prom, giving her a good night kiss—pretty innocent stuff for an actress who one day would be called "The Serpent of the Nile."

A femme fatale reduced to mother roles, Astor wrote about Elizabeth in her memoir, *Life on Film*, and had additional, more provocative, comments to make about her in private to fellow cast members. "Elizabeth was cool and slightly superior," she wrote. "There was a look in those violet eyes that was somewhat calculating. She was quite sure of what she wanted and was quite sure of getting it."

When Elizabeth, in later years, read that, she said, "What an acute observation from the Astor bitch. It's amazing that she was so perceptive, considering she was drunk every day."

Throughout the shoot, Astor battled the bottle. After the filming of *Cynthia* ended, she entered rehab, as would Elizabeth herself in the years to come.

In later interviews, Astor was more revealing of her feelings. "Elizabeth had begun taking sedatives to calm her nerves. She appeared on set very high strung and brittle and snapped at you if you dared speak to her. Like *Cynthia* in the film, Elizabeth required a lot of sick leave. I think she had already begun to take herself too seriously and to believe her press clippings. She was preparing for the melodramatic lifestyle that would follow in her later years. My God, she was only fifteen and ordering her mother to leave the set and go home. The cast learned why. After work, Elizabeth was seen driving away with John Derek, even Errol Flynn. And in the 1930s, I was called a scarlet woman. Errol should have been dating me—not Elizabeth."

Elizabeth understood the character of *Cynthia* and even gave advice to the screenwriter and director, according to George Murphy. "She wanted to move into the adult world far too soon. I felt guilty setting her up with Ronald Reagan. I loved Ronnie dearly, but when it came to women, he could go too far. My God, in a year or so, he would be pursuing Marilyn Monroe. Of course, there are worse things than screwing Elizabeth Taylor and Marilyn Monroe."



Top photo: July, 14, 1947 cover of Life magazine
—the first of four devoted to **Elizabeth** during
the course of her career, and

Lower photos: Co-workers who were less than
enchanted by the antics of young Elizabeth: left
: **Mary Astor**, and right: Director **Robert Z.
Leonard**

The director of *Cynthia* was Robert Z. Leonard, who had in the 1920s married the blonde silent screen vamp, Mae Murray, famed for her 1925 portrayal of *The Merry Widow*.

"From what I'd observed, Elizabeth Taylor was turning into a little whore, and Sara seemed none the wiser," Leonard claimed to Mary Astor and George Murphy. "Of course, I could be wrong. Privately, Sara may have known everything that was going on and was just maintaining a pristine public image. Everybody in Hollywood did that. Elizabeth was complaining to the press that boys were intimidated by her fame and were too afraid to ask her out on a date. That was pure bullshit. No dates! Hell, she was sucking off John Derek and doing God knows what with Errol Flynn. I can't believe how many writers fell for Elizabeth's line. Here she was, hailed as the most beautiful woman in the world, and complaining that men wouldn't go out with her— in Hollywood, of all places! I would have fucked her myself if she'd picked up on my signals."

Leonard would have been a bit old for Elizabeth, as he'd been born in Chicago in 1889. She was pleased to be working with such an experienced director, who had been nominated for Oscars for helming *The Divorcée* in 1930 and *The Great Ziegfeld* in 1936.

When introduced to him on the first day of the shoot, Elizabeth said, "Oh, Mr. Leonard, I've researched your career. Here you are directing Jimmy Lydon and me in a silly little romance when you once directed Clark Gable and Greta Garbo in *Susan Lenox* (*Her Fall and Rise*)."

"I want to grow up fast, even faster than I'm doing," she told Leonard. "I know I'm very young, but have the emotions of a woman twice my age. I want to create a world for myself away from my parents and MGM."

"What kind of a world would that be?" Leonard asked.

"A world filled with men, lots of men," she said, smiling.

Her remarks were tamer in the summer of 1947 when she went on a radio show hosted by Louella Parsons. She bluntly told the gossip maven, "I want to become a great actress. But mostly, I want to snare a husband. Boys my own age bore me."

Privately, she told Parsons. "I'll be auditioning several beaux over the next few months until I find the man most suited to me."

When Parsons quizzed her about the estrangement of her father and mother, she ducked the question, claiming that both of her parents were busy pursuing their own careers.

Cynthia was shot out of sequence, and the kissing scene with Lydon was one of the first to be filmed. Leonard also directed and filmed Elizabeth's kissing scene at the end of the movie. "She's not well versed in pucking," he said. "The difference on film between her early kiss and the film's concluding kiss was day and night. By the end of the shoot, Errol Flynn had taught her everything she ever knew or wanted to know about sex. She should always be grateful to her sexual mentor."

Lydon wasn't all that excited by the kiss. "It was almost a half-century ago," he said, "and people are still talking about it. At the time, I didn't view it as a milestone. It felt more like a handshake. Elizabeth also sang a song in the movie. Her voice was a bit shrill, rather reedy, if you ask me."

During the filming of Cynthia, Sara changed her position about wanting Elizabeth to prolong her role as a child star, as Mickey Rooney had done. When she saw how Shirley Temple was failing at the box office as a young adult, Sara insisted on major changes in Elizabeth's appearance. "She deliberately encouraged her to dress far older than she was, and to show bosom," according to Lawford.

Spencer Tracy observed her in the MGM commissary. "Every day she showed up revealing her tits. It gave even older guys like me hard-ons."

The First Lady of the United States was not impressed. Harry Truman's wife, Bess, invited Elizabeth and other stars to the White House to attend a March of Dimes campaign. Making a stunning entrance, Elizabeth arrived in a black velvet dress, cut very low, a white fur coat, and a pair of seamless black nylon stockings. Mrs. Truman at the head table was overheard, "That Elizabeth Taylor child has some nerve coming here dressed up like one of those hussies Joan Crawford plays in films. If (my daughter) Margaret ever did that to me, I would take her out to the woodshed and give her a whipping she'd never forget."

Back in Hollywood, Elizabeth found that in spite of her grown-up appearance in Washington, she was still seated at the children's table at the MGM commissary. She was approached by a photographer, who asked her if she'd pose for pictures in a bathing suit.

After checking with Sara, Elizabeth agreed to pose on a Santa Monica beach. She wore a revealing one-piece white bathing suit. The photographer snapped some two-hundred pictures of her, which were widely printed and distributed. At the end of the shoot, he told her, "You are the most beautiful woman I have ever photographed, and I've shot all the top stars—Rita Hayworth, Ava Gardner, Betty Grable, Lana Turner."



GENERATION GAP: left photo: **Elizabeth Taylor** kissing **James Lydon** in *Cynthia*

right photo: First Lady **Bess Truman** at the White House: Dire warnings about what would happen "If my daughter (Margaret) ever dressed like that Elizabeth Taylor....."

The next day, Sara telephoned Hedda Hopper, who repeated the photographer's praise in her column, stating that Elizabeth was "the most beautiful woman in the world." So far as it is known, this was the first time that appellation—soon to be repeated around the globe for years to come—first appeared in newsprint.

The next week, Hopper ran another headline—ELIZABETH TAYLOR'S PARENTS REUNITED. Sara had taken ill and had called Francis to come home and take care of her and help her look after Elizabeth. She reminded him that she considered divorce out of the question. He agreed to those terms and would bring her son, Howard, back into the household.

However, during their discussions of a reconciliation, he informed her that he planned to continue his affair with Adrian. He also reserved the right to bring young men in for sleepovers after Elizabeth and Howard had gone to bed.

It was during this time that Michael Curtiz ended his affair with Sara, tossing her aside for the blonde World War II goddess with the peek-a-boo bangs, Veronica Lake.

Upon its release, *Cynthia* became the most popular film shown at U.S. military bases all over the world. During its depiction of Elizabeth's screen kiss, the servicemen often hooted and hollered. As one soldier put it, "Compared to the noise the men made over *Cynthia*, our artillery fire sounded like small firecrackers."

Across America, movie houses organized "Why I deserve to be kissed by Liz" contests. One sailor maintained that he deserved the award because he had an abnormally long tongue that could not be completely concealed when he closed his mouth. "I could reach to the back of her throat," he wrote on his entry form at a movie theater in San Diego, enclosing a picture of himself with his tongue out.

When Howard Strickling, representing MGM's publicity department, jokingly presented this contestant's application and picture to Elizabeth, she said she found it disgusting. She refused to reward any of the contest winners from around the country with a kiss.

She showed the sailor's picture to Roddy McDowall. "I bet he'd be good at cunnilingus and rimming, too." Roddy exclaimed. Then he was forced to explain to Elizabeth what both of those terms meant.

"Then perhaps I'll have to reconsider this long-tongued sailor boy," she told Roddy.

When *Cynthia* was released, Bosley Crowther of *The New York Times* dismissed it, referring to it as "a synthetic morsel right from the Metro candy box." Other, more appreciative critics interpreted it as a cinematic milestone in the depiction of adolescent independence, defining *Cynthia* as a rebel who opts not to let life defeat her the way it did her parents.

Audiences were treated to a revised public image of Elizabeth—one where she looked "drop-dead gorgeous." For the first time, she appeared with her hair swept up. Around her neck, she wore a heart-shaped locket that had been depicted on the cover of *Life* magazine.

Elizabeth had already seen *Cynthia* at a preview, but she asked Roddy to take her to a regular afternoon screening of the film in Pasadena. She slipped in after the screening began and ducked out right before the final scene, as she didn't want to be recognized.

Afterward, she asked Roddy, "I looked grown-up, didn't I?"

"You looked exactly like Greta Garbo in *Two-Faced Woman*," he said facetiously.

"From now on, I'm no longer a teenager except in age," she told him. "Let's face it: Both of us like dick and plenty of it. You've already had every actor in Hollywood, and I want to top your record, even though you've got a head start. I'm tired of waiting."

"You're not waiting," he reminded her. "You've already had more affairs than the typical American gal has in a lifetime."

"Just watch me go," she said. "I'm only at the starting gate."

The knave of hearts, the greatest rogue of them all, the swashbuckler in countless adventures: At last, Michael Curtiz brought Errol Flynn to the set to introduce him to Elizabeth. He wasn't quite forty when she met him. The talk in Hollywood was that he had prematurely aged because of all his drinking, drugs, and debaucheries.

She found him amazing looking, one of the most handsome men she'd ever met. He was charming and suave and spoke with a slight British-Australian accent. He'd obviously come from a tennis game. She was aware that most players on tennis courts in those days wore only white, but he was dressed in sunflower yellow shorts, a yellow T-shirt, and even yellow tennis shoes and socks.

"Hello, I'm Errol Flynn. You obviously are Elizabeth Taylor."

She'd dreamed about what her first words to him would be. She wanted them to be piquant and memorable. "There's one thing no one told me about you," she said.

"And what might that be, my dear?" he asked.

"You have the male version of Betty Grable's legs," she said.

"That's not all I have," he said, kissing her on both cheeks.

She was dazzled by his eyes. They were a beautiful brown color but flecked with gold, and they twinkled as he spoke. He took her hand. When he smiled, he flashed pearly white teeth. After kissing her hand, he gently held it.

She wanted to remember this moment so she could report every tiny detail to Dick Hanley and Roddy McDowall. Here was "Robin Hood" and "Captain Blood" in the flesh, perfectly tanned and with perfect manners, except when it came to speaking to Curtiz.

Curtiz and Flynn often exchanged insulting banter, as each man knew the other's most deadly secrets. "You've got to watch this guy," Errol warned Elizabeth. "He's a vicious Hungarian with a tongue like a cobra's."

"I decided on first picture Flynn's a bum," Curtiz said. "Can't act. So what happens? Warner's assign this jerk to me time and time again."

"Which of my pictures did you like the best?" Errol asked Elizabeth.

"I've seen only two," she said. The Adventures of Robin Hood and Captain Blood."

"I've got a great idea," Errol said. "Why don't you guys come with me to my farm on Mulholland Drive? I've got a copy of my 1937 film, The Perfect Specimen."

"I was the director," Curtiz said. "Hal B. Wallis told me to cast an actor who's athletic, cultured, smart, very handsome, and charming. I get this idiot."

"In the film I have a boxing scene, Errol said. "I get to show off my Betty Grable legs and my perfect specimen of a chest. "Members of the audience screamed and fainted when I came out half-naked."



Two views of superstar **Errol Flynn** lower photo:
In his notorious "fuck pad"

"I can't wait to see it," she said. "I'd love to accept your invitation."

"Come on," he said. "Let's hit the road. Curtiz, you take your own car, and Elizabeth can ride with me."

"I know that sitting beside temptation like me, you'll be the perfect gentleman," she told him.

Elizabeth was apprehensive as Flynn pulled into his driveway, but was relieved to see that Curtiz had trailed them in his own car. Built in the "California colonial" style on a mountaintop, 7740 Mulholland Drive, though modest by A-list movie star standards, was the most notorious private residence in Greater Los Angeles.

As he showed her around, she was amazed at the number of French doors. "That means I can throw them open at parties—I'm always giving parties. You must come to them."

Roddy had already told her about some of these parties and even provided details about the special features of the house—bugging devices, hidden passageways, two-way mirrors, and peeper holes. "One hidden chamber is called "the jerk-off room" although I've never heard that anyone actually masturbates there. They don't have to."

As she returned with Flynn to the living room to join Curtiz, a Mexican maid brought in pink champagne and caviar. "I usually like my liquor brown, but in honor of you, I made it pink champagne tonight," Flynn said.

"Not for me," Curtiz griped. "I'm no god damn fairy. Bring me a whiskey."

As Elizabeth drank gingerly, Flynn pointed out a new glass-fronted cupboard he'd ordered as a display case for his collection of ancient Greek vases, some of which had been excavated by divers off the Aegean coast of the Greek island of Lesbos.

Curtiz, meanwhile, set up the screening for *The Perfect Specimen*, the story of a super-rich character played by Flynn, who is kept sheltered by his grandmother until a vivacious Joan Blondell comes crashing through his fence, launching a whirlwind courtship.

At the film's end, Flynn turned on the lights. Curtiz had disappeared. Flynn with Elizabeth migrated to a panoramic terrace, with its view over Los Angeles.

"At night, everything looks so beautiful," she said. "All the ugliness of Los Angeles is hidden. The moonlight is very forgiving."

"The moon is not needed to enhance your beauty," he told her.

"Thank you for the compliment," he said. "But if you want to see beauty, just check out the image in the mirror when you take a shave in the morning."

"No teenage girl has ever said that to me before," he said. "I love it! More! More!"

Flynn poured more pink champagne, as an incredibly beautiful, blonde-haired young boy who appeared to be no more than fourteen, came onto the terrace. "Mr. Flynn," he said. "Miss Doris Duke is on the phone."

An avid reader of gossip columns, Elizabeth knew who Doris Duke was. The tobacco heiress was the richest woman in the world, and Elizabeth wondered if Flynn was her kept boy. Judging from her pictures and the articles that had appeared about her in the press, Duke was known as a not particularly beautiful woman who had developed a knack for distracting and eventually "purchasing" the men she desired.

When Flynn returned, he said, "That was Miss Duke. She's flown into town from Hawaii and wants to see me."

"I hope you didn't tell her I was here," she said. "I don't want to make such a powerful enemy."

"It would not have mattered," he assured her. "We have an understanding about such things. We're just fuck buddies, nothing more serious than that."

As Stephanie Mansfield, author of *The Richest Girl in the World* put it, "Flynn was Doris Duke's kind of man—bisexual, promiscuous, and not above asking Doris for money. His whole life was once described as a trespass against good taste, which appealed to her."

Over dinner, where pheasant was the main course, Flynn entertained Elizabeth with stories of his early life "growing up as a wicked little Tasmanian Devil."

"But I thought you were from Ireland," she said.

"You've been reading my press. Privately, I called my mother 'The Cunt,' and despite her lack of nurturing, I eventually grew, all by myself, into a strapping lad. Every married woman and every homosexual in Australia tried to get into my trousers. I decided to charge them for the privilege. I was a bona fide male whore until I went to New Guinea to search for gold. That didn't pan out, forgive the pun, so I sold natives as slave labor to the miners. One night I killed a man. But he was only a native, so what the hell?"

"You are the most dangerous man I've ever met," she said.

"For saying that, you get a kiss." From his perch on her side of the sofa, he leaned over to kiss her. One kiss led to another. Unlike her experience with Marshall Thompson, she didn't have to teach Flynn to open his mouth when kissing. Before the session ended, each of them had removed most of their clothing, or so she'd relay later to Dick Hanley.

Flynn did a striptease for Elizabeth; his body was that of an athlete. During their time together in bed, she uncovered one of his sexual secrets. He rubbed cocaine on the tip of his penis before intercourse.

"He hurt me," she later told Dick, "but did so in such a thrilling way."

After their lovemaking, during pillow talk, he'd complained that "I'm just a god damn phallic symbol to the world. They say I'm always trying to seduce young girls—statutory rape and all that. Hell, I come home to find the little vixens hiding under my bed. In my dressing room, I just lie there reading the trades while they work me over."

Curtiz called Flynn the next day to see how it had gone. "We're not fated to have a long affair," Flynn told the director. "There's a big drawback to Elizabeth. I'm a leg man, not a breast man. Her legs are too short. Her breasts are terrific, but how do you make love to a breast?"

"Someday when you're older, you fucker, I'll tell you," Curtiz said before hanging up the phone.

To both Roddy and to Dick, Elizabeth breathlessly supplied the details of her one-night stand. "Suddenly, there he was, all six feet two inches of delicious manhood. I was smitten from the first moment he walked in. I know girls have charged him with rape. He didn't have to rape me. To me, Errol Flynn is romance, danger, adventure."

He called Elizabeth shortly after their experience together, telling her, "You are a very special girl, and I

worship you." Before ringing off, he asked her to come back to the house on Mulholland Drive the following Saturday afternoon, and she willingly accepted.

When she arrived, the house was very different, not romantic at all. She heard the giggles and screams of children coming from the swimming pool. In the living room, Flynn presented her with a large toy poodle whose fur had been artfully dyed pink. "It's adorable, but how do I explain this when I take it home?"

"Tell Sara it's a gift from a crazed fan, which would be the truth in my case," he told her before kissing her.

He walked with her to the edge of the swimming pool where he pointed out his young son, Sean, who was nine years younger than she was. He was playing in the shallow side of the water with two slightly older girls. Then Flynn directed her to a dressing cabana where he told her she'd find a bathing suit her size. In the cabana, she discovered at least twenty women's swim suits, making her wonder who'd worn these suits before.

Then she joined the kids in the pool, playing games as if she was a child again. She found Sean an extremely beautiful, blonde-haired boy. He provided her with a black inner tube, then struggled to overturn it once she'd settled into it. After being dumped in the water, she chased him from the pool, threatening to rip off his bathing trunks. Comfortably seated in a chaise longue, Flynn seemed to enjoy the scene as he puffed on a Havana cigar.

Two hours later, Elizabeth was in Flynn's bedroom. He'd left the door open, and was bouncing her up and down on a king-size bed large enough for four couples. He'd toss her into the air, catching her as she came down. When she looked up, she spotted Sean at the door.

"She's only a girl," he said, coming into the room. "That's the game you play with me!" It sounded like a protest.

"And you're only a boy, sport," Flynn told his son. "See this girl I'm bouncing up and down? Show some respect. She's going to become your stepmother one day."

Sean stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

Later that evening, Elizabeth told Sara that she'd spent the afternoon at Roddy's house. But in the privacy of her bedroom, she called Roddy to report on the day's events. "I'm going to tell you the biggest secret of my life."

"You're pregnant," he said, only half in jest.

"You wish. No, not that. Errol is going to marry me."

"Did he propose?" Roddy asked.

"Not quite, but he more or less did. He practically swore on a stack of bibles to his son, Sean, that I was going to become his stepmother."

Errol Flynn had appeared suddenly into her life, and he disappeared two weeks later with the same suddenness, without telling her of his departure.

"He was 'in like Flynn,' and then out like Flynn," she told Dick Hanley. During his reaction to that observation, Mayer's secretary told her that he thought Flynn had gone on a mysterious trip to Mexico. "He can indulge in debaucheries South of the Border that would get him arrested in the U.S."

As a young girl who was emerging fast but somewhat prematurely into the adult world, Elizabeth suffered from a kind of attention deficit syndrome, even if that term had not yet been made known to her. "Her interest in certain men shifted from week to week," said Dick. "She would continue to visit Flynn from time to time, but when Robert Stack walked into her life, Robin Hood went back to Sherwood Forest."

After a spree with Sara in England, Elizabeth was summoned back to Hollywood by Louis B. Mayer, who had hired Richard Thorpe to direct the feel-good film *A Date With Judy* (1948) at MGM.

Its cast included Jane Powell in the title role, Wallace Beery, Selena Royle, and, for laughs, Carmen Miranda and Xavier Cugat. As mentioned before, Robert Stack would play one of the male leads in a frothy, and

somewhat flawed, film about the “coming of age” of a character played by Elizabeth.

The best scene in the movie did not include any of the more prominently featured leads, but featured Carmen Miranda suggestively teaching a wealthy patriarch, as played by Wallace Beery, how to dance the rhumba. But everything ends happily by film’s end, when it’s made obvious that Rosita is destined for a future with her true love, a character played by Xavier Cugat, at the time Hollywood’s most successful Latino entertainer.

That same year, 1948, Thorpe had directed Peter Lawford in *On an Island With You*, co-starring Esther Williams.

But despite his many previous successes, Elizabeth was mainly intrigued about why Thorpe had been fired from the directorship of *The Wizard of Oz*. He was very blunt in telling her.

“I directed Judy Garland for only two weeks. Mayer didn’t think I had the right air of fantasy about the picture. I gave her a blonde wig and was accused of giving her a cutesy ‘baby-doll’ makeup, making her look older than the innocent little girl from Kansas they wanted. George Cukor came in temporarily and got rid of the wig, the make-up, and me.”

“Well, we won’t have this problem on *A Date With Judy*,” Elizabeth responded. “I want to look older and very sexy.”

“You certainly have the tits for it, kid,” her director told her. She would work with him on future pictures.

A Date With Judy’s producer was Joe Pasternak, who, in 1939, had cast Stack in his inaugural film, *First Love*, starring Deanna Durbin. Stack gave Deanna her first screen kiss. But that decade had passed and, as the forties were coming to an end, Deanna was passé. When Elizabeth was introduced to Pasternak, she told him, “Robert Stack is not going to give me my first screen kiss. He’s much too late for that.”

“Don’t worry, kid,” he told her. “Stack is going to give you your first adult screen kiss.”

Elizabeth was mesmerized by Carmen Miranda, the “Brazilian Bombshell.”

“Why does MGM think I have an accent?” she asked Elizabeth in heavily accented English. “What do they expect from a South American?”

Carmen’s banana hats fascinated Elizabeth, and the star loved to drive fast cars. One afternoon, when Sara was ill, Carmen volunteered to drive Elizabeth home. “My God, she went one-hundred miles an hour,” Elizabeth later said. “She was arrested for speeding. The cops suspected her of being drunk. I went with her to the police station where she was booked. I got home by eleven that night. Miraculously, I was still alive.”

Typical of post-war MGM musicals, *A Date With Judy* was light froth, with all the stars—more or less—required to sing.

Elizabeth recalled bandleader Cugat walking around with a little Chihuahua under his arm. Whenever he passed by Elizabeth, he pinched her butt.

Like his former co-stars, Elizabeth found Wallace Beery obnoxious. The most unlikely superstar of Hollywood’s golden era, he had been married to screen vamp Gloria Swanson throughout most of the course (1916-1919) of World War I. He was usually cast as a jowly, lovable lug. Offscreen, he was anything but the image he portrayed. “He never spoke to me, walked right past me, even though out of respect I always addressed him. He was known for his scene stealing and constant mugging, and he was also a thief. Anything that wasn’t nailed down, including some of the props, he took home with him.”

A Date With Judy represented the first time Elizabeth wore make-up on screen, and the first time she had a leading man who wasn’t four-legged. “One minute I was kissing a horse and the next thing I was kissing Bob Stack with tongue. I loved it. I had such a crush on him.”

Depicted in luscious Technicolor, Elizabeth was the sultry schoolmate of MGM’s singing sensation, Jane Powell, known as “The Girl Next Door.” Thanks partly to her startling singing voice, she’d begun performing since the age of two, and had arrived in Hollywood with hopes of becoming the next Shirley Temple.

In the film, Elizabeth played a rich girl, the rival of Powell. She and Powell were never very close, although they attended MGM’s schoolhouse together, and Powell was frequently invited to Roddy McDowall’s Sunday afternoon gatherings.

Powell later recalled, “Elizabeth was younger than me, and she got to wear green eyeshadow, show off her figure in a tight sweater, and look sexy. That hurt. I was really a little jealous, not of her, but of that green eyeshadow. Just once, I would love to have appeared as sexy in a movie. Bob Stack also gave me my first

screen kiss, but Elizabeth got him at the end of the movie. She was really beautiful, with breasts."

Elizabeth echoed Powell's comment. "I got Stack in more ways than one."

Months later, after seeing the movie's final version, Elizabeth told a reporter, "My silly character never left the first dimension, although I looked gorgeous in those gowns by Helen Rose. I was so impressed with her dresses that I had her design my wedding gown. When I met her, though, she wore a nondescript black dress with food stains on it, and her slip was showing. She'd tied her hair in an unflattering knot. She obviously concentrated on designing clothes for others, not for herself. She made me look very grown up."

A Date With Judy was Elizabeth's first attempt to mold herself into a young femme fatale and "not be turned out to pasture" like other child stars, including Margaret O'Brien and Deanna Durbin. "I did not want an awkward period of adolescence to destroy my daughter's screen character," Sara stated. "She became a young woman overnight."

Powell shared a dressing room with Elizabeth and remembered that she complained that she was "mad for Peter Lawford and he doesn't give a shit for me."

"She was inconsolable and didn't seem able to accept rejection," Powell said.



Light froth "in luscious Technicolor:" **Elizabeth Taylor** and **Jane Powell** in A Date with Judy

Bob Stack made her forget about Lawford.

"With Robert Stack in bed beside you, what girl in the world could want anything better?" Elizabeth asked.

After three years of military service as a gunnery instructor during World War II, Robert Stack returned to Hollywood, wanting to be cast in adult action roles. "What did I get? I ended up as the boy next door in love with the girl next door. But it was worth it. That girl happened to be Elizabeth Taylor. Unlike Errol Flynn, I didn't want to be brought up on a statutory rape charge. But everybody on the set kept telling me that Elizabeth wanted to go out with me. Even though I was twenty-nine years old and she wasn't quite sweet sixteen. I knocked on her dressing room door. My good friend, Flynn, had told me that he'd broken her in already, so I didn't have to teach her sex education courses."

She came to the door in her brassiere. "Unlike Flynn, who's a leg man, I'm a breast man. 'I've come to ask you out on a date,' I told her."

"Well, it's about time," she said. "We've already kissed on camera, so we can get over that kiss-on-the-first-date shit and move on to the next stage."

"That's the best offer I've had since I returned to Hollywood," Stack told her. "I gave Deanna Durbin her first kiss, and didn't get anywhere with that one."

"Your luck is about to change," Elizabeth said.

On her first date with Stack, he picked her up at her home in Beverly Hills at ten o'clock in the morning. He was not an actor that Elizabeth had to conceal from either Francis or Sara. The Taylors knew Stack's mother, Elizabeth Modini Wood Stack, who had long been a Hollywood socialite—in fact, she'd been part of Rudolph Valentino's wedding party early in the 1920s. Stack's father, James Langford Stack, was a powerful advertising executive who had created the slogan, "The beer that made Milwaukee famous."

Mr. and Mrs. Stack had previously visited Francis' art gallery and had, over the course of two years, purchased three valuable paintings from England. The Taylors had also gone to A-list Hollywood parties at the home of the Stacks.

Before Elizabeth dated Stack, Sara had told her, "Bob might make a good match for you, a fine husband. He comes from good stock. I think young girls should marry older men, as a means of giving them stability in life, instead of running off with some wild young thing."

"In that case, maybe I should marry Errol Flynn," Elizabeth said.

"Oh, my dear," Sara said, her face reflecting a look of horror. "We're not talking about a sexual degenerate."

Stack had planned the day, beginning with a trip to a skeet-shooting range. He told Elizabeth that at the age of seventeen, he'd won an award as the national champion of skeet shooting.

"What in the fuck is that?" she asked, using what had become—and would remain—her favorite expletive.

He explained that trapshooting involved clay targets which are mechanically hurled into the air in a way that simulates the movement of wild birds in flight.

That particular description didn't impress her, as it sounded like something to be practiced in a penny arcade. Later, however, on a target range, she was surprised by his skill. In rapid fire, he hit each of his fifty targets. "So what do you think of the sport now?" he asked.

"I've got to tell you the truth: I can't stand it. I've always abhorred fox hunting and the shooting of birds. I saw men do this on the estate where we lived in England. I always ran into the house screaming. A bird in flight is so beautiful. Who in his right mind would want to take it down?"

"Well, obviously, my skeet shooting didn't awe you," Stack said. "Perhaps if I told you who we are having lunch with at the clubhouse, you'll be awed."

"Who might that be?" she asked.

"Clark Gable," he said. "He's a skeet shooter himself. I taught him everything he knows about the sport."

Seated at table in the clubhouse, Elizabeth spotted Gable at the entrance, making his way to their table. Stack whispered to her, "At the age of thirteen, I fell in love with his wife, Carole Lombard."

Elizabeth didn't need to be introduced, as previously, she had talked very superficially with him at the MGM commissary. She didn't know if she could confide in him that she'd once harbored a schoolgirl crush on him. As she'd later relay to Roddy McDowall, when she gave him a detailed description of the day's event, "I'm glad I didn't bring up the subject of that crush. The man sitting across from me was not the Clark Gable of the early 1940s. He had aged badly over the war. I feared he might soon be playing grandfather roles."

Much of the luncheon talk centered on skeet shooting, of which Gable was a devotee. "He's a pretty good shot—not as good as me, though," Stack claimed.

"Like hell, you say." Gable protested. "I can wipe your eye any day."

"Why would you want to do that?" she asked.

"Wiping your eye means shooting a bird that someone has missed," Stack explained.

At long last, the King of Hollywood, occupying a shaky throne, turned to her. "Little girl, I have some news that might startle you. I talked Thursday with Mayer. He told me you're a pain in his ass, but he still has big plans for you in spite of your insolence. He wants to star you in pictures with some of MGM's leading male stars, although we are far older than you are. Yes, he's actually suggested that you and I play on-screen lovers. I might go for it, but I don't want to appear onscreen looking like I'm chasing jailbait. Therefore, I've suggested that we voluntarily submit to a screen test to see if we can blow up any chemical works. I don't want to be laughed off the screen."

"I'd love to do that test with you, Mr. Gable," she said.

"If we're going to be making love on the screen, you call me Clark. Of course, Spangler Arlington Brugh has also been suggested as your screen lover."

"I don't know him," she said. "Is he new?"

"That's Robert Taylor's real name," Stack said. He then told a joke about going on a hunting trip with Robert Taylor and Andy Devine. "We'd had a lot of beer as we traveled along a backroad in Colorado. With all that beer in us, nature called. Andy and Bob stood next to each other irrigating the wildflowers. Andy checked out Bob's pecker. He said, 'That thing doesn't look like it belongs on the world's greatest lover.' Without missing a beat, Bob shot back, 'I know, but don't tell my wife. She thinks they're all the same size.'"

Gable laughed at that, before telling a self-deprecating story about himself. "At Hollywood dinner parties, Carole [Lombard] used to tell guests that if I had once inch less, I'd be known as the Queen of Hollywood."

Elizabeth seemed amazed that Gable was so secure in his manhood that he could reveal such a remark. As she would tell Dick Hanley the next day, "The thought of doing a screen test with Gable—a love scene, no less—scares the hell out of me. I hope I don't faint."

"Give it hell, Elizabeth," he said. "After all, do you want to be the only female star at MGM who hasn't had Gable's tongue down her throat?"

The night had not even begun, and the date with Stack was stretching into one long day. After a morning on the skeet-shooting range, and lunch with Gable and that promise of a screen test, Stack told her, "I'm taking you to the polo grounds. Spencer Tracy will be there."

"I've seen him checking me out in the commissary several times," Elizabeth told him.



Dating Judy (and Jane, and Elizabeth) left to right: **Robert Stack, Jane Powell, Elizabeth Taylor,** and Scotty Beckett

"Don't be too flattered," he said. "He's always checking me out, too."

"You mean, he's a homosexual?"

"Yes," he said. "Actually, bi."

"What about Katharine Hepburn?" she asked.

"She's into girls," Stack said. "Better give her wide berth. Remember, in Hollywood, image is everything. The fan magazines want the myth, not the truth."

On their way to the polo field, Stack told her that he'd been introduced to Tracy through Gable. "Spence admired my skeet shooting, but when he heard I'd been cast in First Love with Deanna Durbin, he said, 'We've lost a good shot and probably gained a lousy actor.'"

Elizabeth patiently watched as Tracy and Stack played polo, and was more fascinated by that sport than skeet shooting because of her love of horses.

Hot and sweaty, Tracy come up to her after the game. "Hey, kiddo, I hear Mayer is going to start casting you with leading male stars. What about it? Want to try me out?"

"Mr. Tracy, you are the greatest actor on the screen," she said. "I wouldn't dare appear in a picture with you. Besides, you've got Katharine Hepburn as a co-star."

In one of those amazing Hollywood coincidences, in 1950, Elizabeth would be offered a co-starring role with Tracy and Hepburn. Elizabeth accepted, and so did Tracy; only Hepburn turned it down. The picture was Father of the Bride.

For dinner that night, Stack took her to Chasen's, where she surprised him with her order. She bypassed the elegant French dishes on the menu and asked for chili con carne, a dish she'd heard much about in America, but had never tasted. That night marked her life-long passion for chili con carne. In the years to come, when she was in such remote locations as alpine Switzerland, she would have Chasen's chili flown to her.

After dinner, as she relayed later to Roddy and Dick, she was mildly surprised when Stack drove her to Errol Flynn's "farm" on Mulholland Drive. "Errol's away, but I have the key. He lets me use his place when I want to."

"How convenient," she said, not disguising the sarcasm in her voice.

While she sat in the living room on the same sofa where she'd made love to Flynn, he disappeared into the kitchen and emerged with a bottle of champagne—not pink this time.

On the sofa, Stack and Elizabeth talked for about an hour about Flynn and about their movie, *A Date with Judy*.

"Errol told me he was a Tasmanian devil," she said. "I didn't want to appear stupid, but what in the fuck is that?"

"It's a carnivorous marsupial known for its extreme ferocity," he said. "What a learned definition," she said. "I'm impressed."

"Don't be—those words were taught to me by Errol himself. There's no one like him. He got so mad at what your friend, Hedda Hopper, wrote about him that he went over to her house and masturbated on her front door while she hid behind the curtains laughing. It probably excited the old bitch."

As he began to kiss her and fondle her, he said, "Don't be afraid. We don't have an audience tonight. We're in the house alone."

"What do you mean, not have an audience?" she asked.

"See that mirror on the ceiling?" He pointed overhead. "That's a two-way mirror. Any guest in that upstairs bedroom can look down on whatever's happening on the sofa."

"Hell, Errol and I had a heavy session here," she said. "I hope no one was watching. How embarrassing."

"I don't think there were too many Peeping Toms that night," he said. "Maybe only Bruce Cabot and David Niven...perhaps Tyrone Power."

"Oh, ONLY THOSE!" she said, heatedly.

"There's more," he said, taking her hand and leading her into the downstairs bedroom. "Errol got the best technician at Warners to install a hidden camera in this room. I'm sure he documented his boudoir performance with you. He likes to show these loops to his party guests on movie night."

"I'm ruined," she said, "Even before I get started in Hollywood. That god damn Tasmanian devil would do that to me! Wait till I get my hands on him and his film!"

"Congratulations," Stack said. "You've made your first blue movie!"

"I can't let this happen," she said. "He tricked me. I'll threaten him again with statutory rape."

"I'll speak to him about it," Stack promised, trying to soothe her. "There are no cameras on tonight. Let's make our own blue movie." He began to smother her with kisses, and she finally succumbed to him, especially when he told her, "I think I'm falling in love with you." She seemed desperate to hear words like that.

When he'd taken off his clothes, she told him, "You have a chest as perfect as Errol's. You can star in the remake of *The Perfect Specimen*."

Before midnight, they were back in the living room drinking more champagne. She felt very tipsy.

"I've got another surprise for you," he said. "One of my best friends is coming to town. I told him about you. I was shocked when he said he knew you. He met you in 1939."

"I was just a little girl in London then," she said. "Who in hell could he be?"

"He said you had this awful crush on him. He's like a fisherman who catches a fish too small and takes it off the hook and returns it to the lake until it grows bigger."

"Come on," she said. "The suspense is killing me. Who is this guy?"

"John F. Kennedy. You know...the ambassador's son."

CHAPTER NINE

So Many Men, So LITTLE TIME

For Elizabeth's possible screen test with Clark Gable, Louis B. Mayer issued one of his strangest orders: "To make her look older," he told Benjamin Thau, his vice-president, "have make-up paint a Joan Crawford mouth on her."

When Gable heard that, he called Elizabeth and suggested that he should take her over to Crawford's home for some career, dress, and make-up advice. "She's helped many a young actress in the past, and no one knows how to become a star better than Joanie."

"I've always wanted to meet her," she said. "She's the kind of star I'd like to be. I asked Michael Curtiz to arrange an introduction, but he never did. He was too busy fucking my mother."

If Gable were taken aback by a teenager talking this way, he made no comment about it.

Two hours later, Gable called Elizabeth back and told her that Crawford had also invited Adrian, whom Elizabeth already knew, since the designer was her father's lover.

Gable drove Elizabeth to Crawford's home where she was ushered inside by a maid. In all her life, Elizabeth had never seen such an immaculately kept house. Gable said he "had a little business to conduct upstairs with Joanie," and that she'd be down later.

The maid ushered Elizabeth out onto a terrace, where Adrian was waiting with a warm embrace. It appeared that the designer had been drinking heavily with Crawford before her arrival.

The subject of Francis was obviously on both of their minds, but only one comment was made about him. "I'm meeting your father around five for cocktails, so I hope Joan and Clark don't take all day."

"You've known them for a long time, haven't you?" she asked.

"I met them both in 1931, when pictures were still learning to talk. Joan told William Haines, 'Adrian for gowns, Gable for fucking.'"

While waiting, Adrian amused her with stories of his early days at MGM. "I go back to the Silents, when I designed some wardrobe for Rudolph Valentino," he said.

"At MGM, they still talk about those shoulder pads you designed for Miss Crawford," Elizabeth said.

"There was a reason for that," he said. "Her hips were too broad, so I padded her shoulders to distract from that. It became known as the coat-hanger look. Bette Davis claimed that I made Joan look like Johnny Weissmuller."

"I'm so honored that you're going to design a gown for my screen test with Clark."

"It's my pleasure," he said. "It's important to remember that with you, the face is the most important thing. Therefore, don't wear anything that will compete with your photogenic face. Your dresses should be elegant, tasteful, even sexy, but remember, in your case, it's face, face, face. You'll want to look as mature and sophisticated as possible, which means we should make Clark look younger."

"He's still a handsome man," she said.

"He owes a lot of that to me," Adrian said. "I didn't think much of him at first—decaying teeth, acute halitosis, jug ears, a loutish personality, and large 'Jack the Ripper' hands. But with new teeth and a new wardrobe, he was transformed."

"Any tips you have about transforming me from an awkward teenager to an MGM harlot will be much appreciated," she said. "Of course, I'm joking about the harlot remark."

"The trick is to emphasize a woman's most attractive feature," he said. "In Joan's case, her large eyes and her showgirl legs are dynamite. With Harlow, I brought out her sensuality; with Norma Shearer, her sedate elegance; and with Garbo, her mystique. If you're properly made up, your face can dominate the screen and

actually create a sense of wonder that any woman can be as beautiful as you are. And those eyes! They're really blue to me, but with the right wardrobe, you can make them violet, which is far more dramatic."



Two views of **Joan Crawford** in dresses by Adrian. Inset photo: **Clark Gable**

When Gable and Crawford descended an hour later, Gable excused himself to go play golf, telling Elizabeth that he'd pick her up later that afternoon.

Crawford kissed Elizabeth briefly and gently on the lips and gave Adrian a passionate hug. She assured Elizabeth that she thought "one day, somewhere in the 1950s, you'll be the Queen of MGM."

Adrian told her he'd brought along a gown he'd designed for her to wear to an upcoming premiere.

"Let me try it on," Crawford said. Right in front of them, she pulled off all her clothes. The panties were the last to go. "All the MGM cows were jealous of me because I wore the smallest panties at the studio," Crawford told Elizabeth.

Elizabeth tried to look away, but was drawn to checking out Crawford's nude body. Without her "Joan Crawford fuck-me high heels," she was a very short woman, standing only five feet, four inches. She looked taller because she was long-waisted. Her legs were perfectly formed, but out of proportion to the rest of her body. Elizabeth noted that her own breasts were much larger than Crawford's.

Adrian had designed a stunning gown in champagne colors for Crawford, and she paraded around the living room in it just like a professional model.

"You've still got it, Joan," Adrian assured her.

"You look stunning, and the gown is spectacular, Miss Crawford," Elizabeth said.

After Crawford had changed back into a dress of cabbage roses, she offered drinks to her guests. She and Adrian preferred vodka, but Elizabeth settled for a soft drink.

Sitting on a sofa whose surface was covered with plastic, Crawford said, "I believe in helping young actresses who are struggling for recognition. Back in the 1920s, no one helped me. Norma Shearer hated me. But I made it, and I know you will, too. I gave Gail Patrick a big push, lending her my make-up man and hairdresser when she tested for a role in *No More Ladies*. I even gave her a gown designed by my lovely friend here."

"Thank you for anything you can do for me," Elizabeth said. "But I'm afraid that the idea of teaming me romantically with Gable is a bit much."

"Not in today's Hollywood," Crawford said. "Clark can make love on the screen with a twenty-year-old, as can Gary Cooper. Male stars over fifty can keep rolling along, but when most actresses reach forty, or even before, they're considered has-beens. The Hollywood Hills are full of them."

Adrian had to leave, but said that within ten days, he'd design the perfect dress for Elizabeth's screen test.

After he was gone, Crawford invited Elizabeth upstairs to her combination bedroom/dressing room. Going inside, Elizabeth noticed the rumpled bed covers so recently vacated by Gable. Crawford had installed a bar in her bedroom and poured herself a hefty vodka, although Elizabeth turned down any beverage.

Ready for business, Crawford suggested that Elizabeth strip so as not to ruin her pretty dress with make-up. Elizabeth pulled off her dress but left on her bra and panties. She sat at a vanity table laden with creams, lotions, powders, beauty accessories, and lipsticks.

As Elizabeth would later tell Dick Hanley, "Crawford painted several faces on me, none of which satisfied her. She even painted a 'Joan Crawford mouth' on me, but it looked ridiculous. Neither of us was satisfied with the results. She had continued to drink and was getting sloppy. Completely without warning, she began fondling my breasts. At first, I was shocked. I just couldn't believe it. This legendary man eater was a part-time lesbian coming on to me. I almost panicked, but kept my self-control."

"How did you escape alive?" Dick asked.

"I got up and quickly slipped on my dress and headed for the door. I told Crawford that I had hardly learned how to sleep with men, much less women. She made an ugly grimace. She told me, 'You obviously don't appreciate what I can do for you.' I left the room. She stood at the door watching me go. I thanked her for everything and asked her to make my apologies to Clark."

"Downstairs, I asked the maid to call me a taxi. I had to wait nervously for fifteen minutes on the front stoop. When the taxi pulled up, I jumped in and headed for home. It would be my last visit to Crawford's house."

If Elizabeth thought she was through with Crawford, she was wrong. The temperamental star would come into her life once again.

Dick Hanley came into Elizabeth's dressing room an hour before the scheduled beginning of her screen test with Gable, and was amazed at how MGM technicians had transformed her look. "Holy shit!" he said. "Is that a twenty-four-year-old Hedy Lamarr sitting on that stool?"

Adrian had designed a stylish black dress for her with a plunging décolletage. An MGM hairdresser and two make-up experts had painted an alluring and almost sultry face on Elizabeth.

Although she still had trepidations about appearing on screen with Gable, she was thrilled with her new look. "Where is that little girl from National Velvet?" she asked her mirror in front of everyone.

After the finishing touches were applied, Dick escorted her to Gable's dressing room. As she came into his room, he revealed to her one of his "beauty secrets," as he jokingly referred to them. "I'm applying hemorrhoid ointment to reduce the size of the bags under my eyes," he told her.

"You don't need to," Dick said in jest. "You look young enough to play Little Lord Fauntleroy."

Under Sara's guidance, Elizabeth had carefully memorized her lines for the test. The script concerned a widower recovering from the death of his loving wife in an airplane accident. The material seemed inspired by the 1942 airplane crash that had taken Gable's third wife, Carole Lombard.

Elizabeth's role was that of a young woman who, since she'd been a girl, had been in love with the character played by Gable. He was her father's best friend. In the loop, she urges Gable to come out of mourning and form a new life with her.

Her most memorable line was, "Love has no respect for age, national border, color, race, or sex." That line was far too provocative to have been included in an A-list movie in the late 1940s, but she nonetheless delivered it with passion and conviction.

After complimenting Elizabeth on her startling new look, Gable gazed intently at his own remade face. "I swear I don't look a day over thirty-nine." He turned to Elizabeth. "They painted you so you look like you've been around for half a century. Many women marry men fifteen years older than they are, so we just might get away with it."

Before they headed out, she apologized to him for not having been there when he returned to pick her up at Joan Crawford's house.

"I understand," he said. "I've known Joanie for years. Now you know her secret. She walks on both sides of the street. But the less said about this, the better."

"My lips are sealed," she promised.

When a waiter with late morning coffee arrived from the commissary, Gable looked very sternly at Elizabeth. "Listen, kiddo, we have one thing in common. Both of us are depending on this screen test to chart our futures

in film. You want to stop playing some little girl attracted to animals, and I want to continue playing romantic leads through the 1950s. But a whole army of young actors in their twenties are beating down doors in Hollywood. Dick was in Mayer's office when we talked about this. Tell her what we talked about, Dick."



Clark Gable with Elizabeth Taylor in 1948

"It was agreed that every decade produces a different type of star, both male and female," Dick said. "Take Clark here. In the 1930s, he represented the Depression Era hero, never better than in *It Happened One Night*. But World War II changed everything. Benjamin Thau—you must meet him—has convinced Mayer of the new type of male star coming up."

"Exactly what kind of guy are you talking about?" she asked Dick.

"A John Derek type, someone you know only too well," Dick said. "Pretty boys like Guy Madison. I bet that cocksucker Henry Willson is auditioning three or four of them as we speak. Monty Clift is the new pretty boy in town, but in his case, he can act. I don't know about some of the others."

In the years to come, Elizabeth would not only watch this prediction come true, but in many cases, she'd get involved as a friend or lover of various members of this new beefcake brigade—Tony Curtis, Rock Hudson, Robert Wagner, Tab Hunter, James Dean, Troy Donahue.

"No wonder Clark Gable didn't feel he'd fit into these changing tastes in male stars," she said.

Before leaving his dressing room, Gable said, "Style in actors change like style in clothing and other things. I'll either keep abreast of those changing styles or become a has-been. You've got to change your image too, Elizabeth, or risk becoming a distantly remembered child star of the 40s."

"You're so right, and I begin that today," she told him. "I'm surprised that an established star like you agreed to a screen test."

"It was for my own protection," Gable said. "In *The Hucksters*, when they wanted to cast Deborah Kerr, I asked for a screen test with her so I could determine if we had any chemistry. Ava Gardner was in that picture, too, and I knew Ava and I had screen chemistry. In fact, Mayer has talked about having me try to re-create with Ava what I had going on the screen with Harlow and Crawford during the 30s."

"Maybe I'll become your new screen partner," Elizabeth said.

"That remains to be seen," he told her. "When I appeared with Anne Baxter in *Homecoming*, where she played my young wife, I got a lot of shit thrown at me because of the difference in our ages."

"Let's go see what we can do," she said, taking his hand.

Facing a noon-day camera at MGM studios, Gable and Elizabeth emoted, fervently, their dramatic scene together, ending in a passionate love scene.

She'd later tell Dick, "I really got to him. I could feel it getting hard. I think we'll burn up the screen in that test."

Mayer demanded that Dick, his secretary, show the screen test to him first, asserting, "I will rule on it."

Watching the test with Dick, Mayer was silent, but Dick noticed him fidgeting in his seat.

When the lights came on, Mayer stood up. "Destroy every god damn copy of that fucking test. No one must see it. It's obscene. Gable comes off like a dirty old man robbing the cradle, and Taylor looks like a teenage whore."

The film was destroyed before Elizabeth got to see the screen test. Although she beseeched Dick for details, all he could safely say was that, "Mayer said that Gable looked far too old to be playing love scenes with you. But he thought you looked terrific, and he's making plans to co-star you with Robert Taylor. He was born in 1911 and Gable in 1901. Bob still looks handsome and with him there won't be that great mountain to climb when it comes to age—only a steep hill."

"Bring him on," Elizabeth said. "Any older actor except for that disgusting Wallace Beery. I just want to play a grown-up on the screen."

"Have I got news for you, sweet cheeks," Dick said. "In your next picture, entitled *Julia Misbehaves*, you'll get to co-star with your all time dreamboat, Peter Lawford. Not only that, but you'll elope with him in the film—perhaps you'll run off with him in real life too, if you work it right."

At long last, Errol Flynn was back in Hollywood and called Elizabeth. She immediately berated him, accusing him of filming the two of them having sex.

He immediately denied it. "I have done things like that in the past. I admit it. But not with you. Such a film, if it got out, could have me brought up on another statutory rape charge. This time I might not get off. I might go to jail, where I'd have to endure countless rapes. I imagine half the men in any prison would want to fuck Errol Flynn. I may be an idiot, but I'm not that much of one."

She didn't believe him and slammed down the phone.

"A week later, her more compassionate side emerged when Dick Hanley told her that Flynn had been rushed, in critical condition, to a hospital.

He accompanied her to Flynn's room at Los Angeles' Monte Sano Hospital. They found him perspiring heavily, with a temperature of 102° F. "Last night it was 104°," he told them. "I'm also suffering from the world's worst cast of hemorrhoids. The doctors can't operate on me right now because of my temperature. I'm also suffering from a recurrence of malaria."

In his weakened condition, he talked to them about the trouble he was having trying to film *The Adventures of Don Juan*. "That bastard, Jack Warner, sent me a telegram. Because of my hemorrhoids, he's worrying that I can't film a dueling scene."

Two days later, she returned to the hospital where she found Flynn with a temperature of 103° F. He was also in the grip of pneumonia. "My piles grow worse by the day," he said. "If anything else happens to me, I think I'm going to die."

She assured him that he'd recover, although when she returned the following afternoon, she found him newly infected, suffering from chest congestion. "A quack has shot me full of penicillin. Some fucking good it did. Now I have an ear infection that's driving me crazy."

After his release from the hospital, he called her and told her he was going to Phoenix, Arizona for some rest and recuperation. He phoned her again in three days. "I heard from Warner. He assured me, in his words, 'with the sun beating down on your vivid kisser, you'll soon be your normal self again and your twelve inches will be back in operation.' The next day, he sent another telegram. The fucker told me, 'there was an error in my previous telegram. Delete the phrase twelve inches and insert six inches instead.'"

"At least you can laugh at yourself. That's a sign that you're getting better," she said.

He called her when he returned from Arizona. She asked him about the dueling scene. He explained that the fictional setting was the king's palace in Madrid. "As Don Juan, I was to make a seventeen-step leap to duel the Duke of Lorca—Robert Douglas, that is—in a sword fight to the death. They shot the scene with our doubles because Robert had an injured knee. Both of my doubles refused to do it. They got Jock Mahoney [later a famous screen Tarzan] to make that leap. He made the jump all right, but didn't handle his sword the right way. It castrated the other double. That poor stunt man will now have to go through life without his balls—poor guy."

He also asked her about her own career, and she explained that she had been heavily made up to look older for a screen test with Gable.

"Quite the opposite with me," he told her. "I have to go in two hours early to be made up. The old queen who does my face claims it takes him all that time to cover my debauchery. I'm not in my prime these days, dear girl."

Errol also told her that, "I got Nora a cameo in the movie."

That was his first reference to his second wife, Nora Eddington. Elizabeth always wondered where he stashed her while he carried on his adventures and his various amours, brawls, whore-mongering, drug abuse, and heavy drinking.

One afternoon, when she had no work, Elizabeth went to Warners to join Errol for lunch. Here, he introduced her to the director Vincent Sherman, who had previously made love to such stars as Bette Davis and Joan Crawford.

She arrived in time to hear a fight between Sherman and Flynn over his crotch. Flynn had ordered the wardrobe department to shorten his jackets so that they only partially covered his crotch. Sherman had seen the first take, and he protested that Flynn's "protrusion was too pronounced."

"Jack Warner won't go for it. Perhaps you could handle it more modestly and do what I tell ballet dancers to do when they're bulging out of their leotards: Pull up your thing and put a piece of tape across it. Then put on a tight-fitting jockstrap or codpiece."

"Listen, sport," Flynn said. "I've done many things for Warner's in my day, but I'm damned if I'll tape up my cock for them. Right, Elizabeth? I'm sure she agrees." He then invited her to the commissary to have lunch with him.

Sherman later recalled, "Flynn was Warner's biggest headache. Women and liquor were the devils that tormented him. He could not resist a pretty girl." The director later admitted that he was astonished that a young beauty like Elizabeth would show an interest in Flynn. "He had reached his peak and was rapidly descending, just like his role model, John Barrymore, had done. But I've never understood women, especially if that woman calls herself Bette Davis."

Over lunch, Flynn told Elizabeth that Doris Duke had hooked up again with Porfirio Rubirosa whom she had married in Paris in 1947. "Doris and Porfirio have invited us to dinner: When not involved with their other lovers, they're spending a few days here in L.A."

Both Rubirosa and Duke were tabloid fodder, and Elizabeth was thrilled at the idea of spending time with these media stars. That the tobacco heiress was also the richest woman in the world added an extra excitement.

Elizabeth would later relate in detail the evening she spent with Rubirosa and Duke. "It was my first really grown up evening, and I'm sure a sign of things to come. I was no longer treated as a child, and I was in adult company talking about adult things. The wonderful thing is I felt like I belonged."

For years, she'd read about the adventures of Doris Duke and her many lovers, who had included Cary Grant, Aristotle Onassis, General George C. Patton, and lots of Hawaiian beach boys.

Peter Lawford had described Rubirosa's legendary endowment: "It's at least eleven inches long and thick as a beer can. Doris has a preference for dark meat." The playboy of the Western world was originally from the Dominican Republic and had a very dark complexion.

At dinner, Flynn congratulated Duke and Rubi for getting back together again.

"Marriages, divorces, it's just so much paperwork from the state," Rubi said. "Governments should stay out of one's boudoir."

"Rubi and I will continue to come and go from each other's lives and bedrooms as frequently as we choose." Duke said. "Whether we're married or divorced hardly matters. Of course, there will be other men or women in our lives. For people like us, that must always be the rule. We are citizens of the world, not just one country. Errol is like us."

"I can only aspire to be like you. Just the idea of being tied down to one person sounds boring to me,"

Elizabeth said.

"Hear, hear!" Flynn said. "I, of all rogues, agree with that sentiment."

"When government interferes in one's life, there's always a problem," Duke said. "The State Department tried to confiscate my passport because they came across a picture of me entertaining Hermann Göring before the war. I entertain lots of people, regardless of their politics. If Hitler had invited me to Berlin, I would have gone. Likewise, if the Roosevelts had invited me to the White House, I would also have accepted."

"Just because of who we associate with, J. Edgar Hoover thought Doris and I were Nazi spies," Flynn said,.

"That's bullshit," Rubi said. "They were not Nazi spies. As for me, that's perhaps a story for another day."

Over dinner, Duke called Rubirosa "Rube" instead of the more commonly used "Rubi." "I decided I wanted a real man, so I purchased the best on the market," she said, looking over at him.

"When Doris married me, she thought she owned me," Rubi said. "After all, she'd paid for me. But I'm not a sex slave on an auction block. During the first week of our honeymoon on the French Riviera, I ran off with another woman."

"But I got even," Duke said. "When he came back to my hotel suite after a few days, he caught me in bed with two black musicians that a club in Cannes had imported from New Orleans."

"Doris adores black musicians," Flynn said.

"So I see," Elizabeth said. At that point in her life, she was a bit taken aback by biracial liaisons.



Doris Duke with Porfirio Rubirosa in Paris in 1947

"The more I learned about Rube—jewel thief, Nazi sympathizer, rogue, world class liar, whoremonger—the more I adored him" Duke said.

"And the more I learned about Doris, the more intriguing she became," Rubi said. "I especially like hearing that she fills entire vaults within Swiss banks with gold bars in her name."

When all three adults at table focused on Elizabeth, she told them about her career crisis and her desire to play more mature roles. "I want to be a movie star, maybe not the greatest actress in the world, but more famous than Lana Turner."

"My darling, I think you'll make it," Rubi said. "It's a treacherous town, though. Two studios wanted me. I could play a Latin lover type. But when I applied for a special work visa, I was rejected by some bureaucrat. He claimed my role could be played by any number of American actors."

"I'm sure you would have become a star," Elizabeth said. "Too bad you didn't get a chance."

"But he's still the big attraction in boudoirs on two continents," Flynn said. "Even better at it than I am, and of that, I'm certain."

After dessert, Duke rose from the table and took Flynn's hand. She announced that she and Flynn had some business matters to discuss upstairs, and Rubi had to make some important phone calls. "He's in trouble again with various governments, including Spain, France, and the United States. But my lawyers will help him."

"In the meantime, darling, I have an amusement for you," Duke said. "Go into that library. I took out some

jewelry. They're all valuable pieces, but I don't keep my world class gems here. Look at them, decide which one you want, and feel free to take it home."

"Miss Duke, surely you don't mean that," Elizabeth said.

"But I do," Duke said.

In the library, Elizabeth picked up each piece of jewelry, each more dazzling than the one that preceded it. She could not decide, as she wanted all of them. She'd later recall, "My world interest in jewelry began that night. It was one of the hardest decisions of my life, but I finally decided on a ruby-and-diamond bracelet."

When she returned to join the others, Flynn and Duke had not yet emerged from upstairs, but she spotted Rubi smoking a cigarette on the terrace. She joined him in the moonlight.

"Nights like this remind me of Santo Domingo," he said. "I'm a funny kind of guy. Wherever I am, I'm dreaming of being someplace else. When I'm sitting under a café canopy in Paris, as the winter rains come down, I'm thinking of sunny California. When I'm dining at Chasen's in Los Angeles, I want to be entering Maxim's in Paris. In New York in a penthouse overlooking Central Park, I'm remembering the fading light over the Colosseum in Rome."

"I want to experience all those places, too," Elizabeth said.

"In time, you'll know them all, I'm sure," he assured her. "You'll even know what it's like to make love to me."

"You certainly have confidence," she said.

"One thousand, perhaps two thousand—I forget—women have made me very confident. Instead of making love to you tonight, I think I'll wait a few years, but not too long. I'll let others break you in for me. Perhaps one night when I hear we're both in Paris, I'll call you."

"I think I'll accept your invitation," she said. "After all, you're known as the world's greatest lover."

At that point, Duke and Flynn joined them on the terrace.

Elizabeth thanked Duke for the evening, and showed her the bracelet she'd chosen.

"A wise choice," Duke said. "You and Errol have been a delight, and I want to invite both of you to join Rubi and me on a flight to Buenos Aires. After the war, I bought a B-25 bomber and had it converted into a private passenger plane. It has a bar and a lavish kitchen, and it seats ten people. Rubi likes to fly to Argentina every now and then to fuck Eva Peron, while I seek other amusement among the tango dancers. He even donates money I give him to Eva's charities."

"When Juan Peron learned of this," Rubi said, "he was quoted as saying, 'It's the first time in recorded history that a pimp ever gave money to a harlot.'"

On the way back home, Elizabeth chastised Flynn. "You told me you're still weak and out of commission, but I noticed you had enough energy to go upstairs to fuck Doris."

"That's not quite true," he said. "I didn't bang her, sport. She likes to masturbate while I voraciously suck her toes."

"Oh, I see," she said. "Little Miss Taylor is learning more about the world every day."

On a previous date with Robert Stack, he had informed Elizabeth that John F. Kennedy, newly elected to Congress from Massachusetts, would be at his house at around noon on Saturday. She accepted an invitation for a late luncheon with Stack and his longtime friend.

Before World War II, a mutual friend, Alfredo de la Vega, had introduced JFK to Stack. It was the beginning of a friendship that lasted throughout the course of JFK's life.

Since she'd last seen JFK, he'd become a naval hero, partly because of the publicity generated by his father's media machine in association with his military service during World War II. She'd read that his PT boat had been rammed and sunk by a Japanese destroyer, and that JFK had heroically rescued his men from death in the South Pacific.

Prior to JFK's arrival, Stack relayed stories to her about the young politician's previous visits to Hollywood, and how many doors had been opened to him thanks to his status as son of "the Ambassador," the former movie producer Joseph Kennedy, Sr., himself a legend in Hollywood.

During the early days of his friendship with JFK, Robert occupied a small apartment that lay at the end of a cul-de-sac, Whitley Terrace, between Cahuenga and Highland Boulevards in the Hollywood Hills. One of the apartment's bedrooms had a low ceiling only five feet high. Stack had defined this as "The Flag Room," a "chamber of seduction." On its ceiling, Stack had pinned replicas of the flags of many nations. When he escorted a woman inside, she lay on the bed and was instructed to memorize the position of each of the flags with the understanding that later, after cocktails, she'd be quizzed as to which nation each of them represented. If she flunked the quiz, she had to "pay the piper."

"All the girls flunked," Stack told Elizabeth. "There were too many flags to remember. One beautiful young model, Norma Jeane Baker, flunked four times and had to suffer punishment from both Jack and me."

[Norma Jeane, a short time later, changed her name to Marilyn Monroe.]

In his memoirs, *Straight Shooting*, Stack confessed that it was in this Flag Room that "I learned about the birds, the bees, the barracudas, and other forms of Hollywood wildlife." He had persuaded his parents to rent the hideaway apartment for him as a retreat where he could pursue his studies. "I studied all right," he said, "female anatomy. As for those flags, I taught Jack to recognize the banners of many countries, and therefore helped prepare him for the geopolitics he needed later in his life."



Top photo: Highly sexed bachelors at large:
Robert Stack with **John F. Kennedy** in the early
1940s Lower photos: 17-year-old **Elizabeth Taylor**
and (right) **June Allyson**

Stack rearranged the flags every night so that some foxy lady, paying her third or fourth visit, would not be able to memorize their positions and lineup order.

He recalled that through his humble portals passed "a guest list that ran the gamut from chorus line cuties to Academy Award winners."

Judy Garland, who dated both JFK and Stack, had been seduced there by both of them, and later asserted that they were "the two most desirable bachelors in Hollywood. All the girls were after them, and some of the boys, too."

"I'd known most Hollywood stars, and JFK could attract more women than anybody," Stack said. "He'd just look at a gal, and she was ready to give him a tumble. To my regret, most of the girls went for Jack instead of me. In my conceited way, I thought I was much prettier than Jack, and certainly a better swordsman."

To his best friend back East, Lem Billings, Jack referred to Stack as "my libidinous buddy. He threw down the red carpet for me on my last visit to Hollywood. Crossing it were beautiful stars, lovely starlets, and so-so wannabes."

In later years, Stack told friends that before his latest arrival, JFK had told him, "I want to fuck every woman in Hollywood...I want to specialize in celebrity poontang."

Before JFK's expected arrival, Elizabeth learned early one morning in make-up at MGM that she wasn't the only woman awaiting the upcoming arrival of the handsome young politician from Massachusetts. She sat next to June Allyson, and learned that she, too, was eager to date JFK after having had an affair with him back in 1946.

The stars lining up every workday for make-up were often amazingly frank in their discussion of men. It was their favorite sport and distraction during an oft-repeated ritual performed by mainly homosexual technicians, who glamorized the actresses' faces and eavesdropped on every conversation.

Allyson was billed as the wholesome-looking "Girl Next Door," but throughout MGM, she was known as a predatory nymphomaniac. She'd invite members of the film crew, including grips, to her dressing room during breaks.

"I know you're dating Bob Stack, and Jack Kennedy will be staying with him," Allyson told her. "Perhaps we'll go out on a double date."

"Perhaps," Elizabeth responded, concealing her jealousy of the older star.

"I fell really big for him a couple of years back," Allyson confessed. "Later, I found out I was competing with Gene Tierney and that overbite of hers. In many ways, Jack reminds me of our mutual friend, Peter Lawford. Both are fun loving and good looking."

"Jack can literally charm the pants off a girl," Allyson continued. "He calls his penis 'the implement.' He wants a girl at both the front and back doors. I'd never had anal sex before. It hurt. He's utterly ingratiating, but not that great in the sack. He's a sort of 'Slam, Bam, Thank You, Ma'am' type of lover. When the dirty deed is done, he wants to move on to his next conquest."

Elizabeth deliberately did not tell Allyson that she'd spent a day with JFK when she was a little girl growing up in pre-war London. She was thrilled with anticipation when Stack picked her up on Saturday and drove her to his house, where JFK had arrived and had been taking a nap when he'd left him. "He told me he's seen only National Velvet, so he has no idea of what you look like now."

When they reached his house, Stack directed Elizabeth to his pool, where JFK was waiting. Looking rail-thin, he wore only a pair of white shorts and was resting on a chaise longue in the sun. He did not get up to greet her, but put out his hand, capturing hers and holding it for a long time. "Hi, Elizabeth, you are living proof that little girls grow up in delightful ways. You've changed. For the better, I'd say."

"You have, too," she responded.

"In what way," he asked.

"Better looking. More manly. I guess it was the war and the years. I hear you're a big time naval hero."

"Fuck!" he said. "I don't care what you've heard. I won the war single-handedly. Don't let anyone tell you differently." The twinkle in his eyes revealed that he was satirizing his own exploits.

"And now, you're a congressman!" she said.

"If Dad has anything to say about it, I'll be sitting in the White House at least by 1964."

"I hope you'll issue me a presidential pardon," she said.

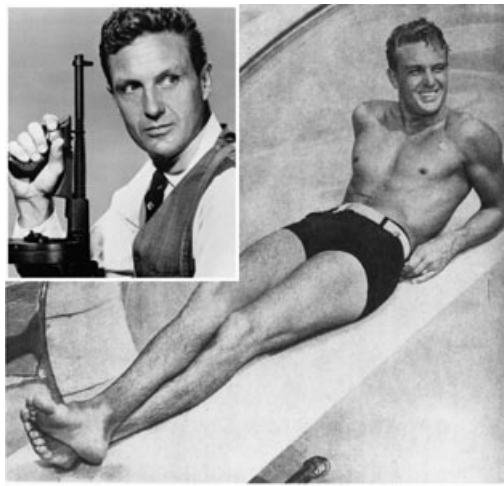
"Not likely," he smiled. "I'll summon you to the White House for a command performance."

At that point, Stack came out onto the patio calling them to lunch.

As they ate, JFK told Elizabeth and Stack that he'd flown to the West Coast to escape election debts and because he couldn't attend any more chicken à la king dinners.

"And you're out here to get your jollies!" Stack interjected.

"There's nothing wrong with that!" JFK said. "Right, Elizabeth?"



Two views of **Robert Stack**

"There's nothing wrong if you get them with me!" She shocked even herself at how forward she had become. JFK laughed. "A promise I'll make you keep."

Even though they indulged in mostly small talk, there was sexual tension in the air. She would later confess to Roddy McDowall that she was waiting for one of them, especially JFK, to make the first move.

After lunch, he got up and pulled off his white shorts in front of them. He was completely casual about his nudity, as his future wife, Jackie Kennedy, would eventually claim.

"Let's all go for a nude swim," he proposed, jumping into the pool.

In front of her, Stack pulled off his shorts and jumped into the water to swim after JFK. As Elizabeth would later relay to Dick Hanley, "I knew it was show time, and I didn't want to disappoint. I pulled off my dress, bra, and panties, and swam in after them."

At that point, the screen goes black. She refused to relay any of the juicy details to Dick, even though he wanted a blow-by-blow description. "I can live vicariously, can't I?"

All she'd confess to was a three-way. "It was my first such experience, but I don't think it will be my last. Bob is the better lover, but Jack has more charm. All I'll tell you is that he's mainly concerned with getting himself off—and not the girl who's lying under him. Bob has better staying power. Jack went first. But he shot off rather quickly. Would you believe that Bob and I were still going at it, and Jack was up beside the bed making a phone call? Then Bob and I finished the dirty deed."

"Are you going to pursue Jack?" Dick asked, "or was that it?"

"No, I'll keep after him," she said. "Not so much because of his love-making, but because of his charm. He has this amazing ability to look at you while you're talking and make you feel that you're saying something so vital that the fate of the whole world depends on it."

During an early-morning make-up session at MGM the following Monday, Elizabeth found herself seated once again side by side with Allyson.

In hushed tones, Allyson whispered to Elizabeth, "You would not believe what happened to me on Sunday. I went over to Bob Stack's house to meet with Jack Kennedy. I found him swimming nude in the pool. Before the afternoon ended, Jack, Bob, and I piled into bed together for a three-way."

"June Allyson, I'm shocked," Elizabeth said. "I would never do anything like that... ever."

"You're such a puritan, girl," Allyson said. "After a few more years in Hollywood, you'll be ripe for the plucking."

"Was that 'plucking' you said or something else?" Elizabeth facetiously asked.

For her next picture, a tedious romp entitled *Julia Misbehaves* (1948), Louis B. Mayer decided to team Elizabeth with Greer Garson and Walter Pidgeon, those fabled Mrs. Miniver stars of World War II. The popularity

of Garson during the darkest years of World War II had transformed her into the unofficial "Queen of MGM." But after the war, her popularity had waned, and Mayer was scheming to reinvent her as a screen comedienne, an unwise choice.

Afraid that Garson would steal the picture from her, Elizabeth quipped, "Greer seems to believe that actresses are ageless." Even at the young age of sixteen, Elizabeth had already developed a sharp tongue. As director Jack Conway said, "She was so young, so beautiful, and couldn't say three sentences without at least one curse word."

Conway fascinated Elizabeth, as he was a walking textbook of the history of Hollywood, having started his career as an actor in 1909 in *The Old Soldier's Story*. He had directed Clark Gable in films which included *Boom Town* (1941). Most recently, he'd directed Ava Gardner and Gable in *The Hucksters* (1947). That same year, he also partially directed Garson in one of her all-time disasters, *Desire Me*, yet nonetheless, he was chosen to helm her once again in this newest frothy film. Three other directors had shared in the debacle of *Desire Me*, including Victor Saville, Mervyn LeRoy, and George Cukor. "I hope I have better luck with Greer on this picture," he told Elizabeth. "On *Desire Me*, during the filming of one scene, it took 125 takes for her to just say 'no.'"

When Garson objected to foul language on the set, Elizabeth told her to "go fuck yourself." But Garson was gracious in spite of the insult, even inviting Elizabeth to four o'clock tea. Elizabeth quickly warmed to the star. "Someday in the years to come, you'll be in my same position, trying to hold onto a fading career while fighting wrinkles."

Julia Misbehaves cast Elizabeth as Susan Packett, a rich girl who invites her estranged mother to her wedding, where the complications flow like a river. The young bride's ultimate aim involves orchestrating a reconciliation of her long-divorced parents. Walter Pidgeon, Garson's frequent co-star, was cast as Elizabeth's father.

As Conway said about the ironies associated with his role in directing this film, "Mayer gave me three gay actors—Peter Lawford, Cesar Romero, and Walter Pidgeon."

Other screen stalwarts in the film included veterans Mary Boland, Lucile Watson, and Nigel Bruce. Elizabeth told Conway, "The script parallels my own life. I brought Francis and Sara back together. I'd better qualify that. I mean, they now live once again under the same roof."

Filming began in mid-January of 1948. Elizabeth was delighted to be working with twenty-five-year-old Peter Lawford again. She told Roddy, "I'm still mad about the boy."

"I was, too," Roddy told her, "until he dumped me."

"To me, Peter is the first and last word in sophistication," she said. "He's princely and refined, the kind of man I'm going to marry. Sara wants me to marry him, but he hasn't asked me yet."

At afternoon tea, Elizabeth realized that Garson was a sympathetic soul. She poured out her romantic complications to her. "I fear both Pidgeon and Romero will also be trying to get into Peter's trousers."

"Don't worry," Garson said. "Peter can run faster than either of those men. I had the same problem with Laurence Olivier when we had an affair in London in the 1930s. I had to compete with Noël Coward and an array of other gentlemen for his affections."

Elizabeth later recalled, "Peter was one of the guys I had this tremendous crush on, and he had already made love to me. I thought he was terribly, terribly handsome. He had such an elegant speaking voice. I avoided his mother, Lady May, because she was a bitch from hell. The whole cast of *Julia Misbehaves* knew that I was in love with Peter and teased me about it. The trouble was, he wasn't really in love with me."

During the filming of *Julia Misbehaves*, Elizabeth reached her full height of five feet four and a half inches. Her ideal weight fluctuated between 118 and 120 pounds.

In February of that year, Conway and the cast of *Julia Misbehaves* threw a "Sweet Sixteen" party for Elizabeth, presenting her with jade earrings and a silver choker. Her present from Mayer and MGM was the chic wardrobe she wore in the film. Sara and Francis gave her the greatest gift of all, a solid gold key to a baby blue Cadillac, even though she hadn't learned to drive yet. The bill for the Cadillac came from Elizabeth's own earnings. In addition, she received word from MGM that her weekly salary had been raised to \$1,000.

Lawford was enlisted as her escort to her Sweet Sixteen party, but he hadn't shown up. She was very tipsy when the chocolate layer cake was brought in. By the time Lawford did arrive, she had fallen asleep on a nearby sofa, having drunk too much champagne. But she recovered in time for him to take her dancing at the Cocoanut Grove.



upper photo: **Greer Garson, Peter Lawford, and Elizabeth Taylor**
in *Julia Misbehaves*.

Inset photo: **Greer Garson**

That night at the Ambassador Hotel, site at the time of the Cocoanut Grove nightclub, Elizabeth and Lawford double dated with Garson and E.E. ("Buddy") Fogelson, a rich Texas oilman. For Fogelson, it was love at first sight when he met the red-haired beauty. Before the evening ended, he told Garson, "I'm going to marry you." He did. She was at his bedside on December 1, 1987, when he died at the age of eighty-seven.

"Elizabeth welcomed the mobility that a car provided," Roddy recalled. "Carmen Miranda must have been her driving teacher. Elizabeth was hell on wheels. As for parking, she always managed to hit the rear of the car in front of her and the one parked behind her."

One morning she crashed into John Wayne's new, fire-red Thunderbird. He was furious or "boiling mad," as he put it.

After bashing in The Duke's car, Elizabeth became a hit-and-run driver. However, two stagehands witnessed her plowing into Wayne's vehicle.

When confronted with the evidence, she dismissed complaints. "Duke should not have parked there in the first place since it was my spot. Also, he should have left room for me to park. I think the Road Hog got what he deserved."

Wayne never quite forgave her and used future occasions to attack her. When he was having a torrid affair with actress Gail Russell, he said, "Gail is ten times more beautiful than ugly Liz with her thunder thighs will ever be."

His anger continued to bubble over for years. He attacked her for appearing in two screen adaptation of plays by "that queer, Tennessee Williams." He was referring, of course, to the 1959 *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and to the 1959 *Suddenly, Last Summer*. The latter picture infuriated Wayne, who called it "garbage from a diseased mind."

"I don't like to see Hollywood's bloodstream polluted with perversion, or immoral and amoral nuances. The film depicts homosexuality, murder, and psychotherapy," Wayne charged. Privately, he told friends that Elizabeth "cursed like a sailor and had a filthy mind." He was also infuriated when she won an Oscar for appearing as a prostitute in *Butterfield 8* (1960). "At least MGM knew that she'd be great playing a whore, a role she knows only too well. I heard she even tried to get Lassie—a male collie, incidentally—to fuck her in her first movie."



John Wayne (photo above):
"Playing a whore is a role
she (E.T.) knows only too
well,"

Elizabeth Taylor (about John
Wayne): "These closeted
queens have such bitchy
tongues."

When she heard about this, she said, "Oh, Wayne, Oh, Johanna Wayne. These closeted queens have such bitchy tongues on them."

Although Mayer had warned Lawford to stay away from Elizabeth and to protect her innocence, he continued to see her secretly. "Louis B. doesn't know that I've already tasted the honey," he told her.

"The less Mayer knows about my private life, the better," she said.

She found dating Lawford unsatisfactory, although Sara told friends that Elizabeth and Lawford planned to marry when she turned seventeen. Even during the peak of their dating, Elizabeth suspected that Lawford was carrying on affairs with both men and women on the side.

As the dean of Hollywood biographers, Lawrence J. Quirk, wrote: "Peter was compelled to make love to a number of women he involved himself with. They expected it, and he needed it, for pleasure and for his image's sake, and to help dispel rumors about his relationships with men—and there were a number of them. These relationships worried him; they were often a sexual release rather than a romance. When he fell in love or entertained romantic feelings toward a man, Peter grew inescapably depressed. This side of his erotic life he found ominous, threatening, baleful, yet he needed it, too."

Amazingly for her age, Elizabeth seemed to understand Lawford's dilemma, a harbinger of the sympathy and support she'd offer during later friendships with Rock Hudson, James Dean, and Montgomery Clift.

Lucille Ryman, chief of talent at MGM, noted that the teenage Elizabeth "seemed to be chasing after anything in pants, and she seemed desperate to find a husband, probably because she'd be able to move out of the house she shared with Francis and Sara."

Lawford didn't believe that Elizabeth's love for him was genuine. He dismissed her "as a girl in love with love."

Sheilah Graham, a rival columnist of both Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper, was the first journalist to suggest in print that Elizabeth was a sexual predator, even though she was only sixteen years old. Graham drew up a list of what she privately called "the biggest whores in Hollywood."

Photoplay would not print that, of course, and the list's name was changed to "Hollywood's Most Dangerous Women." The list was headed by Lana Turner, Ava Gardner, and Joan Crawford, and also included Jane Wyman, Rita Hayworth, and—as the youngest star on the roster—Elizabeth Taylor.

Some editors at Photoplay objected to Graham putting Elizabeth's name on that notorious list, claiming, "But she's only a child."

"Like hell she is!" Graham shot back. "If you're fucking Ronnie Reagan, Peter Lawford, Robert Stack, John Derek, Marshall Thompson, Mickey Rooney, and Errol Flynn, you're a child no more. Admittedly, she's had only a

fraction of men, unlike the other whores on my list, but they'd had years to seduce men. At the rate Elizabeth is going, she will have beat out all of them by the time she's forty."

One "fan" letter arrived at MGM from Betsy Blywood in Athens, Georgia. "Elizabeth Taylor may have turned sixteen, but she dresses and acts like the Whore of Babylon. I will pray for her."

A Date with Judy and Julia Misbehaves were each released within a week of each other. Most of the reviews sounded similar, using the same vocabulary—"Silly," "trivial," "vacuous," or even "vulgar," although why any critic would have used the term "vulgar" in association with either of these somewhat saccharine screenplays was never fully explained.

Critics claimed that Sidney Guilaroff, one of the leading hairdressers in Hollywood, went too far in "maturing" Elizabeth's screen image. They complained that she was "one of the loveliest girls in movies, but in Julia Misbehaves, she was made up and her hair done in such a way as to make her prettiness tiresome and conventional."

In spite of bad reviews, the film had a strong opening at Radio City Music Hall in Manhattan, the New York Herald Tribune hailing Elizabeth as "one of cinema's reigning queens." But the movie flopped overall, and did nothing to advance the fading career of Greer Garson.

MGM itself seemed confused as to how to promote Elizabeth's screen image. As author Alexander Walker wrote, "MGM was guilty of giving out confusing signals. Perhaps it, too, was confused. Elizabeth, in a photo spread taken by the fashionable photographer, Valezka, could pass for thirty with her hair drawn back close to her skull. And one picture of her, bosom thrust forward and stretching a tight, off-the-shoulder blouse, while she tilts her head back in a look of unashamed enjoyment of her own sexuality, must rank among the frankest photos MGM permitted an up-and-coming star—and a legal minor, too—to be pictured at that time."

"I'll be god damn if I'm going to be Judy Garland having my breasts strapped down so as to look fourteen," Elizabeth warned MGM.

In spite of this blatant publicity, and despite rumors about her sexual promiscuity, Mayer decided to give Elizabeth "one last chance," at playing an innocent virgin. He cast her as one of the leads in Louisa May Alcott's children's classic, Little Women, which had been brought to the screen before, with Katharine Hepburn playing the lead.

Elizabeth's "ripening" as a woman was concealed by a period costume showing nothing. Even her celebrated raven-black hair was concealed with a blonde wig.

She didn't want the role in Little Women and privately protested to her friends. "This is my last time appearing in a child's part. I want to heat up the screen like Ava and Lana. God damn it, I will, too, even if I have to go into the executive headquarters at MGM and suck off Benjamin Thau like Nancy Davis [later, Reagan] does every morning."

George Cukor had directed Katharine Hepburn, Joan Bennett, Jean Parker, and Frances Dee in Little Women way back in 1933. In the 1940s, David O. Selznick planned a remake starring Jennifer Jones and Shirley Temple, but later, he abandoned the project. Then MGM picked up the property and named Mervyn LeRoy to helm this glossy 1949 remake of Alcott's gentle account of teenage girls finding maturity and romance.

The Alcott story was largely autobiographical, the tale of sisters growing up in Concord, Massachusetts, during the 1860s. The little women keep the home fires burning as their preacher father serves in the Union army during the American Civil War.

Under a strawberry blonde wig, Elizabeth was cast as Amy, a character described as "snooty, anxious, nervous, and haughty." Ironically, Amy had been played by Bennett in the 1933 version. Bennett, a few months after the completion of the 1949 version, would play Elizabeth's mother in one her most popular films, Father of the Bride (1950).

At the age of thirty-two, June Allyson snagged the lead as Jo in the 1949 version of Little Women, playing a fifteen-year-old. Allyson was married to Dick Powell at the time and pregnant with her first child.

Other sisters included Janet Leigh as Meg and Margaret O'Brien as Beth. Cast with Elizabeth once again, Mary

Astor played the beloved Marmee, with Peter Lawford in the role of "Laurie." Other members of the cast included Rossano Brazzi, Lucile Watson, Leon Ames, and the old and very grand C. Aubrey Smith, who would die before the picture's release.

Elizabeth despised Astor and resented having to appear in another movie with her. The hatred was mutual. "Elizabeth spoke all the time with this boyfriend stationed in Korea while holding up production. She mercilessly ticked away MGM's money while we waited on the set for her to get off the phone. I had never encountered such a brazen attitude on the part of a child actor. Nobody in the company, including the director, dared utter a word about it to the precious darling, despite the fact that she was holding up the shooting schedule for weeks."

"Elizabeth visited me a lot in my dressing room between takes," Allyson said. "She obviously was thinking about marriage and asked many questions. She wanted to know if a married woman has to submit to sex any time her husband wants it. She also was eager to know if she had the legal right to demand sex from her husband."

"I told her that technically in marriage, a man and a woman should agree on having sex before committing the act. 'Usually, it's a spontaneous act,' I said. 'But men being men often want it when they want it. Of course, you can demand sex from a man, but they have such different plumbing. If they don't want to, you can't get a rise out of those fuckers.'"

In addition to Allyson, Elizabeth also bonded with Janet Leigh on the set. In fact, they became such close friends they began to go out on double dates.

"Elizabeth was always looking for some diversion to take her mind off wearing that blonde wig—she detested the thing," Leigh claimed. "The light hair really didn't do justice to her coloring. Our daily exposure allowed me a deeper perception of Elizabeth. I think I had anticipated a different person, because of the early recognition of her incredible beauty and success. I didn't expect the warmth, the humor, the openness, and the regard she extended to her friends."

Despite Leigh's rosy portrait of Elizabeth, her future husband, Tony Curtis, had a different view. "Janet got some good parts in spite of the fact that she was forced to dwell in Elizabeth's shadow. Janet and the girls at MGM didn't have an easy time competing with Elizabeth, who had an incredible allure and got any star role she wanted, which made it very hard on the other young actresses. As for me in 1948, I didn't need Elizabeth Taylor. To hell with the bitch. I was fucking Marilyn Monroe."

Co-starring with Lawford again, Elizabeth maneuvered it so that he would ask her out. One day at work, she said, "Peter, we both love the beach. Why not go together?"

He seemed to have other plans, but agreed to take her to Will Rogers State Beach.

Later, she complained about that date to Roddy McDowall. "To my regret, Peter spent most of the day looking at the bodies of all those gorgeous young men. I noticed that he made frequent trips to the gents' toilet and was gone for a very long time."

"Perhaps he has a weak bladder," Roddy said, jokingly.

"One time, when he came back from the loo, I accused him of not paying me much attention," she said.

As she relayed to Roddy, Lawford became very blunt with her. "Elizabeth, my dear, if you had better legs, I'd be more attentive. You don't have shapely legs. You have pods. Too many hot fudge sundaes at Will Wright's Ice Cream Parlor."

"Of course, it broke my heart to hear him say that," she confessed. "I really have dieted. My waist has gone from twenty inches to eighteen. But all my life I'd never been able to do anything about my pods. I thought swimming would help. At Malibu, I thrashed around in the water so long I got this awful cramp. Fortunately, my brother Howard was on the beach with some of his friends. He jumped in and swam out to rescue me."

Opening at Manhattan's Radio City Music Hall in March of 1949 as an Easter attraction, Little Women in its latest incarnation became one of the top-grossing films of that year.

Until the summer of 1948, most of Elizabeth's fans assumed she was still a virgin, as erroneous reports circulated that she was guarded, day and night, by Sara. Elizabeth laughed at these fan magazine fantasies. Among the columnists, Sheilah Graham, former lover of novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald, knew that Elizabeth had

indulged in a number of affairs, and as such, she printed an occasionally negative blurb. Perhaps Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper knew it, too, but for the moment, at least, it served their purposes to present Elizabeth as "The Virgin Princess of Hollywood."

The first of her romances to hit the press was largely a creation of the MGM publicity factory. At the time, Glenn Davis, the most famous football player in America, was as well known on the sports pages as Elizabeth was in the movie magazines. He had won the Heisman Trophy in 1946, and the same year, the Associated Press named him "Male Athlete of the Year."

MGM publicists wanted to link Elizabeth romantically with this "dreamboat" athlete as a means of generating publicity, since her last teenage films had not fared as well, commercially, as her earlier films as a child star, especially those Lassie vehicles.

Just prior to the period of his greatest exposure in Hollywood (and to Elizabeth), Davis had completed twenty-two weeks of infantry training at the U.S. Army's Fort Benning. He was scheduled to be in Los Angeles that summer playing football before being shipped off for military duties in Korea, beginning in September.



Question: What happens when you mix the two most famous football players in America, the publicity department at MGM, and everybody's favorite emerging new starlet?

left figure: **Doc Blanchard**
right figure: **Glenn Davis**
inset figure: **Elizabeth Taylor**

Davis stood tall and handsome, with auburn hair. His former girl friend, Glenda Neal, said that he was "built like a Greek god, especially where it counts."

A romance between Elizabeth and Davis was promoted by Dorismae Kearns, who worked for Howard Strickling in the publicity department at MGM. Sara invited Dorismae and her husband, Hubie Kearns, to their beach bungalow at Malibu one Saturday afternoon. At MGM, Dorismae's duties included overseeing publicity for Elizabeth, which was almost a full-time position.

Hubie was also an athlete, formerly renowned as a track star for the University of Southern California. He had won a bronze medal in the 400-meter event in the 1948 Olympics, and was a good friend of Davis.

Accompanied by Davis, now an army lieutenant, Dorismae and Hubie Kearns walked onto the beach at Malibu to discover Elizabeth engaged in a game of touch football with her brother Howard and his friends from school. Elizabeth's first words to Davis were, "I bet I can play football better than you."

"You think so, squirt?" he said. "You're on." The game became more tackle football than touch football, and both Davis and Elizabeth ended up wrestling together in the sand.

After that, they headed for the nearby Taylor home, where Davis greeted Sara, who would later recall the moment: "When I saw that frank, wonderful face, I thought this is the boy for my girl."

Davis remembered their first dinner together. "Elizabeth and I didn't have much to say to each other. I stared

at her, and she stared at me. We seemed to like what we saw.”

“I never saw much of Francis Taylor,” Davis recalled. “Sara was clearly in charge. Francis was always in his bedroom. I heard he had a drinking problem.”

The next morning, Elizabeth called Dick Hanley, who was on a three-day leave from Louis B. Mayer’s office. “Glenn is yummy—oh, god, what a guy!”

“We have an expression for that in America,” Dick said. “Built like a brick shithouse.”

“You Americans can be so unromantic,” she responded.

The next day, she showed Glenn the sights of Beverly Hills. She went window shopping with him, passing a jewelry store. A necklace of sixty-nine graduated pearls caught her eye. He asked her to come into the store with him where he purchased the expensive necklace for her.

As the years went by, Elizabeth eventually presented the necklace to her mother. In her will, Sara bequeathed it “to my beloved granddaughter, Liza Todd.”

After Elizabeth’s weekend with Glenn Davis, their coming together was referred to as “spontaneous combustion” in Hedda Hopper’s newspaper column.

Davis invited Sara and Elizabeth to be his guests at an exhibition football game, where the Los Angeles Rams battled the Washington Redskins. Rams fans (who included Elizabeth) shouted, “We want Davis! We want Davis!”

Then Elizabeth turned to her mother. “And god damn, I mean that. I’m gonna have him, too.”

“Glenn was in our bungalow at Malibu every minute that Elizabeth was there,” Sara claimed. “Those lovebirds sure saw a lot of each other that summer.”

During their long talks together, it seemed that Davis maintained ambitions of Hollywood stardom after his scheduled return from Korea. He’d already appeared in one film with Felix (“Doc”) Blanchard, *The Spirit of West Point*, about the Army’s championship football team.

At MGM, Dorismae Kearns speculated that Davis was using the spotlight focused on the time he was spending with Elizabeth as a means of launching himself as an actor.

The publicist was largely responsible for generating headlines that appeared across the nation: ALLAMERICA HERO DATES MGM’S TEENAGE STAR.

Roddy McDowall claimed that Peter Lawford was jealous of Elizabeth for snaring a stud like Davis. The actor called Davis and invited him for a weekend at a house where he was staying at Laguna Beach. Davis had seen three of Lawford’s movies and seemed impressed with the invitation.

But Elizabeth protested vehemently, warning Davis that if he accepted Lawford’s invitation, “You might have to sing for your supper.”

“You mean he’s that way?” Davis asked. Elizabeth nodded her head. That night, Davis called Lawford and cancelled their “date.”

Officially, Davis later told reporters, “Elizabeth and I didn’t drink or smoke, and I never laid a hand on her. We kissed and stuff like that, but we certainly didn’t sleep together.”

Because he knew otherwise, Roddy mocked Davis’ comment, having been delivered a full report from Elizabeth. “Glenn might not have laid a hand on her, but he screwed her royally with his handlebar. He’s right about their not sleeping together. When they were in bed, they were too busy fucking to get any sleep. I admire him, though, for being a gentleman and trying to protect Elizabeth’s reputation.”

Davis told Hubie Kearns, Doc Blanchard (his football-playing comrade), and Dick Hanley, “I scored with Elizabeth on every date. I don’t know where she learned all her tricks, but she’s a woman of the world, even at her age. In fact, she was the aggressor.”

To Davis’s shock, Elizabeth announced to the press that she and Davis “were engaged to be engaged.”

“That was news to me,” Davis later said. “I hardly knew her. We’d never talked about marriage.”

Elizabeth told both Dick and Roddy that she was falling in love with Davis and didn’t “want him to die in some swamp in Korea from some communist bullet.” Then she placed an emotional phone call to Howard Young, her father’s rich and aging uncle, and begged him to contact one of his best friends, General Dwight D. Eisenhower with the intention of arranging an exemption for Davis from military service. Young said he didn’t like to do that, but agreed to intervene for “my favorite gal.”

He did speak to the general and reported back to Elizabeth a few days later. "Ike saw National Velvet, and he thought you were wonderful. But he's always had a strict policy against granting requests such as yours. He thinks a young man must serve his nation in time of peace or war. There is nothing more I can do."

"Oh thank you, Uncle Howard," Elizabeth said before bursting into tears and hanging up.

Davis invited Elizabeth to a dinner with his football playing friend, Felix ("Doc") Blanchard, who had been the first ever junior to win the Heisman Trophy. At the time, he was studying at, and played football for, West Point. He later joined the United States Air Force.

Dick Hanley arranged for Elizabeth to see a film, *The Spirit of West Point*, that had co-starred Davis and Blanchard. Both of the athletes had portrayed themselves in this dramatization of two All-America football players at West Point. Davis hoped that the film might lead to a contract as a romantic lead in Hollywood, but it didn't happen. Blanchard, on the other hand, planned to devote his career to the military.

Years later, Elizabeth wrote that her romance with Davis was "so childish. We were just two sweet children. It was not a big, hot romance."

After he read her memoirs, Davis resented her dismissive tone, reporting to Blanchard and others, "Hell, I was fucking her. We weren't two innocent sweet children. She was crazy for it. By the time I married Terry Moore, I was much wiser about these Hollywood stars. Of course, in both the cases of Elizabeth and Terry, Howard Hughes was waiting to move in for the kill."

On September 8, 1948, Elizabeth captured the attention of America when she kissed Davis good-bye before his departure for military service in Korea. In front of photographers, he gave her his lucky gold football chain, which she wore for a time around her neck. "She told the press, "Just call me a war bride."

Davis' tour of duty lasted seven months, during which period he wrote to her frequently, addressing her as "Mona Lizzie." She answered as many of his letters as she could.

Upon his return, Elizabeth showed up at the Los Angeles airport to welcome him home, embracing him and kissing him for the benefit of the cameras. She even shed "a tear of joy." When a photographer didn't capture this welcome home tableau, Elizabeth repeated it.

She didn't want to immediately drop Davis, and for that reason, she invited him to the Academy Awards Ceremony. But he didn't seem to fit into all the glitz and glamour.

MGM, through Howard Strickling, announced to the press that Elizabeth's relationship with Davis was ending because of a conflict of interest in their careers. Privately, Stickland said, "Davis went from the frying pan into the fire. He fell in love with Terry Moore on the rebound, and entered a disastrous marriage to Howard Hughes's girlfriend (or wife) depending on which story you want to believe."

Most biographers were led into believing that Davis just disappeared from Elizabeth's life after their romance came to an end. But that was not what happened. She actually wanted him out of her life, because she was pursuing other men, but Davis kept reappearing. Later, she referred to their final farewell to each other as, "the long goodbye."

During the time Glenn Davis spent in Korea and still hadn't proposed, Elizabeth was receiving at least a dozen marriage proposals per week, most of them from young men in American colleges. Her fan mail rose to one-thousand letters a week. Harvard University sent her a Valentine, claiming that its male students had voted her "The Girl We Would Never Lampoon." In later years, Harvard students would not honor that old promise, viciously lampooning her.

On the home front, Sara somehow managed to learn that Davis had only \$20,000 in savings. She quickly changed her mind about him as a prospective bridegroom for Elizabeth. She sat her daughter down for a "heart-to-heart" talk.

"Maybe in the future, you'll become the greatest screen vamp of all time," Sara told her. "But whereas man supposes, God disposes. By 1954, you could be a has-been. You know how fickle public taste is. Now is the time you should strike it rich, and entice a man of great wealth into marrying you."

"What are you saying, Mother? Are you trying to pimp me out to some old goat?"

"There's nothing wrong with marrying a rich man," Sara said. "Greer Garson did it and now she's a billionaire

in Texas...or is it New Mexico, one of those rattlesnake-infested states.”

Davis’ friend, Hubie Kearns, claimed that “Elizabeth was desperately in love with Glenn. But that didn’t preclude some harmless dating on her part. I set her up with George Murphy—not the movie star—but USC’s quarterback. That didn’t go anywhere. I also arranged a date for her with Bill Bayliss, a member of the USC track team. He turned out to be a deadhead and didn’t have anything to say to her. She called me the next day and denounced me for arranging a date with such a ‘dud.’”

In her memoir, *There Really Was a Hollywood*, Janet Leigh wrote about double dating with Elizabeth after they had bonded on the set of *Little Women*. They agreed to go together to the annual Society of Hollywood Press Photographers Costume Ball, borrowing wardrobes from an MGM storeroom.

“Elizabeth and I went as Spanish señoritas —Elizabeth in white and me in black. We looked like we were having a ‘Who Can Wear the Lowest-Cut Bodice’ contest. The photographers stood on chairs shooting downward for maximum exposure of our décolletages. Elizabeth and I were exercising the rule, ‘If you’ve got it, flaunt it.’”

Janet’s date was the handsome, San Francisco-born actor, Barry Nelson, who was thirty-two years old. He is known today as the first actor to portray Ian Fleming’s secret agent James Bond in *Casino Royale*. Playing the agent as an American named “Jimmy Bond,” Nelson appeared in the 1954 TV anthology series *Climax*, preceding Sean Connery’s iconic interpretation of Dr. No by eight years.

“At the time, no one had ever heard of James Bond,” Nelson recalled. “I hadn’t read the book or anything like that, because it wasn’t well known.”

Elizabeth noted that Nelson and Leigh were deeply in love. Or, as Leigh put it, “He released my trapped emotions and freed my slaves. Wisely, tenderly, he opened a fresh depth of feeling in me.” Leigh suffered guilt about her rather notorious past, and she credited Nelson with “defusing my fears. He didn’t dispel my qualms about my shaky past altogether, but he was responsible for my somewhat healthier attitude.”

“Barry’s the kind of man I’d like to marry,” Elizabeth told Leigh. “A man who you can talk to and share your problems with. All I get are men in awe of me who can say nothing more to me than tell me how beautiful I am.”



Who is an actress likely to meet when her boyfriend takes her home to meet his parents?

Joseph I. Breen (photo above)
Hollywood censor and enforcer of The Code: “E.T. is a limey slut.”

Leigh eventually dumped Nelson, comparing her feelings to those of Elizabeth. “Right at this point in our lives, no one man can satisfy us” Leigh said. “Both of us have so many more worlds we want to explore. It’s like I have this deep well of emotions, and I don’t want to stop filling that well. I’ve talked it over with Elizabeth, and she feels the same way.”

During her first double date with Leigh, Elizabeth was accompanied by Tom Breen, the son of the notorious Joseph I. Breen, Hollywood's chief censor and enforcer of "The Code," a strict set of puritanical moral guidelines that Hollywood was forced to follow from, roughly, 1934 to 1954.

Elizabeth, the first A-list actress who would use the word "fuck" on the screen, visited Tom at the Breen home, where she was introduced to his father. As his biographer, Thomas Doherty, put it, "Shaped by parochial schools, and guided to maturity by the Jesuits, Joseph Breen embodied the restraint, repression, and rigidity of a personality type known as Victorian Irish. This is characterized neither by Leprechaun charm nor whiskey soaked gloom, but by a sober vigilance over the self and a brisk readiness to perform the same service for others, solicited or not."

Joseph discussed very briefly some key decisions he'd made over the years. His biggest battle, he told her, was his dilemma over allowing Clark Gable, as Rhett Butler in *Gone With the Wind*, to say, "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn." He also told her he struggled a great deal about allowing the word "hell" to be used in World War II movies.

After his son, Tom, had a few dates with Elizabeth, Joseph concluded that she was "not fit company for my boy." When he saw her performance as a prostitute in *Butterfield 8*, he condemned her as a "limey slut."

In spite of his father's objection, Tom continued to date Elizabeth. One of their rendezvous was at Malibu Beach, where she learned for the first time that he'd lost one of his legs in Iwo Jima. He had a wooden leg strapped on. Later, she spent a weekend with him in a wooden cabin overlooking Lake Arrowhead near San Bernardino. He had removed his wooden leg and was lying on a sofa as she tossed some logs into the fireplace. "For God's sake," he told her. "Don't burn my wooden leg."

In addition to the massive adulation Elizabeth enjoyed over the years, she would also be subjected to vulgar jokes, and evoked by Joan Rivers during her stewardship of *The Tonight Show* when she frequently ridiculed Elizabeth's weight gain.

When Hollywood discovered that Elizabeth was dating Tom Breen, "the man with the stump," locker room humor incited some people to (tastelessly) assert, "A horse in *National Velvet* wasn't good enough for Liz. Only a man's stump can fill that cavity."

Elizabeth wept bitterly when she heard those obscene putdowns, but as the years went by, she would toughen herself against such outrageous assaults.

Tom Breen faded into Elizabeth's dating history after Bing Crosby introduced her to Ralph Kiner, the former home-run king of the Pittsburgh Pirates, a team which the singer owned at the time. Kiner took her to the premiere of *Twelve O'Clock High* (1949), starring Gregory Peck in a World War II story about U.S. flyers in England.

The next day, Crosby invited Elizabeth and Kiner for lunch at his clubhouse on the golf course. When Kiner went to change into his "whites" for a match on an adjoining tennis court, Crosby propositioned Elizabeth.

As she'd later tell Dick Hanley, "I told him I preferred older men, and that was the end of that."

"Don't feel sorry for Bing," Hanley told her. "He's been seen with this gorgeous blonde model from New York, a gal named Grace Kelly."

Sara wanted Elizabeth to date "someone rich," and arrangements were made for Arthur Loew, Jr. to take her out. A wealthy playboy who later became a film producer, Arthur was the offspring of a maternal grandfather, Adolph Zukor, who had founded Paramount Pictures. His paternal grandfather, Marcus Loew, had founded MGM and the Loew's chain of movie theaters. His father, Arthur Loew, Sr., had been president of MGM. Born into wealth and privilege, Arthur was in some ways the harbinger of Elizabeth's first marriage to Nicky Hilton, son of the hotel tycoon.

During these double dates, Leigh had fallen in love with Danny Scholl, who was a Broadway singer and soon to appear in a 1949 hit called *Texas Li'l Darlin'*. During his big number, he swung around on stage and his cock popped out. (He'd forgotten to button his fly.) That night, he received a standing ovation.

Elizabeth and Leigh always enjoyed hearing stories about Scholl, especially in 1966 when he married Corinne Griffith, who was twenty-five years older than he was.

Scholl invited Elizabeth and Janet Leigh to dinner one night at Griffith's luxurious home. In the days of the silent pictures, Griffin had been dubbed "The Orchid Lady of the Screen," and was publicized as "the most beautiful woman ever to appear in movies." With the coming of sound, her career failed because she "talked

through her nose.”

Both Leigh and Elizabeth were awed by Griffin’s wealth, a fortune of \$150 million (a staggering sum back then), which she’d accumulated in real estate ventures.

Scholl had been married to Griffin for only a few days. Shortly after that dinner, he contacted Elizabeth and Leigh to tell them that the real estate tycoon was divorcing him.



Arthur Loew, Jr.



Ralph Kiner

In court, Griffin claimed that she was not Corrine Griffith, but her younger sister by twenty years. She said she took her sister’s place upon her death. Eyewitnesses were called to testify that she was, indeed, the silent screen star. The marriage was annulled.

At a dinner party shortly after Griffith’s death in 1979 at the age of eighty, Elizabeth said, “I envied Corrine Griffith, not just for her money and jewelry, but for her having the balls to play a character called ‘Pussy,’ and that was back in a silent movie made in 1916. My dream is to play in a talkie where I’m called ‘Pussy.’”

Elizabeth “adored” Arthur Loew, Jr., but interpreted their relationship as more of a friendship than a love affair. Coincidentally, his future girlfriend, Joan Collins, eventually dumped him, finding their dating “too platonic.”

Every Tuesday night, Elizabeth, Leigh, and others, including Farley Granger and Shelley Winters, would convene at Arthur’s home because he owned one of the few TV sets in Los Angeles. “We’d watch ‘Uncle Miltie’ in drag, or the Texaco Star Theater,” Elizabeth said. “Although Farley would arrive with Shelley, he’d often leave with one of the cute boys at the party, especially John Dall, his co-star in Rope.”

Arthur and Elizabeth would remain lifelong friends, and she often enlisted him as a babysitter for her children when she had to travel.

But after only a few dates, she “surrendered” him to Leigh, who was enthralled with him. “He was the most natural, easygoing person,” Leigh said. “He was comfortable in all situations and blessed with a superior sense of humor. He introduced me to the grand social life of Hollywood. He had his regular table at such clubs as the Cocoanut Grove, Ciro’s, and Mocambo’s.”

Elizabeth recalled being invited by producer Joe Naar to Arthur’s house for his birthday celebration. “Janet was Arthur’s date that night, and Peter Lawford was my escort. Before the drunken party ended, I was propositioned by Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis, and Sammy Davis, Jr. I had truly arrived in the adult world. A drunken Sammy told me that I had not experienced life until I’d sampled black dick. Gene Kelly spent most of the evening going after Peter. I’m sure Frank Sinatra would have gone for me, but he was out of town. I called that party a prehistoric gathering of the infamous Rat Pack.”

Naar recalled Elizabeth looking gorgeous in yellow chiffon, “a real lemon meringue pie. She was sixteen going on thirty. I saw the guys clustering around her. She turned down Jerry Lewis, but I think she set up something in the future with Martin. I thought she might one day cross that bridge with Sammy, but I don’t think she was quite ready for that type of biracial experience yet.”

Short of cash, Errol Flynn was forced to give up his home on Mulholland Drive, which was being put on the market at a “sheriff’s sale.” Flynn’s business manager, Al Blum, had died, and records revealed that he had embezzled thousands of dollars from the star. Flynn’s first wife, Lili Damita, was in hot pursuit of him for back alimony payments.

He had run out of money in Europe producing an independent picture, *William Tell*, and creditors were after him. He’d given a role in that movie to his long-time friend and former roommate, Bruce Cabot, who was also suing him for back pay. Flynn’s personal belongings had been seized, including two of his automobiles.

As part of the rituals associated with his departure from his “farm” on Mul-holland, Flynn decided to invite A-list Hollywood to a party there. He included the silent screen vamp Gloria Swanson, then shooting *Sunset Blvd.*, Joan Bennett, Ann Miller, Clark Gable, Joan Fontaine, Virginia Mayo, Jack Benny, James Stewart, Dorothy Lamour, George Cukor, Walter Pidgeon, Van Johnson, Jennifer Jones, Greer Garson, Jane Wyman, Loretta Young, Robert Young, and David O. Selznick.

Huge water lilies floated on the pool, and guests dined on roasted pheasant served on silver plates provided by Romanoff’s. Entertainment included white mice races and hillbilly skits by Judy Canova. A lookalike transvestite, an exact image of Louella Parsons, went around the room revealing deadly secrets about other Hollywood stars. Alexis Smith was revealed as a closeted lesbian, and Dorothy Lamour was exposed as a former prostitute who used to work for the most notorious madam in New York City, Polly Adler.

Elizabeth was escorted to Flynn’s party by Robert Stack, whom she was dating less and less frequently. Janet Leigh arrived at the party escorted by Arthur Loew, Jr, Elizabeth’s former beau.

At one point, Leigh whispered to Elizabeth, who already knew her way around Flynn’s house, “I want to see that famous boudoir.”

Elizabeth had just heard that Shirley Temple and “her living doll of a husband,” as Elizabeth referred to John Agar, had arrived at the party.

She decided to show off Errol’s boudoir to both Leigh and Arthur Loew and, at the same time, “to repair any damage to my make-up before presenting myself to Miss Temple.”

Leigh and Arthur were amused by Flynn’s bedroom, where the bed rested on an elevated platform like a throne. Mirrors sheathed the walls and ceiling. Leigh wrote in her memoirs, “As the wolf said to Little Red Riding hood, ‘The better to see you with, my dear.’”

Elizabeth had played roles on the screen that were considered right for Temple, so there was jealousy there. David O. Selznick had pitched the idea of Temple starring in *Little Women*, as he’d also tried to seduce her, as she related in her memoirs, *Child Star*.

But eventually, the producer dropped the plan, suggesting that she go to Italy, change her image, and appear as “a film vamp, a sex symbol in an Italian vineyard.”

Elizabeth’s role in *Life With Father* had also been suggested as a vehicle for Temple, who was trying to hold

onto a film career as she matured.

For Elizabeth, there was also the lingering resentment she harbored for Temple "for having taken John Derek from my clutches."

In Flynn's boudoir, Elizabeth excused herself to go into the toilet as Leigh and Arthur Loew returned to another part of the house.

Making herself even more gorgeous than she already was, she heard someone enter the bedroom. She feared it might be Flynn seeking another seduction, and was surprised to see John Agar at the door.

"Forgive me," he said. "I'm Mr. Shirley Temple, desperate to take a leak. I was drinking in the car on the way here. I hope you don't mind."

"A man must answer nature's call," she said, flirtatiously, applying more lipstick.

"You're more gorgeous in person than you are in your movies," Agar said.

"So are you, Big Boy," she said.

At the toilet bowl, he didn't turn his back to her, but stood to its side. Unzipping his pants, he removed his penis, which he clearly exhibited to her before he urinated.

As she would later tell Roddy McDowall, "It was love at first sight."



Shirley Temple (left and center photo) gets married! to **John Agar** (center and right photo)

CHAPTER TEN

Sex and the Single Girl

In the wake of the Errol Flynn home eviction party, Elizabeth began a clandestine affair with John Agar, who, after his marriage to Shirley Temple in 1945, had generated a headline: AMERICAN PRINCESS MARRIES PRINCE CHARMING.

Their secret liaison was launched during the waning months of the rapidly deteriorating “storybook” marriage between Agar and Temple. Elizabeth and Agar never dared go out in public together, and only a handful of her closest friends knew she was dating the handsome, young, and athletic former member of both the Naval Air Corps and the Army Air Corps.

Elizabeth’s rendezvous with Agar were usually conducted at the home of Roddy McDowall, at the apartment of Dick Hanley, and on occasion in Marion Davies’ guest cottage at the Hearst compound in Beverly Hills.

“I find him irresistible,” she told Roddy. “That square jaw, those blue eyes, and that handsome face...”

The actor stood six feet, two inches, the son of a meat packer from Chicago. “He packs his own meat,” Elizabeth jokingly told Dick.

“If he makes it big in the movies in the 1950s, he’ll be another William Holden.”

Temple had first met Agar in 1943, as her home was next door to the Agar family’s. Joyce Agar became her friend, and one day Shirley invited Joyce’s older brother, John, over for a swim. At the time, he was twenty-four, and she was only fifteen, so he didn’t pay her much attention. He was not a movie buff and had never seen one of her pictures.

When he left for seven months of basic training in Texas, she wrote him nearly every day. She’d developed a powerful crush on him. He began to take her seriously during his furlough for the Christmas holiday of 1944. The following year, when Temple turned seventeen, they were married.

“Shirley and I had our first fight on the morning I woke up after our honeymoon night,” Agar said to Elizabeth. “I accused her of not being a virgin.”

During his affair with Elizabeth, Agar found her to be a good listener to his professional and private woes.

“I married a little girl who had been worshipped by millions in the 1930s. To her, it must have seemed like the universe revolved around her. Now that all that attention is fading, our storybook marriage is a joke.”

Eleven years older than Elizabeth, Agar was very experienced in the bedroom. “I think he was broken in early in life by a lot of older women, perhaps in Chicago,” Elizabeth told Dick. “He’s a great lover...at least when he’s sober.”

Agar had never wanted to be an actor until David O. Selznick, who held Temple’s contract, suggested that he might go over big in the movies because of his good looks and charm. His first picture, *Fort Apache* (1948), had starred Temple. John Wayne was the real star, and John Ford was the director. Wayne took up for Agar and befriended him, but Ford attacked him viciously during the making of *Fort Apache*, or so Agar told Elizabeth.

Ford’s biographer, Ronald Davis, wrote: “Psychologists might suggest that Ford feared the feminine side of himself and lashed out at pretty boy types. An even darker interpretation might infer that the director’s need for dominance was a form of seduction.”



John Wayne, Shirley Temple, Henry Fonda, and John Agar in Fort Apache (1948)



John Agar (left) with **John Wayne** in Sands of Iwo Jima (1949)

Regrettably for Agar and his marriage, the young actor became a close drinking buddy of Wayne's night after night. The bond became so close that The Duke insisted that Agar appear in five more of his movies: Sands of Iwo Jima (1949); She Wore a Yellow Ribbon (1949); The Undefeated (1969); Chisum (1970), and Big Jake (1971).

"I think Wayne went for me big time," Agar told Elizabeth. "I ended up spending more time with him than I did with Shirley. I also hung out with Clark Gable and Spencer Tracy. All the closeted homos in Hollywood seem to go for me. A lot of Hollywood's big stars carry dubious sexual reputations from when they were young, unknown actors struggling for recognition."

"As you probably already know, it's called the casting couch," Elizabeth said. "I never had to actually lie down on it, because I became a star when I was only a child. If I'd launched my career at the age of twenty, I might have had to suck as much cock as that blonde trollop that everyone's talking about, Marilyn Monroe."

Agar admitted he could be a brute, bringing home other women with Temple in the house and even beating her. As Temple herself revealed in her memoirs, she ended up on the floor on several occasions, "a disheveled woman with an aching heart and a crumpled spirit. It was growing ever harder to keep the lamp of love lit."

In spite of knowing the details of these stories, Elizabeth remained defensive of Agar, even in the aftermath of his arrests for drunk driving. "He's always portrayed as such a Bad Boy in the press," she said, "but I have found him to be a young man with good manners, always a gentleman, rather soft spoken, and with tremendous respect for women."

"I'm sure that's how you see him," Roddy said. "In fact, I think you and John Wayne are the only stars in Hollywood in love with Agar."

The only public comment Wayne ever made about Agar was, "John is just too good looking for his own good."

One night, Agar asked Elizabeth if she respected him less because he was not faithful to Temple. "I mean, I live in her shadow. I turn to other women because they make me feel like a man. The Temples have castrated me."

"I don't believe that a man or woman should remain faithful in a marriage," Elizabeth said. "It's a middle class concept. All adventurous people have a roving eye."

On another occasion, Agar told her he'd met a tall, good-looking guy in a bar, an aspirant actor named Rock Hudson. "He's a homo, but said he'd love to meet you because he is your biggest fan."

Ironically, both Agar and Hudson would end up working together in one of Wayne's movies, *The Undefeated* (1969), and Elizabeth, of course, would become one of Hudson's all time best friends.

Years later, Hudson would tell Elizabeth that he was nervous about meeting Wayne, who had a reputation for "faggot bashing."

"I met Duke in his dressing room as he was applying natural lipstick and wearing heels to make himself look taller," Hudson said. "We got along fine and played bridge together. John Agar told me what Wayne had said about me one day. He told Agar, 'Look at that face on Rock Hudson. Too bad it's wasted on a queer. You know what I could have done with a face like that on the screen?'"

When Agar's divorce from Temple was finalized, he'd wanted to marry Elizabeth, but by then, she'd moved on to other lovers. Actually, she told Dick Hanley the real reason for their breakup: "One drunken night, John told me his dream was to marry a long-legged model."

"But no such luck for me," Agar later recalled. "I ended up marrying Shirley Temple and dating Elizabeth Taylor, two gals with stumps for legs."

After *Little Women*, Elizabeth vowed that she'd played her last juvenile teen role. "From now on, I plan to appear on the screen as an adult, playing love scenes with grown men, even though I'm still sixteen," she told Dick Hanley.

"I adored Elizabeth," Hanley said, "but she was a scheming little vixen. She was not willing to prostitute herself to Louis B., whom she still despised, but her attention focused on the Veep, Benjamin Thau, whom we called Benny. He was actually responsible for her contracts and, in the main, for the roles assigned to her."

Instead of passively waiting for roles, Elizabeth decided to lobby for them. She was learning a lot just from listening to the gossip every morning in the make-up department, where she was talking to Ava Gardner, Katharine Hepburn, Lana Turner, and Lucille Ball.

One morning, one of her favorite actresses, Barbara Stanwyck, arrived on the lot for the filming associated with *East Side, West Side* (1949), which also contained roles for Ava Gardner and Nancy Davis. Stanwyck was married at the time to one of the screen world's most talked-about "pretty boys," Robert Taylor.

Stanwyck checked out Elizabeth and told Hepburn, "No woman, if the Taylor dame can be called that, has a right to look that gorgeous at five o'clock in the morning."

In one of the many ironies of Elizabeth's life, she would, within a matter of months, be playing the role of wife, onscreen, to Stanwyck's real-life husband, Robert Taylor.

Sidney Guilaroff, the prominent hairdresser who had styled Elizabeth's hair for *National Velvet*, noticed her checking out Nancy Davis (later, Mrs. Ronald Reagan), who was co-starring with Ava Gardner and Stanwyck in *East Side, West Side*.

When Elizabeth had finished her make-up and was heading for coffee with Guilaroff in the commissary, she wanted to know more about Davis. "She certainly won't challenge Ava or Lana for movie roles," Elizabeth said. "Maybe she could get some minor parts—perhaps a housewifey thing, or the girl next door. And she looks old enough to be my mother."

At this point, Judy Garland joined their table, having overheard their talk. "Nancy Davis is Benny's new protégée," Garland said. "She's a ripe twenty-eight years old, if she's a day, and Metro, as you know, rarely hires gals over twenty-five. Nancy, or so I hear, has a special talent. She visits Benny's office every morning to give him a state-of-the-art blow-job."

Garland's statement can't be lightly dismissed as mere gossip. The famous biographer, Anne Edwards, visited

Thau in 1983 when he was dying at the Motion Picture and Television Hospital in Los Angeles. He admitted that Nancy was known during the late 1940s for performing oral sex, her lucky conquests including not only Thau, but Clark Gable and Spencer Tracy. Tracy had been her main sponsor at MGM.

Elizabeth was still dating Peter Lawford, on occasion, and he was also romancing Nancy Davis. He confirmed that "Nancy gives great head, and you know what an oral type I am."

Ironically both Lawford and Davis were also romancing actor Robert Walker, who had been married to Jennifer Jones until producer David O. Selznick made off with her.

Not to be upstaged by Davis, Elizabeth asked Dick to arrange a private meeting between Thau and herself, and the MGM executive welcomed her, because he viewed her as the studio's best prospect for major stardom in the 1950s.

Thau later told Dick, "She really came on strong to me. I believe all I had to do was unzip and she'd go for it. But she was so young, and I'd already been serviced that morning by Nancy. Actually, her little rendezvous with me was completely unnecessary. I was going to contact her that afternoon with some good news. Mayer had agreed to cast her as the wife of Robert Taylor in a movie to be shot in London." It was *Conspirator*, eventually released in 1949.

"I ran into Elizabeth when she'd just come out of Thau's office," Garland recalled. "She was almost hysterical at being assigned her first adult role."



Starlet **Nancy Davis** before she became Mrs. Ronald Reagan in 1951

"How was sucking Benny's dick?" Garland asked in her typically blunt fashion. "Did he say you were better than Nancy?"

"Oh, Judy, I didn't have to do that, although I would have. In my next movie, I'm going to star opposite Robert Taylor, and I'll be able to say that I did it based on my talent, and not by just moving from zipper to zipper!"

Elizabeth, accompanied by Sara, sailed from New York to England aboard the *Queen Mary* in October of 1948 to begin the filming of *Conspirator*. Because of her age, and because technically, as a seventeen-year-old who hadn't yet graduated from high school, she had to carve out time for lessons with a "schoolmarm"—in this case, the white-haired Birtina Anderson, whom MGM kept on its payroll—to at least maintain the illusion that she was proceeding with the "normal" life of an American teenager.

"Between love scenes with Robert Taylor, I had to meet with Birtina, who thought I was a horrible student in English, algebra, and history."

Because Elizabeth had dual nationality, both American and British, the question of her being granted a work permit did not come up.

An MGM limousine waited at Southampton to drive them to London and their suite at Claridges, where red roses and orchids awaited them.

Back in her hometown of London, Elizabeth was shocked at the devastation wreaked by the bombings of World War II. Entire neighborhoods of the city had been destroyed during the Blitz. But at Claridges, the most prestigious hotel in England, everything was elegance itself, especially the suite assigned to Sara and Elizabeth.

She was introduced to Percy Rogers, a very effeminate version of Roddy McDowall, with a solitary wisp of dyed blonde hair that fell across his forehead. He'd been hired by MGM as an "expediter" specifically assigned to Sara and Elizabeth.

"Miss Taylor, you are my favorite movie star. I've adored all of your films. Anything you want in London, I've been ordered to get it for you."

"How about Prince Philip?" she asked.

"Oh, you sweet darling, you have a wicked sense of humor. Prince Philip is on my list, too. You know, he fucks around, don't you? I want him first, then I'll pass him on to you."

"You're my kind of guy," she said, kissing him on the cheek in front of a rather disdainful Sara.

The next morning, after an English breakfast in Claridges dining room, Sara stayed in the suite while Percy drove Elizabeth to the Taylor family's former home on Wildwood Road near Hampstead. She was shocked to find the house in disrepair. He asked her if she wanted to go inside, informing her that it was now occupied by the Women's Voluntary Services, but she declined. "I'd rather remember it as it was."

Back at Claridges she told Percy, "I want you to escort me everywhere. But don't get your hopes up. I don't put out, at least not for you."

"Oh, my dear, that's something you, with your ghastly plumbing, will never have to worry about."

That weekend, Percy drove Sara and Elizabeth to the estate in Kent associated with the late Victor Cazalet, where they were entertained by his sister, Thelma.

The Taylors were welcomed warmly as part of the family. There was much talk of London before the war and loving memoirs of Victor were shared. "I also miss Francis so much," Thelma said. "I wish he could have come."

"He simply can't afford it," Sara said. "Even though Elizabeth is a movie star, she doesn't make that much money."

"She will one day," Thelma assured Sara.

On the following Monday at around noon, Percy escorted Elizabeth and Sara to a luncheon at London's Ritz Hotel, where they met the British director Victor Saville, one of the founding fathers of British filmmaking. Having been associated with MGM since 1941, he'd previously directed such classics as *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (1939), and worked closely with such stars as Greer Garson, Katharine Hepburn, Joan Crawford, Ingrid Bergman, Lana Turner, Errol Flynn, and Hedy Lamarr.

Saville was so supportive of Elizabeth, and so complimentary of her, that she felt she'd have a good working relationship with him.

Thirty minutes late, the star of the picture, Robert Taylor, finally showed up.

Before becoming the pretty boy of MGM in the 1930s, he'd trained as a cellist in Nebraska, where he was known by his birth name, Spangler Arlington Brugh.

Elizabeth knew Robert's image only through two pictures she'd seen— *Camille* (1937), where he'd co-starred with Greta Garbo, and *Johnny Eager* (1942), with Lana Turner. Elizabeth was startled at how his face had changed since World War II. No one would accuse him of being a pretty boy ever again.

As critic David Thomson put it, "Taylor's history is like that of Tyrone Power: of hollow, gorgeous youth dwindling into anxiety. But in Taylor's case, there is something touching in his decline. For he became not plainer, but harsher: Churlish, peeved, disagreeable—no more than that, never enough to make him an absorbing villain."

A villain was what MGM had miscast him as in *Conspirator*, where he played a British officer spying for the Russians and married to an unsuspecting, twenty-one-year-old American, as portrayed by the sixteen-year-old Elizabeth.

"Just think," Elizabeth said to Robert, "You've had girlfriends on the screen who have included Greta Garbo,

Katharine Hepburn, Jean Harlow, Vivien Leigh, Joan Fontaine, and Hedy Lamarr—and now you get me.”

He looked her over. “And how lucky I am.”

Robert regaled his luncheon table with stories about his early days at MGM. “After several months of studying with MGM’s acting coaches, I was told to go back to my family farm in Nebraska. That made me so god damn sore, I stayed on in Hollywood.”

“I remember in 1937 when MGM tried to counter your pretty boy image by releasing photographs of you shirtless, revealing hair on your chest to prove your ‘He-ness,’ as it was defined at the time,” Saville said.

“I’d rather forget that,” Robert said.

Before leaving, Robert told her, “We have love scenes coming up in the film, but would you at least give me a peck on the cheek as a preview?”

“Of course I will,” Elizabeth said, kissing him on the mouth.

“Aren’t there laws about making love to a minor like Elizabeth?” Saville asked.

She smiled at him. “Laws are only made to be broken.”

Later, Percy told Elizabeth, “I used to have the hots for Robert Taylor. But in my fantasies, I’ve moved on to dream about younger men.”

Elizabeth eagerly awaited her first kissing scene with Robert. She later said that she closed her eyes and pretended it was Glenn Davis.



Two Taylors (Elizabeth and Robert) in
Conspirator, She was 16, he was 38.

“Robert isn’t as good a kisser as Glenn is,” she told Percy. “But he did give me some advice. He told me to powder down my lips before kissing him. That way, I wouldn’t smear his make-up. How unromantic!”

Much MGM publicity was generated by that first kissing scene. The word got out that to conceal Robert’s “enormous erection,” he’d ordered cameraman Freddie Young to shoot him only from the waist up.

Reportedly, Young mocked those remarks. “Taylor couldn’t produce a big hard-on if his life depended on it—

call that one 'Princess Tiny Meat.'"

Elizabeth wrote Roddy, complaining about having to do schoolwork while co-starring in a film. "It's hard to concentrate on algebra when Robert Taylor is sticking his tongue down your throat."

Robert told Saville, "That Elizabeth Taylor is stacked. I didn't realize it until she appeared in one scene in a *négligée*. Good god, she is just a child, but I can't help myself." He later told Saville that he slipped her back to his hotel suite and seduced her.

"How was it?" Saville asked.

"I've had better," Robert said. "I told her that if she didn't shave her legs, I would do it for her."

During the shoot, Elizabeth was asked how she felt about very young actresses appearing on the screen with middle-aged men. "Hollywood thinks nothing of romantically pairing older men with young girls," she said. "But you never see the reverse. Imagine seeing Roddy McDowall on the screen making love to Barbara Stanwyck."

One scene that Saville shot with both Taylors didn't go over with Dore Schary at MGM's home office in Hollywood. Schary ordered that the director reshoot it. "When Elizabeth's robe flies open in a scene where she's struggling with Bob, we see far too many of her God given assets," he wrote. "Please try to keep in mind that this is not a blue movie."

When the rough cut of *Conspirator* was rushed back to MGM, Pandro S. Berman was not impressed with Elizabeth's first venture into an adult movie. "She has the face for it, but doesn't possess the strength of voice to go with it. It was like she was half child, half grown woman. I advised MGM to hold up the picture for a while until her career was more secure."

Ultimately, when the film was released in 1949, the critics agreed with Berman, although many claimed that Elizabeth delivered a fine performance in an otherwise mediocre movie. *Conspirator*, evaluated by the box office as a flop, did nothing to advance the post-war career of Robert Taylor.

Even though the two Taylors failed to excite audiences, it would not be the last time they would be cast together in an MGM film.

During the filming of *Conspirator*, Elizabeth blossomed as a social flower in London, meeting people who would alter her life forever.

One noonday, Elizabeth and Percy Rogers were enjoying some fish and chips at the MGM canteen in London, and he was filling her in on all the movie and theatrical gossip of the West End. She obviously could not have known it, but two of her future husbands—Richard Burton and Michael Wilding—would also be having lunch that day in the canteen.

During that era, MGM talent scouts were successfully luring the most talented British stars, both male and female, to Hollywood. Among those solicited, Deborah Kerr was already in California, and such actors as Stewart Granger, Wilding, and Burton would soon be on their way to America, too.

Orson Welles, whom Elizabeth had known since the days of filming *Jane Eyre*, had stopped by her dressing room earlier that morning. He was having lunch with Wilding.

In his memoirs, *The Wilding Way*, the British actor recalled the first time he spotted Elizabeth, although he associated the circumstance with the wrong year of 1951. That was when she returned to England to film *Ivanhoe*, once again with Robert Taylor as her co-star. Wilding actually met her when she was filming *Conspirator* in MGM's London commissary in 1948.

"I was aware of her beauty," Wilding wrote. "Instead of asking the waitress for the salt, she sashayed down the whole length of the canteen to pick it up from the counter. All eyes focused on her, and I'm sure that was her intent."

Wilding claimed that Welles, his luncheon partner, raised a satirical eyebrow and quipped, "The girl didn't ought to do that, you know. Upsets the digestion."

Back at her table, Elizabeth asked Percy the identity of the man dining with Welles.

"He's an actor, Michael Wilding, under contract to Henry Wilcox, the producer. I think he's making a picture with Wilcox's wife, Anna Neagle."

"Very handsome, very debonair," she said. "When I walked past his table, he looked at me with devouring eyes."

"That's because he's a notorious breast man, but he's too old for you, my darling. The old sod must be forty if he's a day. Before the war, he met and married this woman named Kay Young because he said her beauty reminded him of Joan Crawford. But his true love, and this has been so since the war, is actually sitting over in the far corner of the room making eyes at your Robert Taylor."

Elizabeth stared long and hard at Robert's luncheon guest. "He's stunningly attractive, too. What's his name?"

"Stewart Granger," Percy said. "He's a real swashbuckler, our British film industry's equivalent of your Errol Flynn. He was madly in love with Deborah Kerr before she went to Hollywood. When he made Caesar and Cleopatra, Vivien Leigh fell madly in love with him. But, in spite of all his philandering, his most consistent lover has been Michael Wilding himself. Of course, those two are never faithful to anybody. Stewart right now is obviously making a play for Robert, because he wants to star in pictures for Metro in Hollywood. He knows that Robert can open many doors for him. I have no doubt that those two hot guys will be exploring each other's bums before Big Ben strikes midnight."

Elizabeth spent the rest of her time glancing first at Granger, then at Wilding. "When I think of the two, Granger has the most sex appeal," she said. At the time, of course, it was inconceivable that in a relatively short time, she would be living under the same roof with both men.

"Stewart is in love with Jean Simmons, who is being billed as Britain's answer to Elizabeth Taylor," Percy said.

"I saw her play Ophelia opposite Laurence Olivier in Hamlet," Elizabeth said. "She was very good and very beautiful."

As Elizabeth looked at the entrance, she spotted Laurence Olivier entering the canteen with a handsome young actor. "What is the deal with those two?" she asked.

"Larry is mad about the boy," Percy responded. "That's Richard Burton, an actor from Wales. He's the biggest whore in the business. He's seduced all the stately homos in the British theatre, including Noël Coward and John Gielgud. He's also gone through half the actresses in the theater."

"I adore British actors," she said. "They seem to play musical chairs every night. Everybody is sleeping with everybody else, regardless of gender."

"We're far more sophisticated about such things than you uptight Americans," Percy said.

Olivier nodded as he walked by Elizabeth's table, and she met Burton eye to eye. After he was out of earshot, she said, "I will not become another notch in Mr. Burton's belt."

"I wouldn't be so sure about that," Percy told her. "Richard's got the most seductive voice in the British theater, far more so than Larry. Richard is also generous with his cock. Once in his dressing room, he owed me a favor, so he let me go down on him. Seven and a half inches at full mast, in case you do become interested."

"That is most doubtful," she said. "Give me this Stewart Granger any day, even Michael Wilding."

At that point, she saw Welles, trailed by Wilding, heading toward their table. "Elizabeth, my sweet, dear child, I'd love to drop by your suite tonight to pay my respects to you and Sara. I also am friends with the world's most intriguing personality, who's also staying at Claridges and would adore meeting you."

"I'd be delighted, as always, Orson," Elizabeth said. "not only to see you, but to meet this mystery guest of yours—no doubt, Winston Churchill himself."

Welles looked over at Percy. "No need to introduce me to this one. His reputation has preceded him." Then he turned around to Wilding. "Forgive me, Elizabeth, this is Mr. Michael Wilding."

"Miss Taylor, an honor," Wilding said. "Are you real or merely a painting that Leonardo da Vinci did by dawn's rosy light?"

"I'm just a lonely little chit from Hampstead, wiggling her ass across the canteen, hoping to attract some handsome British gentleman who will invite her out on a fucking date. Is that too much to ask?"

"I'd like to be that gentleman," Wilding said. "However, the first time a waiter asks, 'And Mr. Wilding, what will your daughter order tonight,' I'm out the door."

She laughed heartily. "I'm at Claridges, and most anxious to escape my mother, Sara. Perhaps you can fix her up with Robert Morley. She just loves bushy eyebrows."

"I'll call tomorrow, since Orson here has you booked for tonight," Wilding said. "In fact, I need a date to take

to Lord Mountbatten's ball in honor of his daughter. Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip will be there. I'm sure they'd love to meet a British girl who went to Hollywood and made good. They'll probably entice you back to England to make films here on your native soil."

At that moment, a messenger from MGM stopped at Elizabeth's table, passing a note to Percy. He read it quickly and looked up at Welles and Wilding. "Sorry, gents, but Elizabeth and I have to go. We just got word that two guests have dropped by the set to call on Elizabeth—Patricia Neal and Ronald Reagan."

During the cold, bleak winter of 1948 in London, four homesick Americans bonded, waiting for the weeks to pass in the bombed-out city, with its deprivations and food rationing, until they could return to sunny California. During their frequent evening excursions, Patricia Neal was escorted by Ronald Reagan, her co-star in *The Hasty Heart*, and Robert Taylor was Elizabeth's date. Neal was desperately lonely for the arms of Gary Cooper, and Reagan was still in deep mourning over the end of his marriage to Jane Wyman. At that point in her life, Elizabeth hadn't quite ended her love affair with Glenn Davis.

For Robert Taylor, his "lavender marriage" to his bisexual wife, Barbara Stanwyck, was over except for the final divorce proceedings.

On the set of *Conspirator*, Elizabeth had renewed her acquaintance with Reagan and was introduced to Neal. He suggested that Robert Taylor join them that Friday night for a steak dinner at the Savoy Restaurant. In meat-scarce London, Reagan had ordered a dozen steaks flown in from "21" in Manhattan.

In the Savoy Dining Room, Patricia remembered that "Elizabeth was so exquisite, so young, and Robert delighted in teasing her. There seemed some intimacy between them that I could only guess at. I also got the vague suspicion that something had gone on between Ronnie and Elizabeth back in Hollywood, but perhaps I was wrong. He didn't have a reputation as a child molester."

The maître d'hôtel arrived with the bad news. The steaks shipped from New York had gone bad, or so he claimed. Reagan suspected that the meat-hungry staff had either consumed or sold them. Nonetheless, he ordered a dozen more, warning the maître d', "When they get here, I don't want you coming into the dining room with blood dripping out the corners of your mouth."

"Over dinner, which consisted of stale mutton chops, Robert amused us with stories of MGM, and Ronnie lobbed complaints about Jane Wyman and their failed marriage," Neal said. "Elizabeth and I listened patiently."

"When I starred with Garbo in *Camille* in '36, she told the director I was 'so beautiful but so dumb,'" Robert said. He also told them that when he signed to make *The Gorgeous Hussy* (1936) with Joan Crawford, Hollywood wags asked, 'To which of them does the title refer?'"

Reagan claimed that he was going to make a deal with Wyman that each of them should not discuss the other to members of the press. "I was really pissed off when she told reporters that I'm as good in bed as I was on the screen."

"I read the other day in the papers that she'd made another crack about me," Reagan said. She told some reporter, 'Don't ask Ronnie what time it is, because he will tell you how a watch is made.'"

When Robert took Elizabeth to another steak dinner at the Savoy, Reagan learned that, according to the maître d', "only six of your steaks went bad this time."

One night, when Robert did not show up for a previously scheduled dinner, Elizabeth contacted Percy, who told them what had happened. Earlier that evening, Robert had been arrested in a room above the Wounded Pelican, a pub with upstairs bedrooms in Soho. It was a hangout for London homosexuals, who could rent "hot beds" for sex. Robert had been caught with a young hustler from Birmingham.

Both Reagan and Neal seemed very concerned, but Elizabeth less so. She was convinced that MGM publicists, operating on orders from Howard Strickling at headquarters in Hollywood, would hush up the scandal.



Patricia Neal in *Hasty Heart* with future U.S. President **Ronald Reagan** "You know, an actress can learn to hate Elizabeth Taylor."

Elizabeth had had more than her quota of champagne that night. She mischievously goaded Reagan, "Thank God you didn't get arrested with Errol Flynn," she said, "He told me that he went for you big time when you guys made *Santa Fe Trail*."

"Errol is such a tease," Reagan said, looking embarrassed. "He could have told you anything—and probably did—but I don't go that way. If you ever run into Lana Turner, Betty Grable, or Susan Hayward, they'll establish my credentials. But in your case, Elizabeth, ask yourself."

"I couldn't believe it," Patricia later said. "I took that to be a confession. So, Ronnie had taken our little teen darling, Elizabeth, to bed. I couldn't wait to tell Gary."

Reagan wisely suggested that the next time they had dinner with Robert that each of them make no mention of his arrest, which, as Elizabeth had predicted, was covered up and did not appear in the newspapers.

When reunited as double-dating "couples" again, Neal suggested that Reagan and Robert take Elizabeth and her dancing at a local dance hall in Holborn that she'd heard about, and they agreed.

As Neal remembered the evening, "Elizabeth showed up way overdressed, in a gown designed by Christian Dior. We went to this hall where most of the other patrons were shabbily dressed, still suffering from wartime deprivation. All eyes turned to look at her. The British people still had their wonderful bravado about them. Elizabeth was moved when the patrons sang *The White Cliffs of Dover*, the name of that wartime movie she'd made when she was a child."

That weekend, Elizabeth agreed to drive into the English countryside with Robert, Reagan, and Neal, in a large car driven by Hamish Thomson, a young dentist who wanted to show them the Cotswolds. During the slow drive there, Thomson suggested they play a game—"A little quiz I've read about in this London magazine. Everybody has to reveal a secret wish."

Neal claimed that her wish involved Gary Cooper divorcing his wife and marrying her. Robert told them that he hoped Stanwyck would ask for no alimony when she divorced him. Elizabeth shocked the passengers in the car by claiming that her wish involved marrying Michael Wilding. When the game focused on Reagan, he said, "My wish—no, not my wish, my destiny—is to become President of the United States."

One weekend when he wouldn't be needed in the movie studio the following Monday, Robert went with Stewart Granger to the country house of one of his friends. Neal couldn't join Elizabeth and Reagan because she'd eaten a slice of West Country ham that had poisoned her. "I'm spending all my time on the toilet," she told Elizabeth.

Reagan called Elizabeth and asked her to go for dinner and dancing with him at the Ritz Hotel in London, and she accepted, although she would have preferred if Michael Wilding rather than Reagan had invited her.

"That was one very despondent date I had," Elizabeth told Percy the following morning. "The reality of losing Jane Wyman seemed to have finally settled in. We sat in a remote corner of the Ritz Hotel's lobby near a potted palm, and he broke down and cried. I held him in my arms and tried to comfort him."

Reagan later pulled himself together and had dinner with her, but didn't feel up to dancing. She agreed to go

back to his suite with him.

"I thought if I threw him a mercy fuck—a term I learned from Roddy McDowall—that would cheer him up. But sex was about the last thing on his mind. He spent the rest of the evening talking about how he was going to run for senator from California."

When Michael Wilding finally called her for a date, Elizabeth quickly dropped Robert, Reagan, and Neal in favor of spending time with this older British actor.

"When I told this trio good-bye, we made some vague promise about getting together in Hollywood," Elizabeth told Percy. "Actually, I had no plans to see either of them again."

In the years ahead, Neal would refer to Elizabeth as "that God damn bitch," blaming her for "stealing the two most coveted roles of my lifetime."

In the summer of 1958, Neal was in London playing Catherine Holly in Tennessee Williams' *Suddenly, Last Summer*. Her performance received rave reviews, and she called it the "most thrilling acting experience of my life."

Producer Sam Spiegel came to see it and was impressed enough to acquire the movie rights, promising Neal that she could repeat her stage performance on the screen.

"Imagine my surprise when I picked up the paper to read that Elizabeth Taylor had signed to do the part with Monty Clift," Neal said. "Losing that role to Taylor was one of the hardest professional blows of my life. I still cannot talk about it without bitterness."

"There was more to come," Neal said. "I was for a time the leading candidate for the role of Martha in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* I was ready to sign the contract. Only Bette Davis stood in my way. Guess what? I picked up the morning paper to read that Miss Elizabeth Taylor, cunt from hell, had signed to do the role with her husband du jour."

Elizabeth herself often discussed the irony of what she called "the second act for Ronnie and me. No Hollywood script, regardless of how far-fetched, would have me playing the housewife of a Republican senator, John Warner, hanging out at the White House with Ronnie, the President of the United States, and Benny Thau's fellatio artist, now installed as First Lady of the Land, a position once occupied by Eleanor Roosevelt."

Orson Welles, a larger-than-life creature, once claimed, "I have always had the hots for Elizabeth Taylor." After three postponements, he finally came to visit Sara and Elizabeth at their suite at Claridges.

Settling in for a drink, he lamented how difficult it was for him in post-war Hollywood. "During the war, I could have any woman I wanted. There was no competition. All the men were overseas. Today there are one hundred actors competing for every job. Everybody has a film script to sell. I want to continue making movies, but I have this unfortunate habit of spending all my money on women. No one seems to want to lend me any more dough."

"Perhaps Louella Parsons hasn't forgiven you for *Citizen Kane* and your depiction of her boss, William Randolph Hearst," Elizabeth said.

"I haven't forgiven her for all the rotten stuff she wrote about me during my marriage to Rita [a reference to Love Goddess Rita Hayworth]," Welles said. "Of course, much of the failure of my marriage was my own fault. A beautiful woman comes alone, and I can't resist her. Maria Montez, Judy Garland, Lucille Ball...well, maybe not Lucille."

"You certainly are known for seducing beautiful women," Sara said.

"That is so true, yet during my last visit to Hollywood, Guinn Williams, the one they call 'Big Boy,' attacked me at the Brown Derby restaurant, accusing me of being a queer. I demanded that he apologize. He didn't. Instead, he took a knife and cut off half of my tie."

"Perhaps you should have cut off something of Big Boy's," Elizabeth said.

Welles looked startled for a minute. "You do have a wicked sense of humor, which makes you all the more adorable."

After an hour of exchanging Hollywood gossip, Welles invited Elizabeth, but not Sara, to meet a special guest,

who was also staying in a suite at Claridges. Sara seemed miffed that the invitation didn't include her.

A knock on the door of the "special guest's" suite summoned a maid from India, dressed in a sari. Elizabeth and Welles were ushered into the living room of the suite where they had to wait fifteen minutes for their host to appear.

"The suspense is killing me," Elizabeth said, "From the smell of perfume, I gather our host is really a hostess."

Suddenly, Marlene Dietrich emerged from the bedroom, wearing a silvery gown and draped in white furs, ready for an evening at the Café Royal with Welles.

"Oh, the darling girl with the violet eyes," she said to Elizabeth.

"Miss Dietrich," Elizabeth said, standing up. "You are so very lovely."

"It's all an illusion, my dear," Dietrich said. "I'm far too old to still be alive."

Welles came forward to kiss Dietrich. Then he quoted from Shakespeare, "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale..."

She cut him off. "I know, I know. I'm called the timeless wonder. But time always wins."

She came over to Elizabeth and held her hand. "Orson and I must be leaving soon, but I really wanted to see you in the flesh. It is true: You are without a doubt the most beautiful girl in the world."

"But becoming less of a girl every day," Elizabeth said.

"Don't wish for youth to go by too quickly, or you'll regret it," Dietrich warned. "Oh, to be sixteen again. Didn't you know, my child, that the dream of every red-blooded man involves crawling into bed with a girl of sixteen?"

"If I didn't know that, I'm finding it out now," Elizabeth said.

"I heard that you met with George Bernard Shaw," Welles said before downing the rest of his drink. "How did that meeting of two legends go?"

"Like you, he's a genius," Dietrich said. "You're well aware that when I meet a genius, I kneel in front of him. Once on my knees, I unbuttoned his fly and removed his penis. I made love to it. Of course, I had to do that before we could sit down and talk."

Elizabeth didn't know how to respond to that. "Miss Dietrich, I will treasure meeting you, one of my great honors. You are today's Helen of Troy, the Queen of Sheba, Cleopatra reincarnate."

"You are so very kind," Dietrich said. "But I'm the mere wife of a chicken farmer, my dear Rudy."

That was a reference to her husband, Rudolph Sieber, with whom she no longer lived but never divorced. "We must meet again soon. I will share with you my secret of vinegar and ice water douches. It will prevent pregnancy."

She reached down to kiss Elizabeth. Her lips were very, very wet.

Back in her own suite, Elizabeth told Sara, "I simply adore Marlene. I'm sure she's going to become one of my very best friends."

"Perhaps you'd rather her be your mother instead of me?" Sara said.

"Mother, jealousy doesn't become you."

During that evening at Claridges, Elizabeth could hardly have imagined that in a few short years, she and Dietrich would be competing for the love of one man, and that "The Kraut" (as Ernest Hemingway called her) would seduce at least four of her future husbands and many of her lovers.

Twenty years her senior, Michael Wilding was still handsome, in an offbeat kind of way. Elegant and polished, he talked, walked, and moved in a manner common to British aristocracy. In many ways, he evoked the decorum of Victor Cazalet, her standard for measuring an English "gent."

During their first outing together, he took her to The Salisbury, a pub and "watering hole" for many actors in London's West End. "The food is ghastly, but so English it will make you homesick." He ordered steak-and-kidney pie for both of them.

After lunch and a walk through Mayfair, he took her to the National Gallery, where he told her that his dream had been to become an artist before "I wandered into acting."

After the museum, he guided her through some of the war-torn neighborhoods of London, a city still recovering from Hitler's last desperate attempt to destroy it. He told her many stories of the bravery and endurance of Londoners during their worst hour. At one point, she was moved to tears.

Back at Claridges, she filled Percy and Sara in on the details of her day. Then, after a brief rest, she put on her most revealing dress, since he'd invited her to dinner downstairs in the hotel's elegant dining room. Over dinner, she said, "I feel like Queen Victoria will walk in the door at any minute."

She urged Wilding to consider migrating to Hollywood, but he dismissed the idea. "I feel there are few roles for cultivated English gentlemen in post-war Hollywood. I think there would have been more parts for me in the 1930s. Someone wrote in *The Times* that I was the poor man's answer to Ronald Colman. I'm not sure there are that many roles for Colman himself these days."

She apologized for never having seen any of Wilding's films.

With a sense of self-mockery, he said, "You mean to tell me you haven't seen *The Courtneys of Curzon Street*, *Piccadilly Incident*, *Tilly of Bloomsbury*, or *Spring in Park Lane*? At least my next picture will be a change of pace for me. My producer, Henry Wilcox, told me that my sophisticated wit, if I dare call it that, and my English sensibility would never go over in Tinseltown. David Niven is the best example of that. Americans like Gary Cooper and John Wayne...and, I might add, Elizabeth Taylor."

He told her that Alfred Hitchcock had signed him to film *Under Capricorn* in New Zealand with Ingrid Bergman and Joseph Cotten. "Hitch said to watch out for Ingrid. He claims she'd fuck a tree. Margaret Leighton is going to be in the film, too. I find her talented but rather toffee-nosed. I don't go for her at all." [Ironically, Leighton would eventually become Wilding's fourth and final wife.]



Elizabeth's competitor for the affections of Michael Wilding: **Marlene Dietrich**

"I've already met with Cotten," Wilding said. "We sniffed at each other at first— you know, like two suspicious dogs. Now we like each other. He calls the upcoming film *Under Crapicorn*."

Before leaving her that evening, he invited her to accompany him to Broad-lands, Lord Mountbatten's country estate, where he was hosting a dinner/dance in honor of Lord John Brabourne, who had married his daughter, Patricia Mountbatten. "Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip will be there," Wilding said.

But before the ball, Elizabeth was privileged to meet the future Queen of England at a command performance of the film *That Forsythe Woman*, starring her friends, Greer Garson and Errol Flynn.

Standing in a receiving line beside the former screen queen, Myrna Loy, Elizabeth met Queen Elizabeth (the former Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon) and her daughter, the Princess Elizabeth, who in a relatively short time would ascend to the throne after the death of her father, King George VI.

That weekend, in a chauffeured Rolls Royce, Elizabeth was driven to Broadlands with Wilding, Henry Wilcox, and his actress wife, Anna Neagle.

By ten o'clock that night at the ball, arrangements were made for Prince Philip to dance with Elizabeth Taylor. As she'd later reveal to Percy, "I pressed up against him and got the desired response. I think I really excited him, but with his princess in the room, what could he do? I am definitely targeting him as a future conquest."

By midnight, Wilding was drunk on champagne. He was approached by Lord Brabourne, who informed him that it was his turn to dance with Her Royal Highness, Princess Elizabeth. Wilding protested, "I've had too much

to drink. I'm afraid I'll step on her royal toes." But His Lordship insisted.

At her table, Princess Elizabeth told Wilding, "I'm reluctant to dance with you, having seen you dance on the screen." Nonetheless, she arose and walked to the dance floor with him as the band struck up a waltz.

"Thank God," she said. "I feared the band was going to play a rhumba. I can never get the hang of those Latin rhythms."

After the dance, he dutifully returned her to her table and said, "I'm relieved that I got through the dance without hitting you."

She gave him a startled look. He'd meant to say, "without kicking you." But he was so embarrassed, he thanked the princess and retreated back to Elizabeth (Taylor).

Wilding saved the last dance for her, holding her tightly in his arms. "I'm going to miss you."

"Oh, Michael," she said. "I never want to leave you."

Wilcox and Neagle spent the night in the same room in a nearby hotel, where separate bedrooms had been assigned to Elizabeth and Wilding. When Elizabeth articulated an account of the night's events to Percy, she said, "I kept my door unlocked all night waiting for him, but he never dropped in for a visit. In his affair with Stewart Granger, is Michael strictly a bottom?"

"No, he's both a top and a bottom, Stewart strictly a manly top," Percy claimed.

"You precious angel," Elizabeth said. "You do seem to know everything about British actors."

"It's my calling in life," he told her.

Three days later, Percy escorted Sara and Elizabeth to the airport as the first segment of their previously scheduled return to the U.S. Claridges sent a separate London taxi for transport of their luggage.

After exchanging many hugs and kisses with Percy, she disappeared into the VIP lounge at Heathrow. To her surprise, Wilding was waiting there for her. Sara discreetly removed herself to enjoy tea and some movie magazines.

The airplane to New York didn't leave for another hour, and Wilding sat with Elizabeth, holding her hand and talking intently with her. No one knows what was said, and she avoided revealing anything to her confidants, but it was obvious that an intense bond had been formed between them.

He was seen giving her a deep throat goodbye kiss. A flight attendant overheard his final words to her and reported his words to the press: "Grow up very, very fast and come back to me."

Elizabeth had first met and befriended Merv Griffin at one of Roddy Mc-Dowall's Sunday afternoon barbecues.

From the beginning, the future TV talk show host was impressed with her beauty and her kindness. He told Roddy, "She is the least judgmental person I know. She seems to recognize that all people have needs—and that love takes many forms."



Witty, charming, bisexual, and generically English: **Michael Wilding**.
Unknown in America, but big in Britain

When they were first introduced, she talked to him about the perils of being a child star. "Hedda Hopper told me there is no second act for child stars in movies. 'What awaits a child star?' she asked me. 'A decline in fans. A dwindling bank account. Personal disasters in relationships. Booze. And premature death. Most child stars can't adjust to life when the sound of applause no longer rings in their ears.'"

Back in New York, Elizabeth was on her own, as her mother had flown down to Florida. Elizabeth later claimed that this interlude in her life was "the beginning of my being an adult, with no parent or chaperone around telling me when I could take a crap."

Hearing that Griffin was in town, she called and invited him out on a date, with the understanding that it was a brother-sister type relationship of the sort she had with Roddy.

Merv arrived at her hotel suite with three dozen long-stemmed yellow roses, her favorite.

Escorted by him to the Stork Club, she introduced a "New Elizabeth Taylor" to public view, one clad seductively in a gown with plunging décolletage. "Let's dance the night away," she told Griffin.

The occupants of the other tables couldn't stop staring at Elizabeth, who seemed to tune them out. One aspect of her body disturbed Merv. He noticed that her bare arms were peppered with fine black hairs. They were unsightly, detracting from her otherwise stunning beauty.

At two o'clock, they left the club, and he took her back to her hotel, with an invitation for dinner the following night at 21.

The next evening, midway through their meal, Clark Gable walked in with his new wife, Lady Sylvia Ashley, a willowy blonde with a peaches-and-cream complexion and Wedgwood blue eyes. Nancy Davis (later Mrs. Ronald Reagan) had failed to persuade Gable to marry her.

Lady Sylvia pointedly ignored Elizabeth when they were introduced, but Gable leaned over and kissed Elizabeth on the cheek. Then the newlyweds departed quickly for their table.

"What do you think of Lady Sylvia?" Merv asked.

"That gold-digging bitch," Elizabeth said, "I heard she got her start modeling bras and bloomers. You know, she was once a chorus girl in the seediest clubs in London's Soho."

That night, back at her hotel suite, Elizabeth invited Griffin in as a means of continuing their discussion. "I'm thinking about getting married," she told him.

"Well, I'm an available candidate," he said, not at all seriously. "Who's the lucky guy?"

"I have five candidates in mind, and I'm currently conducting auditions. I can't tell you now. You'll read about

it in the papers. Now I've got to get my beauty sleep. 'Night, love, and thanks for a darling evening. You're sweet."

Later, from New York, Elizabeth flew to Miami, where Francis and Sara met her at the airport and drove her to her Uncle Howard Young's mansion on Star Island. Reunited with her beloved uncle, she learned that he was tossing a big bash to celebrate her seventeenth birthday, to which he'd invited about one-hundred guests, including the power élite of South Florida.

To the party, he invited a handsome, twenty-eight-year-old bachelor, William Pawley, Jr., whose wealthy father had been the U.S. ambassador to both Peru and Brazil. A pilot during the war, Pawley was the president of Miami Transit. Uncle Howard had selected Pawley as a more suitable beau for Elizabeth than Glenn Davis.

She later stated that she found him "tall, dark, and handsome, with blue eyes that matched my own." He stood six feet tall, with jet-black hair. Escaping from the party with her, he walked through the Star Island gardens with her, telling her fascinating stories based on his travels in Brazil, Peru, China, and India.

Her discarded beau, Glenn Davis, later claimed that the Taylor family "pushed Elizabeth into the arms of this rich guy, a real slick operator who could show her a better time than I could afford and buy jewelry for her."

Davis also claimed that Sara and Francis "didn't have a pot to piss in, and Elizabeth was their meal ticket. Sara was interested in three things—Elizabeth as a money maker, Christian Science, and her blocked bowels. I was later glad I didn't marry Elizabeth Taylor."

After meeting Pawley, he booked her for dances, parties, yachting trips, fishing expeditions, leisurely luncheons overlooking the bay, and romantic lobster-and-caviar dinners.

"Sara wanted Elizabeth to marry a guy who lived in a mansion with servants and a swimming pool, and who owned a yacht," Davis claimed.

In the beginning, Elizabeth seemed dazzled by Pawley, a dashing young man, but problems emerged after only a week. She confided to Francis and Sara that, "He's already acting like a dominating husband. He even tells me what to wear. I think he prefers high-necked dresses—no breasts showing."

The Pawley family exerted a powerful influence over their heir. His parents reportedly told him that Elizabeth Taylor was a very vulgar young woman, and they'd much prefer him to marry a Florida débutante from a good family—"not some Hollywood tramp." Apparently, the Pawleys had hired a private detective in Los Angeles, who had uncovered and reported shocking revelations, including the accusation that both of her parents were bisexuals—and gold-diggers as well, living entirely off whatever profits they could make off Elizabeth. It was also alleged that she had attended sex parties at the home of Errol Flynn, and that she'd engaged in numerous affairs with actors who had included, among others, both Robert Stack and John Derek, even though it was widely implied in fan magazines that she was still a virgin.



So This is Love? **Merv Griffin**, singer and movie star hopeful, signing autographs in 1953.

At an upscale party hosted aboard the Pawley family's yacht as it was moored at a dock in Miami's harbor, family members and much of tout Miami virtually ignored Elizabeth, even though she was accustomed to being

fawned over by the press and public alike.

Ignoring the objections of his family, Pawley proposed to Elizabeth and she accepted.

He presented her with her first "white diamond"—a three-and-a-half carat emerald-cut solitary ring for which he paid \$16,000. She described it as a "Nice piece of ice," to the press, uttering that line in an imitation of Mae West.

Once the engagement ring was on her finger, Pawley became even more possessive, claiming that she'd have to give up her career in Hollywood and devote herself full time to being his wife. Amazingly, she agreed, asserting, "I'd rather be making babies than making movies," to the press.

"I have no intention of becoming known as Mr. Elizabeth Taylor," Pawley chimed in.

That news sent shock waves all the way to Louis B. Mayer's office. He immediately dispatched MGM producer Sam Marx, who was in Miami Beach at the time, to visit the Pawley mansion for a showdown with Elizabeth.

At first, Pawley didn't want to let Marx into his home, claiming that he was about to take Elizabeth fishing. But she ran down the stairs and told Pawley that she'd already agreed to meet with Marx, because years before, he had arranged for her first big break in films.

Over tea, Marx told her that he was in Miami supervising the filming of *A Lady Without a Passport*, starring Hedy Lamarr. "Lamarr looked great in those 1940s films, but she's getting a bit long in the tooth. Mayer agrees that you are the only one on the lot who can become the Hedy Lamarr of the 1950s. No one else is that beautiful."

He also told her that *Time* magazine was planning to put her picture on the cover of its August, 1949, issue. The magazine was going to announce that such golden stars of yesterday—Barbara Stanwyck, Marlene Dietrich, Bette Davis, and Joan Crawford—had reached their "sell-by dates."

"Time will editorialize that a new type of goddess will soon emerge onto the American landscape—and her name is Elizabeth Taylor," Marx said.

He also told her that MGM was planning its biggest picture of the year, a vehicle where she'd play a bride, the daughter of Spencer Tracy. He went on to say that Mayer wanted to lend her to Paramount for "the female role of the year," appearing opposite Montgomery Clift in a film based on Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*.

"If you leave the film industry now, you'll be remembered, if at all, as a little girl who rode a horse in *National Velvet*," Marx said. "Conspirator bombed at the box office. If you must eventually leave Hollywood, make these two big pictures and go out in a blast as the world's biggest female box office attraction who abandoned everything for the man she loved. Otherwise, you'll be tossed into the dustbin with Shirley Temple and Margaret O'Brien, two kids who couldn't make it as adults in film. Do you want to become the forgotten bride of some guy down in Miami, or do you want to reign as the Queen of MGM?" Marx asked her.

That question seemed to cinch the deal for Elizabeth, who told Marx she'd return to MGM. However, before she could star in the two blockbusters he described, she had been cast opposite Van Johnson in a movie entitled *The Big Hangover*.

After a tearful farewell with Pawley, and despite his objections, Elizabeth flew back to Hollywood with Sara and Francis. When she got there, she told Roddy McDowall and Dick Hanley, "I'm starved for love. Bill and I have agreed not to do it until our wedding night. In the meantime, spread the word secretly that I'm available for dates."

Pawley telephoned her every day and agreed to fly to Hollywood to escort her to Jane Powell's wedding to Geary Steffen, Jr., scheduled for September 17, 1949. Elizabeth caught the bridal bouquet. Afterward, the wedding party converged on the Mocambo nightclub, where Vic Damone was the headliner.

Elizabeth had long harbored a crush on him, and the singer joined the bridal party between his sets. When Pawley excused himself to go to the men's room, she slipped Damone her phone number.



Elizabeth Taylor with her wealthy Florida beau, **William Pawley, Jr.**

That same night, she told Pawley, "I won't abandon my career until I play a monster on the screen, a real hellion, for which I will win an Oscar."

That, of course, was a dream destined to come true.

At that point, Pawley probably realized that Elizabeth was never going to settle down to marry him, but that she planned to continue, hell-bent, on her career. As a means of soothing his frustration and disappointment, he flew to his father's estate in Virginia. There, he read in Hedda Hopper's column that his engagement to Elizabeth had been canceled.

After that, partly because of her role in the collapse of previous engagements to both Glenn Davis and William Pawley, Elizabeth began experiencing her first bad press. She was portrayed as a heart-breaking femme fatale, a very-mature teenager flitting duplicitously from man to man.

The writers and editors at Photoplay were particularly incensed with her because of how its October, 1949 issue, meticulously prepared and edited many weeks in advance, had laid out a splashy (and already out-of-date) feature article that showcased Pawley and Elizabeth as two beautiful people madly in love with each other.

The Sunday Pictorial in London attacked her "New Look" in fashion. During the filming of *Conspirator*, before returning to the United States from London, she'd flown to Paris and acquired gowns from Christian Dior, then, arguably the most sought-after couturier in the world. But despite her haute sense of revised glamour, Sunday Pictorial stated, "For breaking off her most recent engagement, somebody should administer a series of resounding smacks behind the bustle of Elizabeth Taylor's latest Paris fashion creation. She is a living argument against the employment of children in the studios."

Pawley had some difficulty getting Elizabeth to return his engagement ring, but she finally shipped it back to him. Her predilection for acquiring and hanging on to jewelry came out in another way, too.

At the Diamond Jubilee of the Jewelry Industry Council, where she functioned as one of the figureheads, she was lent, as a prominently showcased accessory, a \$22,000 diamond tiara. At the end of the event, she begged council officers to let her keep it. They simply could not do that, but compromised, allowing her to keep it for one week before she had to surrender it.

After writing Pawley some loving and regret-tinged letters, Elizabeth emerged more or less unscathed from her most recent broken engagement. When reporters at the Mocambo asked her about the breakup, she said, "Bill and I went well together under the palm trees; we looked nice on the dance floor; we loved to go boating. But we had nothing in common."

Many decades later, during the spring of 2011, the weekly tabloid, *The Globe*, conducted an interview with the then-elderly Pawley, finding him living in Pembroke Pines, Florida, with relatives. "I loved her with all my

heart, and I know she loved me," he told reporters. "I planned to spend the rest of my life with her. Studio officials wrecked our romance, leaving me devastated. I still haven't gotten over her, and I'm ninety years old."

He'd saved her letters, which she had written in purple ink on pink stationery. In one of them, she wrote:

"My heart aches and makes me want to cry when I think of you, and how much I want to be with you and to look in your beautiful blue eyes, and kiss your sweet lips and have your strong arms around me, oh so tight and close to you. I want us to be lovers always—even after we've been married 75 years and have at least a dozen great-great-grandchildren."

Pawley waited until 1974 to get married, a quarter of a century after his engagement to Elizabeth. When his wife died in 2002, Elizabeth, from Hollywood, placed a call to him to extend her sympathies.

Upon Elizabeth's own death, Pawley told the press, "If Elizabeth had married me, she would not have needed all those other husbands."

An odd request for Elizabeth came in from Benny Thau at MGM. Mayer had hired Stewart Granger, whom they'd planned to launch into major American stardom after his robust success in British films.

Granger was fresh from the beds of Jean Simmons and Michael Wilding, and a recent affair with Robert Taylor during the making of *Conspirator*. Granger was being seriously considered for the lead role in MGM's big production of *Quo Vadis*?

Thau wanted Elizabeth for a screen test with Granger, with the understanding that as a result, she might be selected as the lead, opposite Granger, in *Quo Vadis*?

She had seen Granger lunching with Robert Taylor at the MGM canteen in London, but they had never been formally introduced.

Granger later recalled, "I found her incredibly beautiful and curvaceous, but was disappointed by her rather squeaky voice. She would have been better in silent pictures. Except for the voice, she had everything else in abundance, and she could speak British to me. In the test, she was my demure slave and I the lecherous Roman conqueror."

John Huston was set to direct the scene.

Granger had learned that Elizabeth was just past her seventeenth birthday. "I was dressed in a skimpy tunic—shades of Caesar and Cleopatra that I did with Vivien Leigh—and I had my hair curled, Roman style. Huston said, 'Play the scene like a big buck drunken nigger.'"

"I broke up the crew ogling Elizabeth's assets." He later recalled that Huston, as an experiment and test, also filmed a love scene whose footage was later destroyed, like her screen test with Clark Gable. "She pressed that body against me, and I got overly excited. I was lecherous all right. I didn't know if the bitch was play acting or, perhaps, was desperate to get fucked. I finally concluded that she wanted me to fuck her. Since my precious Jean (Simmons) was away, I made plans to have this hot-to-trot teenager for the night."

When Elizabeth was allowed to see the screen test, she told Dick Hanley, "Huston wanted to see if Stewart and I had any chemistry between us. We not only had chemistry, we blew up the chemical works."

"I saw the screen test too," Dick later said. "I think Mayer should send a memo to future actors appearing in love scenes with Elizabeth. He should order all of them to wear jock straps."

Originally, Gregory Peck had been offered the lead. He arrived at MGM and dressed in Roman gear, but looked into a full length mirror and decided, "My calves were far too skinny for such a role."

Both Elizabeth and Granger lost the lead roles in *Quo Vadis*? Their parts went instead to Robert Taylor and Deborah Kerr. When Taylor signed for the lead role, he was shown the screen test of Granger and Elizabeth. The director, Mervyn LeRoy, told Taylor to play the part just like Granger did. "If I were so great and just right for the part, why didn't MGM use me?" Granger asked. Instead, he was assigned the lead in *King Solomon's Mines*, which, coincidentally, starred Deborah Kerr. "Deborah and I renewed our love affair," Granger later confessed.

As he'd anticipated, Granger found Elizabeth only too willing to go out with him for the night. He informed her

that they couldn't go to any public place where photographers were likely to spot them. "I'm committed to Jean," he said, "but I've always been a naughty lad."

"Please," she responded. "I'm used to back alley romances. You're not my first secret date." She looked provocatively at him, as he remembered. "Are you going to kiss me or not?" she asked.

"Bloody hell," Granger said. "The little minx had just gotten into my rented car. We kissed all right. I felt her up—what breasts!—and she fondled my jewels. She got me so hot we skipped dinner and drove to the apartment where I was staying."

"Instead of dinner, we feasted on each other," Granger told Huston, who spread the gossip around. "Elizabeth confessed to me that she believed in love at first sight. I told her to pull back, that I was in love with Jean, and that we shouldn't see each other any more. I didn't want to break her heart. She was an impressionable seventeen-year-old."

"That morning, when I drove her home, she cried all the way there," Granger recalled.

Years later, he said, "Oh, what tangled lives we actors lead. Other than making films, the second best business in Hollywood is laundering sheets from hot beds."

[Ironically, in a strange twist of fate, and despite the murky dramas associated with Granger, her young age, and the fallout associated with their screen test, Elizabeth ended up in Quo Vadis? anyway — as an extra.

During her honeymoon in 1950 with hotel heir Nicky Hilton, she flew with him to Rome. After she learned that he'd spent the night in a Roman bordello, the newly married couple had a violent argument and he attacked her.

To escape from him, she called Mervyn LeRoy, the newly appointed director of Quo Vadis?, a replacement for John Huston. She begged him to find a place where she could hide from Nicky. When she arrived on the set, he told her that the best place for her to hide was in a crowd scene. He ordered her to go to wardrobe, where she was attired in a toga, and instructed to join the extras. For one entire week, she played the role of a Christian martyr in a replica of the Colosseum.

"I got this fucking job as an extra, while that rat fink, Nicky Hilton, searched all over Rome for me," Elizabeth said.

As a means of accommodating her, LeRoy had to cut short the involvement in the film of Claire Davis, a British starlet. "I begged Taylor not to accept the role, because I was pregnant at the time and needed the job to qualify for health insurance. She refused to listen to me, claiming that LeRoy would give me another part. He didn't, and I lost all around. To me, Elizabeth Taylor was spoiled and heartless."]

As a means of coinciding with her new sultry image of herself, Elizabeth decided she wanted to be photographed by Philippe Halsman, who had famously photographed a long-time friend of his family, Albert Einstein, in 1947. Halsman's other subjects would eventually include Pablo Picasso, Winston Churchill, Judy Garland, Alfred Hitchcock, John F. Kennedy, and Marilyn Monroe.



Stewart Granger

She was intrigued by Halsman's background. A Latvian Jew, he moved to Austria with his family when he was a child. In 1928, he was sentenced to four years in prison for patricide, having allegedly murdered his father during a hill-climbing expedition in the Alps. After appeals to Austrian authorities from both Albert Einstein and Thomas Mann, Halsman was released from prison in 1931 and kicked out of Austria.

In the United States, Elizabeth Arden used his photograph of model Constance Ford against a backdrop of the American flag in an ad campaign for "Victory Red" lipstick. The image became one of the iconic symbols of War War II.

When Elizabeth met Halsman in 1949, he was collaborating with the sur-realist artist Salvador Dalí.

Elizabeth had been particularly amused by his 1948 Dalí Atomicus, depicting three cats airborne, a bucket of thrown water, and Dalí himself floating in mid-air.

Life magazine arranged for Halsman to photograph Elizabeth in his studio on Manhattan's Upper West Side. In the photograph, Elizabeth's violet eyes appear rather vacant; her figure voluptuous, and three-quarters of her ample breasts are exposed. Her gown was described as "the color of melted money." Edith Head once ordained that green was not a sexy color for a woman, but Halsman disagreed. He'd later enshrine Grace Kelly in green chiffon against Grecian columns.

"You have bosoms," Halsman shouted at her during their photo shoot. "Stick them out!" She followed his instructions.

To protect her husband from this teenage femme fatale, Yvonne, Halsman's wife, made it a point to remain in the studio throughout the photo shoot. "I was struck by the sight of her arms. They were covered with what Philippe called 'dark eyelashes,' an abundance of unsightly black hair."

Elizabeth later recalled, "Philippe saw I had a woman's body and insisted I exploit it for the camera. In one day, I learned how to pose provocatively. In short, I developed sex appeal."

On seeing Halsman's portrait before it was published, critic Richard Roud asserted, "Elizabeth Taylor looks like a girl who would really put out and I mean really put out."

Yvonne reported that Elizabeth arrived at the photo shoot alone. When it was over, she said, "I have no date for tonight. All the men seemed to assume I'm heavily booked. But no one has called me, even though the papers have reported I'm in New York. I'm facing a lonely evening."

During her time in New York, Elizabeth made that "lonely girl" remark to a number of people. Somehow, the word got out, because at seven o'clock that night, the phone rang in her hotel suite.

It was from another sultry star, this one male. Actor Steve Cochran, who had thrilled her with his sexiness in *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), was on the phone. "What you doing, doll?" he asked.

"Waiting for you to call," she said, inviting him up to her hotel suite at eight that night.

"I can get there even earlier," he told her, "because I'm in your hotel lobby right now."

“Pretty sure of yourself, aren’t you?” she asked.

“I’ve got a lot to be pretty sure about,” he told her.

As she’d later confide to Dick Hanley, “I knew I was in for some action. When Steve had appeared with Mae West on the stage in Diamond Lil, she’d told half of Hollywood how well endowed he was.”

Additional praise for this tough guy, who portrayed hoods and cutthroats in the movies, came from Joan Crawford, with whom he was to co-star in *The Damned Don’t Cry* (1950). The stud was not opposed to letting other actors or singers, such as Merv Griffin or Danny Kaye, “service” him, although he preferred teenage girls like Elizabeth, who had long held his attention. After seeing her in *National Velvet*, he told his producer, Samuel Goldwyn, “I’d like to kidnap that little number and rape her ten times a day.”

As she’d recall to Dick, “Steve and I never left my suite that night. We called room service when we got hungry. He’s really white trash, but glorious white trash. I’ve never been so down and dirty with a man before. He forces a really decent girl to do filthy things. But he made it fun, really exciting.”

She also claimed that Steve wanted “to make it a permanent thing with me, but I turned him down. Every gal should have a few sleazy nights in her life, but not on a regular basis—that’s not my style. He’s one of Hollywood’s really bad boys, and will probably make a lot of police news in his life before he dies young.”

“Frankly, I’m afraid of him. But give the devil His due. He’s the best sex I’ve ever had and may ever have again.”

Millions ultimately saw Philippe Halsman’s photograph of Elizabeth in *Life* magazine, but it captured the eye of one man in particular. The aviation hero and movie mogul, Howard Hughes, became fascinated by her, especially her breasts. He was the man who had developed a cantilevered bra for Jane Russell to wear in *The Outlaw* (1943), the most erotic Western ever made at that time.

Hughes told his public relations agent, Johnny Meyer, who was actually his pimp, “I’m going to marry Elizabeth Taylor in spite of the difference in our ages. When a man has money, what does age matter to a woman?”

When director Norman Krasna, guided by MGM executives, assigned Elizabeth Taylor to co-star with Van Johnson in *The Big Hangover* (1950), both stars knew, after reading the script, that it was a “silly, boring comedy.” Johnson was cast as a war veteran and an up-and-coming young lawyer who was in a wine cellar in France during a bomb attack, breaking most of the bottles, almost drowning him in a river of wine. Now everytime he gets a whiff of alcohol, he has hallucinations, acts irrationally, and imagines that his dog is talking to him. Elizabeth was cast as the daughter of his boss, who makes it her mission to save him from his dilemma. She denounced her role as “the stooge part.”

Krasna frankly admitted, “I’m a lousy director, But I’ve got bills to pay.” Unlike George Stevens in *A Place in the Sun*, this director’s camera paid virtually no attention to what the press referred to as Elizabeth’s “burgeoning sexuality.”

Johnson and Elizabeth had been correct in predicting that the only thing big about *The Big Hangover* was that it was a big flop at the box office. It opened in May of 1950 at Grauman’s Egyptian Theater in Hollywood and at Loew’s State Theater in New York, playing mostly to empty houses. Even so, as a means of holding on to Elizabeth, MGM raised her salary to \$2,000 a week.

For the most part, the reviews were bad, *The New Yorker* asserting that, “Miss Taylor is beautiful and cannot act. This puts her one up on Mr. Johnson.”

Elizabeth had a long-standing crush on Johnson, who in the 1940s had been defined by the studio’s PR staff as “The Boy Next Door.” In real life, he was anything but that, and led a rather active homosexual lifestyle. Character actor Keenan Wynn was Johnson’s lover and best friend. Wynn was married to the former stage actress Evie Lynn Abbott.

When it became apparent that word was rapidly spreading that a hot MGM property like Johnson was gay, Mayer issued a bizarre mandate. He told Wynn that he would not renew his contract if he didn't divorce Evie so that she could enter into an arranged marriage with Johnson.

Although all parties later regretted being forced into such an arrangement, they agreed to Mayer's terms. Even after Johnson's marriage to the former Mrs. Keenan Wynn, her former and present husbands continued their love affair with one another, although Johnson had many dalliances on the side.



Steve Cochran

Johnson and June Allyson in the late 1940s had been billed as "America's Sweethearts." It was Allyson, Elizabeth's friend, who warned her, "Get over your crush. I used to date Van, and he's handsome and charming, but our dates were arranged by MGM for publicity purposes. After a premiere, he would dump me back on my doorstep, and run off with his boyfriend of the moment. Van and I are friends, but we've had our arguments in the past, especially when we both pursued the same man at the same time. We ran into serious conflict when we fought over which of us was going to sleep with Peter Lawford."

"The public believes what it reads in those movie magazines," Elizabeth said. "Thank God our fans don't know what's really going on in Tinseltown."

"Let's hope it stays that way," Allyson said. "Thank God I've got an understanding husband—one who overlooks my indiscretions."

She was referring to her marriage to actor/singer Dick Powell, who had been married to Joan Blondell, who had been married to Mike Todd, who would soon wed Elizabeth herself.

"Let's face it," Allyson said, "many of us in Hollywood change boyfriends as often as we change our panties." At the time she made that pronouncement, she was lusting for the handsome actor Alan Ladd, who was himself a bisexual.

Even though no romance ever developed between Johnson and Elizabeth, they became friends and would co-star in a future movie together. She was only mildly surprised when Roddy McDowall called her and announced that he had fallen madly in love with Johnson, and they were "having a wild affair." "He's got eight inches and gets rock hard," he assured her.

To celebrate their "engagement," Elizabeth invited several of her friends to a beach party, based in the vicinity of the Taylor cottage in Malibu. Everybody had a date except her. Peter Lawford heard about it and called her to ask if he could show up with "the love of my life." He was referring to the handsome young actor, Tom Drake, who had played "the boy next door" opposite Judy Garland in *Meet Me In St. Louis* (1944).

Elizabeth called Roddy and asked him if it would be all right "to invite your ex."

"You mean Peter?" Roddy said. "Of course, we're still friends, even though we no longer bump pussies together."

Dick Hanley was invited as Elizabeth's escort. "It is said that the sexual revolution didn't reach America until

the hippie era of the late 1960s,” he recalled years later. “But actually, young stars such as Elizabeth and Roddy launched it in Hollywood in the early 1950s. A lot of good-looking guys and gals of all sexual persuasions were thrown together, and everybody was making it with everybody else’s boyfriend the following weekend. A typical example was Elizabeth and her friend, Janet Leigh. They double dated a lot in those days and often switched boyfriends from weekend to weekend. Elizabeth, believe it or not, often ended up getting Janet’s boyfriends after she’d auditioned them.”

“A case in point involved the notorious gangster, Johnny Stompanato, who was Mickey Cohen’s right hand henchman,” Dick said. “Janet dated him briefly before he took up with Elizabeth. Regrettably, Johnny eventually met Lana Turner, and they began the most notorious affair in Hollywood history. Too bad Lana fatally stabbed him. In his short, sex-filled life, Johnny made a lot of horny women and a lot of gay guys very happy.”

Dick claimed that he was sitting on a beach blanket with Elizabeth the afternoon of her Malibu party when Leigh introduced Johnny to Elizabeth.”

“Janet appeared on the beach with a tall, handsome, dark-haired guy with a great build on him,” Dick said. “He was wearing a skimpy white bikini that was virtually see-through. It looked like a handlebar, and it was still soft.”

Leigh introduced her new boyfriend only as “Johnny,” without including a last name.

When Leigh and Johnny went for a swim, Elizabeth turned to Dick. “I think he wants me. He undressed me with his eyes.”

“Do you think what he’s showing in that bikini is real—or is it padding?” Dick asked.

“I’m sure that sooner than later either you or me—or perhaps both of us— will find out for ourselves,” she said. “Janet shouldn’t have squatter’s rights on Johnny. It looks to me like there’s plenty to go around for all of us.”

Before the end of the party, Johnny spent some time alone with Sara. Elizabeth heard her mother laughing at his jokes.



top photo: **Tom Drake**
lower photo: **Van Johnson**

After her guests had left, Elizabeth went to take a shower. Her mother was in the kitchen preparing supper. "I hope you don't mind, but I met this charming young man. His name is Johnny. He told me he's a businessman in Los Angeles, and I suspect he's very rich. I gave him your phone number."

"For once in your life, you did something right," Elizabeth said, unfastening her top as she headed for the shower.

In the late 1940s and early 50s, actor Farley Granger was known as "the most beautiful male animal in films."

Elizabeth had known him when she'd attended a studio-run schoolhouse for its stars under the age of eighteen. Farley, Peggy Ann Garner, and Roddy, among others, were Elizabeth's fellow schoolmates.

During the making of *The Big Hangover*, Elizabeth was often a guest at parties thrown by Van and his wife, Evie Johnson, who had become one of the most prominent hostesses in Beverly Hills, on a par with Edie Goetz, the daughter of Louis B. Mayer, according to the Ronald L. Davis biography, *Van Johnson: MGM's Golden Boy*.

On two separate occasions, Elizabeth attended these soirées with Judy Garland, who invariably would kick off her shoes and entertain guests of the Johnsons. "She always drank too much and got out of control," Elizabeth recalled.

Henry Willson, the most notoriously homosexual talent agent in Hollywood, was a frequent guest at the Johnson parties. On the side, he provided Van with handsome young men eager to have sex with an established star.

One night, Willson brought a young actor he'd recently renamed Rock Hudson. Tall, masculine, and extraordinarily handsome, he was introduced to Elizabeth.

He was so in awe of her, he had almost nothing to say. In time, of course, he would become one of her closest friends and confidants. Later, she'd meet another of Willson's homosexual discoveries and protégés, Tab Hunter. The studio would arrange publicity dates between them in her future.

Phyllis Gates, who worked for Willson and later entered into a marriage of convenience with Hudson, told Elizabeth, "My boss is a virtuoso at arranging sexual affairs—heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, you name it, he's a master."

One night, Dick Hanley escorted Elizabeth to the Johnson home, where she had a talk with Van's wife and charming hostess, Evie.

Both Elizabeth and Evie bonded over their mutual dislike of Louis B. Mayer, Evie referring to him as "a dictator with the ethics and morals of a cockroach."

"Mayer told me that if I didn't divorce Keenan and marry Van, as a means of suppressing rumors about his homosexuality, that he would not renew Keenan's contract," Evie said. "I was young and stupid and let Mayer manipulate me. I'm sorry I ever did that."

"Whatever you do, Elizabeth, don't marry a homosexual or bisexual husband," Evie advised her.

"I'll insist they be straight as an arrow," Elizabeth said.

One night, Farley Granger called and asked if he could escort her to one of the Johnson parties. Elizabeth was aware, through June Allyson, that Farley and Van Johnson were having a torrid affair.

At the party, which lasted until dawn, she and Farley had far too much to drink. Evie asked him to put Elizabeth to bed in one of their guest bedrooms.

As she would relay to Dick Hanley the following Monday, "I woke up nude in bed with Farley Granger. I found him devastatingly attractive."

She told Hanley that "before we made an appearance around noon, we did it—and he's definitely bisexual. A beautiful man and a beautiful lover."

Both Farley and Elizabeth joined Van and Evie beside their swimming pool for lunch that day.

"I left late that afternoon," Elizabeth said, "but Farley stayed on with the Johnsons for two more weeks—how convenient for Van."

"Farley and I dated two or three more times," Elizabeth later recalled. "But one day I got a call from Shelley Winters. She told me to leave Farley alone or else she'd cut off my left tit. Why not the right one? By that time,

I'd moved on from Farley and it didn't matter. A few months later, Shelley called me in tears, claiming that Farley had met Ava Gardner and was involved in an intense affair with her."

[In New York in November of 1963, in the aftermath of John F. Kennedy's assassination in Dallas, Farley met his life partner, Robert Calhoun, who remained at the actor's side until Calhoun's death in 2008. Farley himself died in 2011.]

In the period preceding her first marriage, Elizabeth seemed to race from one man to another. One reporter asserted, "[Elizabeth] is the Lana Turner of the younger generation, turning into a real man-eater."

One of her final schoolgirl crushes was directed at singer Vic Damone, following his 1947 appearance, at the age of nineteen, on Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts, where he sang "Prisoner of Love." Impressed both with him and with his voice, Milton Berle secured two nightclub bookings for him, which eventually led to a contract with Mercury Records.

Elizabeth thought he looked adorable, with black, close-cropped curly hair and a slim physique, very Italian-looking to her. She fell in love with his voice—and the image of the man himself—when she heard his first release. One by one, she'd collect recordings of the more than 2,000 songs he recorded over the years, beginning with his "I Have But One Heart."



Farley Granger

Throughout the course of 1948, she listened faithfully to his weekly radio show, Saturday Night Serenade, and adjusted her own schedule so she wouldn't miss a single broadcast.

She read about him in the fan magazines, learning that he'd been born in Brooklyn, the only boy in a family that otherwise included four girls, and that he'd started singing lessons at the age of ten.

She began dating him after he appeared at the Mocambo in Los Angeles. In her column, Hedda Hopper wrote, "Fickle Elizabeth Taylor has fallen in love again, this time with the handsome young crooner Vic Damone, who is giving Frank Sinatra's fading career a push toward oblivion."

Elizabeth dated Damone only briefly, finding the man of her fantasy different from reality. He announced that he had no objection to a future wife of his having a career, though in the same breath, he claimed he wanted a household "filled with bambini."

He didn't seem to know how to spend money, telling her, "Everything happened so fast. One day, I was singing for subway fare. The next day, I'm hauling in \$5,000 bucks a week."

"Vic was adorable," Elizabeth recalled in later years. "A dear man. But in 1950, he was drafted, and another beau came along."

"Vic seemed a very insecure man, in a hurry to get some place," she said. "Even though I stopped seeing him,

I always like his music. My favorite recording of his remains 'On the Street Where You Live.' He was a young Sinatra with a touch of Mel Tormé."

In the years to come, Elizabeth read about Damone's five marriages, including one to Pier Angeli whom he "stole" from James Dean. Damone also had a long-term liaison with Diahann Carroll, the African-American singer.

"Those people who draw up lists of movie star lovers always include Vic on the list of men who seduced me," Elizabeth said. "I deny categorically that he ever fucked me—at least I don't think that he did. But who knows? It was a long time ago, and so many men have had the privilege. How can one remember who seduced one and who didn't? Ask Peter Lawford. He'd agree with me."

Unknown to Elizabeth one night at the Mocambo, a handsome, rich young man, the heir to a hotel dynasty, sat observing her throughout the evening. He was having drinks with Peter Lawford and Judy Garland, both of whom he'd previously seduced.



Vic Damone

"See that girl over there at the far table?" he asked. "That's Elizabeth Taylor. I'm going to marry her whether she likes it or not."

His name was Conrad Hilton, Jr. Everybody called him "Nicky."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Elizabeth and Monty

SEARCHING FOR A PLACE IN THE SUN

As the 1940s faded into the 50s, Elizabeth became embroiled in the biggest soap opera of her life, far more intriguing and a lot more complicated than any of the movie scripts she'd been offered.

For many years, Howard Hughes, the aviation hero and RKO movie mogul, would stalk Elizabeth, hovering in her background and spying on her. He became obsessed with her.

Sometimes, Elizabeth would be directly involved in the dramas whirling around, and usually catalyzed by, Hughes. On other occasions, she voyeuristically watched as the brohahas unfolded from afar—blackmail, bribery, threats of murder, violent beatings, broken hearts, failed marriages, the secret production of sex films, bisexuality, and rampant adultery.

As a young man, Hughes had married Texas socialite Ella Rice, but that union soon after collapsed. And although he had abandoned hope that Ava Gardner would ever marry him, as he moved deeper into his forties, he once again had marriage on his mind.

Among the bevy of movie stars he considered for conquest and wedded bliss, Elizabeth and Terry Moore topped the chart.

Terry and Elizabeth were friends, though not particularly close. On several occasions, they showed the same taste in men—Glenn Davis, Nicky Hilton, and later, Robert Wagner.

Hughes' pimp, Johnny Meyer, regularly scanned the popular magazines of the day, looking for beauties with large breasts who might tempt his boss. Hughes became fascinated by Terry when he saw her picture in *Look*, and he became even more intrigued when he spotted Elizabeth's photo in both *Time* and *Life* magazines.

As the 1950s dawned, Terry found herself locked in battle with Marilyn Monroe for the title of Hollywood's sexiest starlet. Many fan magazines, however, awarded that title to Elizabeth. Hughes had already seduced Marilyn, even going so far as to hire her as a player in a pornographic film with his heartthrob of the moment, Guy Madison.

Hughes had had affairs with both Madison, whom he called the "handsomest man in movies," and with Monroe. In 1946, he gave each of them \$10,000 to make a "blue movie loop," as he described it, for him. As Madison told his gay agent, Henry Willson, "Getting paid \$10,000 to fuck Marilyn Monroe is not the worst gig in this town."

The film was shot at 7000 Romaine in Los Angeles, with Hughes assisted in its production by his pimp, Johnny Meyer. "Guy had a gay streak in him, but he didn't show it that night," Meyer said. "Monroe was really turned on by Marilyn. When he stripped off his pants and presented her with a long, straight, thick tool, she squealed with delight and went to work polishing it. I had to practically pull him off Monroe when Howard called 'cut.' I never saw the finished product. Boss man kept it for his own viewing pleasure. He later acquired a blue movie loop of Elizabeth Taylor and this gangster boy. But Elizabeth would be set up for that one, not knowing about a concealed camera in the bedroom."

As Meyer proclaimed, "Boss was always a sucker for some gal with big tits and a schoolgirl face." Terry, Elizabeth, and Marilyn Monroe each fitted that category. According to Meyer, in Hughes' pursuit of these blossoming beauties, Hughes set out to recapture his lost youth.

His pursuit of Terry became particularly aggressive when she went on a twenty-six city tour promoting her film, *The Return of October* (1948), starring Glenn Ford. From Indianapolis to Buffalo, Hughes would suddenly fly there to chase after the starlet.

Before he tried to insinuate himself into the lives of Elizabeth and Terry, proving that power and money talk, Hughes had already compiled one of the longest list of seductions of both actors and actresses in the history of Hollywood.

Over the years, the revolving door to his bedroom had admitted some of the most beautiful and talented men and women in Hollywood—Billie Dove, Tyrone Power, Robert Taylor, Errol Flynn, Clark Gable, Ava Gardner, Ginger Rogers, Robert Stack, Marlene Dietrich, Cary Grant, Randolph Scott, Bette Davis, Paulette Goddard, Veronica Lake, Rita Hayworth, Katharine Hepburn, Faith Domergue, Hedy Lamarr, Kathryn Grayson, Ingrid Bergman, Gene Tierney, Carole Lombard, and Marilyn Monroe.

But whereas Terry had been an easy conquest, Elizabeth had repeatedly eluded the net he'd cast for her.

On Thanksgiving Day, 1949, aboard his yacht, Hilda, Hughes married Terry in a ceremony conducted by his captain, Carl Flynn. The yacht was more than five miles off the coast, and the legality of such a marriage would later come into question.

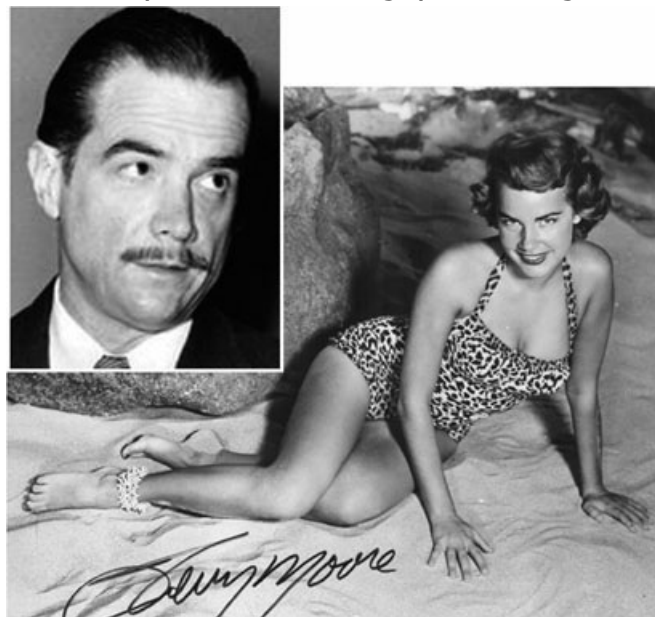
A few days later, Terry called Elizabeth, informing her that although her husband refused to let her release the news officially to the press, she was now Mrs. Howard Hughes. She lived with her new husband in a bungalow within the garden of the Beverly Hills Hotel.

Hughes deserted her for weeks at a time while he pursued other conquests.

Terry was one of the luscious bombshells of the 1950s, hailed as having "a schoolgirl face mounted on an atomic chassis." She had attracted Hughes when she was only fifteen years old. Since their "marriage" at sea had little or no legal recognition, Hughes felt free to propose marriage, soon after, to another beautiful actress, Jean Peters, whom he would eventually "officially and legally" marry. On the same day he proposed marriage to Jean, he also proposed marriage to Janet Leigh, who turned him down, as had Elizabeth.

When Terry could no longer tolerate her cheating "husband or non-husband," depending on how you interpret her union with Hughes, she felt free to pursue Glenn Davis, who was virile, handsome, and young, and who had been a highly visible player for the Los Angeles Rams.

During the era when Elizabeth was dating Davis, Terry had often accompanied them with a man of her own as part of their double dates. In addition, fan magazines of that era often depicted Terry being escorted by some of the pretty boys of the 1950s, many of whom were gay, including James Dean and Tab Hunter.



Starlet **Terry Moore** ("the girl with the atomic chassis") with (inset photo) demented billionaire **Howard Hughes**

After his breakup with Elizabeth, Davis telephoned Terry and asked her to be his date at a football game in the Rose Bowl. One date led to another, and soon, Hedda Hopper was announcing that Davis "had replaced Elizabeth Taylor in his life with the rising young starlet, Terry Moore."

In a call to Elizabeth, Terry told her that although Hughes was still in pursuit of her, she'd broken off their

relationship, referring to him as “a cheat, a liar, and an adulterer.”

The news that Terry had replaced Hughes with Davis disturbed Elizabeth. Although she’d dumped the football hero, she seemed jealous to learn that he was dating a friend of hers.

At the time, the press labeled Davis “the greatest catch in America.” Although she’d been invited Elizabeth opted not to attend the Terry Moore/Glenn Davis wedding on February 9, 1951, at a Mormon church in Glendale. “I’ve been betrayed,” Elizabeth told Roddy McDowall. “Those two must have been carrying on behind my back all along.”

Davis and Terry soon faded from the radar screen, and Elizabeth learned that she was living with the athlete in a modest apartment with a Murphy bed in Lubbock, Texas. Hughes had not given up on her, however. He’d come across a script for a movie entitled *High Heels* that he felt would be ideal for either Terry, Elizabeth, or Marilyn Monroe.

Using the script as bait, he lured Terry back to Hollywood, with the promise that she would play the lead. Unknown to Terry, Hughes also arranged for Dick Hanley to deliver a copy of the script of *High Heels* to Francis Taylor’s art gallery, asserting that Hughes was ready to produce the film at RKO with Elizabeth as the star. It is not known if Elizabeth ever read the script or not, as she was already under contract to MGM, which had assigned her a role in Paramount’s *A Place in the Sun*, an adaptation of Theodore Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy*. Montgomery Clift had been signed as her co-star, with Shelley Winters in a supporting role.

Hughes eventually sold the script of *High Heels* to another studio. It soon became obvious that Terry had been lured back to Hollywood under false pretenses.



Glenn Davis

Back in Lubbock, Davis was furious at the turn of events and the “theft” of his wife. He, too, flew to Hollywood, where he confronted Hughes one evening at the home of Terry Moore’s parents. Hughes was not a fighter, but Davis was.

Roddy McDowall was the first to call Elizabeth after he heard the news: “Your boy Glenn beat the shit out of Hughes. I mean, he’s seriously injured. He was flown to a hospital in San Francisco as a means of avoiding the press in L.A.” Nonetheless, the story soon broke in *Confidential* magazine.

After he recovered, Hughes came up with yet another scheme. He called Davis and told him, “There are no hard feelings. In fact, you struck me—no pun intended—as a powerful hunk of American beef. I think I can make a movie star out of you. All the girls in America will dream of going to bed with you every night, but only if you’re a bachelor—not a married man.”

Since his dream had been to become a movie star, Davis telephoned Elizabeth to discuss Hughes’ proposition with her. She warned him that Hughes routinely double crossed people, and she suspected that this offer might be a trick to get him to divorce Terry.

Although Davis sought Elizabeth’s advice, he didn’t follow it. He let Hughes’ lawyers arrange his divorce from Terry. But when he went to sign his contract with Hughes, the RKO studio head had vanished. There was no

contract, no stardom. Elizabeth had been right. Davis tried to call her again, but she was never available. Davis faded from her life, and she never heard from him again.

It seemed inevitable that Elizabeth, along with her fellow sex goddesses, Marilyn Monroe and Terry, might be considered for the same roles. Although all three had lost out on Hughes' never-realized film project (High Heels), each of these actresses became interested in the publicity surrounding the role of the ingénue in the film version of Come Back, Little Sheba (1952), whose screenplay was based on William Inge's hit Broadway play. During a visit to New York, Elizabeth had been escorted to the play by Monty Clift. Both of them spent the rest of the night drinking and discussing how she might interpret the role onscreen.

Neither Elizabeth, Terry, or Marilyn ever appeared in any movie entitled High Heels, although three foreign film companies used the title for unrelated productions of their own.

The producer of Come Back, Little Sheba was Hal Wallis, working in collaboration with Paramount. One day, Elizabeth, without the permission of MGM, called him for an interview, which he willingly granted. The two leads, Shirley Booth and Burt Lancaster, had already been cast.

Elizabeth was kept waiting in Wallis' outer office while he interviewed another actress who wanted the role. When the door to his inner office opened, Monroe emerged. Elizabeth had never seen her before.

There was a look of recognition between them, followed by a hardening of each of their faces into expressions of hostility. She walked past Elizabeth without speaking. As she would later tell Dick Hanley, "Monroe looked like some whore working Santa Monica Boulevard."

Wallis was polite during his meeting with Elizabeth, and promised he'd give her serious consideration if it appeared that he could persuade Louis B. Mayer to lend her out from MGM.

To her disappointment, Elizabeth later picked up a copy of Variety and read that the role she coveted had been assigned to Terry Moore. Elizabeth was even more disappointed when Terry received an Oscar nomination as Best Supporting Actress of 1952.

Coincidentally, about 18 years later, in 1969, Elizabeth did end up working for Wallis when he produced Anne of a Thousand Days, starring Richard Burton. She appeared only briefly, in a cameo.

A trio of men—Nicky Hilton, Montgomery Clift, and Howard Hughes—were about to become semi-permanent fixtures in Elizabeth's life.

But first, there was Johnny Stompanato.

Howard Hughes had never seen any of Elizabeth's movies, but he was captivated by her image in fan magazines. When he started to pursue her, he was forty-five years old, and she was a tender seventeen. Hughes had shown a tendency, when an actress was that young, of first wooing her parents before moving on to his real prey.

Looking like an unshaven bum, he appeared one day at Francis' art gallery in Beverly Hills. Before his departure an hour later, he had purchased eight very costly and overpriced paintings as part of the biggest art deal Elizabeth's father had ever made.

After leaving the gallery, Hughes drove to the apartment of some unknown starlet, and spent approximately two hours with her. Careless about locking doors, he had left the doors to his car unlocked as it stood in front of the apartment building. By the time he emerged onto the street again, he discovered that all eight paintings had been stolen. He didn't really seem to care, as he hadn't wanted the art anyway.

Before his departure from the gallery that day, he'd invited Francis and Sara to fly with him to a vacation in Reno, Nevada. As an afterthought, he added, "Oh, and don't forget to bring along your daughter."

Before flying to Reno, Hughes called Louis B. Mayer and attempted to purchase Elizabeth's contract. Then in the waning months of his once-iron-bound grip over MGM, the gruff studio chief informed Hughes that her contract was not for sale. "You'll have to find another way to seduce her, Hughes," Mayer told him before

putting down the phone.

When Hughes met Elizabeth for the first time at the airport, he was stunned by her beauty, more compelling than any color magazine photograph could ever convey. "A real looker with tits," he told Johnny Meyer. "I wish I had some way to find out if she's still a virgin."

"Have your doctor examine her," Meyer said.

"Don't be an ass," Hughes snapped at him. "What am I going to do? Call her up and say I've made an appointment for my doctor to examine your hymen to see if it's been pierced?"

At the resort in Reno, Hughes met privately with Sara and Francis, telling them that he was prepared to put up a dowry of one million dollars if they would consent to let Elizabeth marry him. Always ambitious for the advancement of their daughter, Sara promised her cooperation. She didn't seem to be bothered by the difference in their ages.

Francis, however, urged caution. "Elizabeth's a very independent girl these days. She'll have to make up her own mind. But I'd love to have an art patron like Howard Hughes in our family."

Goaded by the encouragement of Sara, Hughes approached Elizabeth later that afternoon. She was clad in a white bathing suit by the hotel pool. Dressed in a rumpled business suit, he came up to her. In the same cardboard box he'd once carried gems for Ava Gardner, he brought a similar unprepossessing package for presentation to Elizabeth.

Opening the box, he dazzled her with rubies, diamonds, and emeralds. He turned over the box and let the stones fall onto her stomach. "C'mon," he said. "I'm taking you to get married. I've had someone make the arrangements. We'll be married tonight. The chapel's already reserved."

Astonished at being on the auction block, she rejected both the stones and the proposal. Jumping up, she scattered the gems onto the pool tiles before racing back to her bedroom.

That night over champagne and crêpes suzette, with Sara and Francis listening, Hughes proposed marriage to Elizabeth. Saying nothing, she excused herself and left the table, retreating back to her bedroom.

The next day, Hughes sent Meyer to apologize instead of doing it himself. "Howard gets carried away sometimes," Meyer told her. "He didn't mean to insult you, certainly not rush you into marriage."

"Tell that fucking madman to stay away from me," she shouted at Meyer. "Your boss bores me, flaunting his money. For god's sake, he reminds me of Louis B. Mayer, and I have no intention of marrying that monster. Or your monster, either!" Showing him to the door, she slammed it in his face.

Nonetheless, Hughes remained persistent and continued to pursue her, even after he'd flown the Taylors back to Los Angeles. From her home, Elizabeth telephoned Roddy McDowall. "I know what I want, and I don't want Howard Hughes. A man can hit on me if he wants to, but when I'm not interested, the word is no. I don't give a flying fuck who he is...or how much money he has."

"Oh, Elizabeth, tell Howard that I'm available." Roddy said.

Despite her protestations, she reluctantly agreed to go out with Hughes on three more dates. She didn't really want to, but Sara kept urging her, almost launching an aggressive campaign to get her to see Hughes again.

On their first date, he drove her to the Cocomanut Grove night club in the Ambassador Hotel to hear Merv Griffin sing. After the night was over, she avoided a kiss at the door and called Roddy to report on the evening. "Hughes was such an out-and-out bore," she said. "I wouldn't marry him for all his money. He just sat there, staring into space and never answering any of my questions. That's because he's deaf in one ear and won't wear a hearing aid. He smelled like he needed a bath. His trousers were wrinkled and hung on him like a scarecrow. He wore dirty sneakers and no socks. His left toe stuck out of one of his shoes."

For his second date with Elizabeth, Hughes drove her to the airport. She thought the venue included taking her on a night flight over Los Angeles to see the dramatic lights along the coast. Instead, he flew her, against her wishes, to San Francisco.

Once there, he checked himself and her into adjoining suites at the Fairmont and invited her out to a night club, Finocchio's, the most famous club in San Francisco for female impersonators. Previously, on separate occasions, he'd escorted both Errol Flynn and Ava Gardner there to see the show.

The headliner was a performer named Pussy-Katt, who had been born as Steve Clayton in Ohio. Her publicity read: "Pussy-Katt is much too pretty to be a boy—and much, much too pretty to be a mere gal."

Elizabeth laughed hilariously during the show and drank too much champagne. She insisted that Hughes stay around for the second show because she was reluctant to return to the Fairmont alone with him.

Between acts, Pussy-Katt came to their table and engaged in conversation with them. Hughes had to excuse himself to make some phone calls.

Elizabeth found Pussy-Katt very amusing. She was curious to learn how she knew Hughes. Pussy-Katt claimed that Hughes had read a book about eunuchs, including sexual practices in ancient Egypt. It seemed that the most beautiful boys in the land—each highly prized as sexual objects—were subjected to the practice of having their penises, testicles, and scrotums removed.

According to the theory, sodomites of that era claimed that the young boys who survived the surgeries were more sexually satisfying because they had only one way to receive sexual pleasure—and that involved being penetrated rectally.

Pussy-Katt claimed that in years previous, Hughes had persuaded her to fly with him to Mexico City, “where I underwent sexual mutilation. There wasn’t that much to cut off anyway, honey,” she told Elizabeth. “Besides, for \$50,000, I was willing to surrender anything.”

That night, back in one of the two adjacent suites in the Fairmont, Elizabeth refused to open the connecting doors in spite of his persistent knocking.

For her third and final date with Hughes, he ordered Edith Head to design a special gown for Elizabeth—the most expensive she’d ever owned in her life. It was tasteful and elegant, with ample décolletage. Before taking her out, he had arranged a special fitting for her with Head, who had selected all black accessories for her. From Tiffany’s he leased a stunningly beautiful diamond necklace, which, according to legend, had once belonged to Marie Antoinette.

She was astonished at the elaborate preparations he was undertaking just to take her to some party. He sent two hairdressers and a top make-up team to her home. “What is this?” she asked. “Is Hughes getting me ready for some sort of coronation?” A Rolls-Royce was sent to fetch her, its driver outfitted in shades of olive green. It was understood that Hughes would not be in the vehicle, but that he’d be waiting to welcome her at the entrance to the party.

She was taken to a mansion in Bel Air where, as planned, Hughes met her and escorted her into a massive reception area. To her surprise, each of the guests, some sixteen in all, were middle aged or older men, each attired in a tuxedo. The champagne flowed, and troughs of caviar were served as she was introduced around. She recognized none of these men and doubted very seriously if they were from the film colony. Most appeared to be titans of industry.

During the two-hour reception, Hughes discreetly arranged conversations between Elizabeth and each of the men there. Her upper-class British accent came back from memory. For some reason, she seemed to understand that he wanted her to impress each of these distinguished gentlemen.

After the men left, Hughes revealed that she had been auditioned for the possible real-life role as First Lady of the United States. Each of the men she’d talked to were powerful contributors to the Republican Party, in search of a candidate to run for President of the United States in the (upcoming) 1952 elections. Already, “Hughes for President” clubs had formed across America.

“But I’m too young to be a First Lady,” she protested. “First Ladies are Eleanor Roosevelt and Bess Truman.” “Not always,” Hughes said. “When Grover Cleveland was president, he married his bride, Francis, who was only twenty-one, about what your age will be when I run for president. The men wanted to see if you had enough poise and charm to function as a possible First Lady, and you passed the test by a country mile.”

“I can’t marry you, Howard,” she said. “I don’t love you.”

“Forget love,” he told her. “We’re talking raw power here. Is there no ambition in you? Just think—you’d become the most famous woman on the planet, the envy of the world, the most beautiful and elegant First Lady in American history, more famous and more widely publicized than that other Elizabeth over in England.”

“I’ll sleep on it,” she said. “Please take me home.”

Years later, Hughes would attempt one final launch into politics. In the meanwhile, however, he continued, through a surrogate, to pursue Elizabeth.

One night, she received a call from the most handsome and dashing attorney in Los Angeles, Greg Bautzer. He’d been the lover of such stars as Ginger Rogers, Ingrid Bergman, Ava Gardner, and Joan Crawford. He’d been

engaged to Lana Turner, Dorothy Lamour, and an unfortunate choice, starlet Barbara Payton, who later fell on hard times and became a prostitute, charging ten dollars a throw.

Although Bautzer was twenty-one years her senior, she was thrilled to date him since he was considered the most desirable bachelor in Hollywood.

She accepted his invitation to fly with him to a villa in Palm Springs. Except for servants, she'd have the villa to herself, as he stayed in a suite at a nearby hotel.

She worked for two hours preparing herself and dressing in her most glamorous outfit for the dinner he'd scheduled with her. Photographers would be waiting.

When the doorbell rang, she opened it only to find Hughes standing on the doorstep, looking his usual bedraggled self.

"I have something to show you," he said, insisting that she walk out to door to his battered old Chevrolet. "It's a surprise."

From the front seat of the car, he retrieved a red bandana like something Aunt Jemima might have worn. He opened it to reveal a queen's ransom in jewelry purchased from Tiffany's. It was larger than the cache of jewelry he'd tossed at her in Reno. "Come with me," he said, "and all of this will be yours."

Racing back into the house, she slammed the door in his face. Packing hurriedly, she fled from Palm Springs and returned to Beverly Hills on her own.

On the phone to Roddy, she asked, "Who does Hughes think I am? One of his bimbo starlets at RKO?"

Before ringing off with Roddy, she said, "Howard Hughes is out of my life forever."

As it happened, she was very wrong about that.

A short while after Janet Leigh introduced Elizabeth to "Johnny" (i.e., the gangster, Johnny Stompanato), she told Elizabeth that she'd broken up with him. "He frightens me," was all the explanation that Leigh ever provided.

In the two weeks that followed, flowers and expensive chocolates began to arrive at the Taylor household, carrying no message except for a card signed "Johnny." Elizabeth wasn't sure, but she believed that they were gifts from the mysterious former beau of Leigh's.

One Saturday afternoon, Elizabeth joined her brother Howard on the beach at Malibu. He'd brought along some school friends, all boys, but none of them showed any interest in her. Eventually the boys, including Howard, wandered off in pursuit of some girls farther up the beach.

Within the hour, Johnny appeared on the beach, walking toward her in a white bikini so sheer he might as well have been nude.

Suddenly, this strikingly handsome young man was sitting beside her. In addition to his impressive physique, the Italian American stud had flashing brown eyes, black wavy hair, and a courtly manner. George Raft had referred to him as "the most cunning and cock-sure man in Hollywood."



Two views of **Johnny Stompanato** (top photo) with **Lana Turner**, and (lower photo) dead from a stab wound administered in Lana's house by the star herself.

She didn't know at the time that Johnny was the henchman and bodyguard for the notorious gangster, Mickey Cohen.

In Cohen's memoirs, *In My Own Words*, the mobster had written: "Johnny Stompanato was the most handsome man I've ever known that was all man. He was an athlete and a real man, without any queerness about him."

Eric Root, Lana Turner's longtime companion, wrote in his memoirs, *The Private Diary of My Life With Lana Turner*: "Stompanato had a reputation for bilking and beating women. He was a punk—not a big-time gangster. He preyed on weak, lonesome, desperate, wealthy women and some wealthy men. He was a known pimp and hustler."

Elizabeth and Janet Leigh were exceptions to Stompanato's usual dating pattern, which focused on richer, older women. He'd been married three times before, once to Helene Stanley, whose face and figure were copied by artists at Walt Disney Studios to create the images of both Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty.

As Elizabeth would later confide to Roddy McDowall, "Johnny was the most seductive man I've ever met. He exuded charm and masculinity. When he talked to a girl, he gave her his undivided attention. His words were as smooth as velvet. As he held my hand, he kissed my fingertips, I was overcome by him."

Before leaving that day, Johnny Stompanato invited her to go with him to an exclusive party. "I didn't even know your last name," she said.

"It's Steele," he said. "John Steele. I'm a businessman." He failed to say what kind of business he was in.

That Sunday night, he arrived at her Beverly Hills home at around six, driving a brand-new black Cadillac with

red upholstery.

After complimenting her on her beauty and her gown, he headed north along the Pacific Coast Highway. At a point near the southern edge of Malibu, he turned right, heading up a steep driveway.

He stopped at a huge iron gate, where two armed guards stood at attention. "Hi, Johnny," one of them called to him, as the other guard opened the gate. The car pulled into a lot filled with other Cadillacs. He escorted her to the main entrance to the house, whose columns evoked Tara in *Gone With the Wind*.

"I'm taking you to a very exclusive private club," he told her. "I'm a member. You'll knock their eyes out."

The door was opened by a stately, gray-haired black butler in tails, who escorted them into the grand hallway, lit by a trio of mammoth crystal chandeliers.

From there, Johnny guided her into a large parlor where well-dressed men, most of them middle-aged, sat drinking at tables with a bevy of expensively gowned women. Peggy Lee was on the small stage, entertaining the guests at this private party.

Eased into their seats, Elizabeth and Johnny were served champagne as they listened to Lee's last three songs. "She's getting paid \$10,000 to come here and sing a few numbers," Johnny whispered to Elizabeth.

After the show, Johnny sat quietly with Elizabeth drinking champagne. She learned that he'd joined the U.S. Marines in 1944 and that he'd been part of the U.S. invasion of China the following year. "I wanted to stay in China after the war, and I met this Turkish woman and married her. For a few months, I became a Muslim. My friends nicknamed me 'Oscar.'"

"Why such an odd name?" she asked.

"I don't mean to embarrass you, but it has to do with the length of something I usually keep concealed."

"Oh, I see," she said, flushing red.

She noted what he'd opted to wear that evening, a battleship gray, tailor-made suit with a dark orange silk shirt unbuttoned to the navel. He wore a silver-buckled leather belt and black lizard skin shoes.

She later informed Roddy that, "I found Johnny highly desirable. Janet might have rejected him, but after the second bottle of champagne, I succumbed to his charms. He took me upstairs to one of the bedrooms. He didn't exaggerate about Oscar. He has to be one of the most skilled lovers since Adam."

He dated her three more times, and on each occasion, he took her to the same gated mansion and the same bedroom.

He told her that he'd evolved from being a Muslim to becoming a Catholic again, the way his Sicilian mother had wanted it. "I've got the Madonna under my skin, which means I experience an attack of conscience every now and then."

Confiding in her, he said that he'd once hoped to be an actor but had opted to become a movie executive instead. "Everybody in Hollywood is trying to climb to the top of the mountain. The route there is hazardous, and most poor slobbs don't make it. What they don't know once they reach the top is that the route down is even more rugged and hazardous."

"Oh, God," she said. "Is that what I have to look forward to?"

One aspect of his work for Mickey Cohen involved the seduction of famous stars, both male and female, and secretly filming these liaisons. In one of the mansion's bedrooms, unknown to his celebrity partner of the moment, he'd be filmed and/or photographed having sex. These secret films would later be used to blackmail the players.

Cohen knew that Elizabeth was being paid only \$2,000 a week, most of it—because she was still a minor—in trust through her parents. Whatever videography was crafted would be held in reserve until she became, as he predicted, one of the biggest stars in Hollywood. Then he planned to blackmail her with the contents of the film.

Howard Hughes, through Johnny Meyer, had arranged for one of his men to trail Elizabeth to the gates of the mansion south of Malibu, and Hughes later learned that Cohen had filmed and was holding a pornographic film featuring Elizabeth. Using Meyer as his go-between, Hughes delivered \$50,000 to Cohen for the relinquishment of the secret film. Apparently, Elizabeth never found out about this generous act of intervention by Hughes. If she had, she might have been kinder and more receptive to his advances.

According to Meyer, Hughes played Elizabeth's porno tape repeatedly—almost as frequently as the one he'd previously commissioned with Marilyn Monroe and Guy Madison.

Trying to forget about both Hughes and Stompanato, Elizabeth turned her mind to her career. It didn't seem to be moving fast enough, and her pictures weren't doing well enough to please her.

Benny Thau asked Elizabeth to report to make-up for some early costume tests, one of which involved a bridal gown for Father of the Bride, even though she'd been scheduled to film A Place In the Sun before that.

She encountered Ava Gardner sitting beside her in the make-up department. Gardner had heard that she'd dropped Hughes. "Good going, gal," she said. "I'm glad you said no. You and I are the only cunts in Hollywood who can't be bought. I'm more tantalized by the size of a man's cock than I am by the size of his bank account. Surely you agree?"

"Both, I think, are equally important."

"Right now, I'm running away from both Frank Sinatra and Hughes." Gardner said. "I've got a new boyfriend, and he's great in bed. His name is Johnny Stompanato, although he calls himself 'John Steele.'"

Elizabeth tried to conceal her shock.

She never heard from "Johnny" again.

In the immediate aftermath of the night of April 4, 1958, everyone in the world, it seemed, learned the name of Johnny Stompanato. He'd been stabbed to death after a violent quarrel in the home of his last and final lover, Lana Turner.

Angered that Turner had not invited him to escort her to the Oscar ceremony, the gangster had threatened to "carve up" Turner's beautiful face. In a "state of madness," she ran down to the kitchen, where she retrieved an eight-inch knife. Returning to her pink satin bedroom, she stabbed him in the stomach. He lived for another fifteen minutes.

Also in the house that fatal night was fourteen-year-old Cheryl Crane, the daughter she had conceived with her former husband, Stephen Crane.

In typical Hollywood fashion, everyone was called before the police. Among several others, the famed attorney, Jerry Geisler, arrived at the house. He was still famous for having successfully defended Errol Flynn during his trial on a charge of statutory rape.

In five hours, a plan was concocted. To avoid a jail term for Turner, Geisler orchestrated a plan wherein Lana would assert that Cheryl went to the kitchen, got the knife, entered the upstairs bedroom, and stabbed Stompanato in an attempt to defend her mother.

The belief was that Cheryl, as a juvenile, would receive a light sentence, if one at all, whereas a jury might "throw the book" at Lana.

Frank Sinatra also arrived that night at the scene, and the singer agreed that Geisler's plan was the way to go. "Let Cheryl take the fall—she'll get off."

Later, when Elizabeth had an affair with Sinatra, he told her the details associated with the night Stompanato was murdered.

Not only that, he informed her that Hughes had very generously ordered his security forces to guard Turner for the next eight months until fear of mob reprisal from Mickey Cohen died down.

Hughes had been a lover of Turner's, and although he'd long ago ceased to have relations with her, he had remained loyal to her.

Elizabeth told Janet Leigh, "Hughes has no more interest in me, although I hear he still has the hots for you."

She firmly believed that, and was therefore surprised one afternoon when the doorbell rang at the Taylor home in Beverly Hills. Both Sara and Francis were at the art gallery at the time. On the doorstep appeared Hughes, looking like he was auditioning for the role of a tramp.

Hughes no longer pressed his case for marriage. Instead, he presented her with a present—tubes of vaginal jelly, which he claimed might prevent an unwanted pregnancy.

"Use this and you won't get pregnant," he instructed her. "If you do get pregnant, your nipples will turn brown

instead of rosy pink, and you'll also get stretch marks. If that ever happens to you, I definitely will not marry you."

Then, without saying anything else, he turned and headed back to his battered old Chevy, which offered no clue that its driver was the richest man in America.

When Monty Clift was told by Paramount that he'd be appearing with Elizabeth Taylor and Shelley Winters in *A Place In the Sun*, he said, "I know Shelley from the Actors Studio, but who in hell is Elizabeth Taylor?"

It is inconceivable that he had not heard of her, although he'd never seen one of her films. They knew dozens of the same show business personalities. To discover who she was in 1949, all someone had to do was walk by a newsstand and look at the covers of various magazines, including *Time*.

Elizabeth certainly knew who Monty was, as he'd been the hottest actor in Hollywood since his recent release of his screen debut in *Red River* (1948), followed by *The Search* (also 1948). She claimed, "He is the most beautiful man in films today."

As a means of generating advance publicity for their joint upcoming film appearance, the studio arranged for Monty to escort Elizabeth to the premiere of his latest film, *The Heiress* (1949), in which he'd appeared opposite Olivia de Havilland. *The Heiress* was based on Henry James's novel, *Washington Square*.

When Paramount explained that Elizabeth was a seventeen-year-old child star who had appeared in her first adult role in *Conspirator*, Monty said, "I'm twenty-nine years old, not a child molester. I'm not taking a kid to any premiere." The studio insisted, however, and he finally relented.

The day before Monty escorted Elizabeth to *The Heiress*, he spent the night on death row at San Quentin State Prison as a means of better understanding how to interpret his upcoming role as George Eastman who, during the final reel of *A Place in the Sun*, is sent to the electric chair on a charge of murder.

In the back seat of a long limousine heading for Grauman's Chinese Theater, he quickly learned that Elizabeth was not the "stuck-up, spoiled Hollywood baby doll" he'd anticipated.

Sliding into the car beside him, she'd said, "Hello, Monty. Thanks for taking me out of my god damn house. My mother is such a pain in the ass, at times, I'm tempted to strike a match to her hairy cunt."

Although at first he was shocked by the vocabulary coming from one so young and beautiful, he quickly adjusted to it and was delighted by her blunt talk. "You're my kind of gal, Bessie Mae."

"Where did you come up with this 'Bessie Mae' shit?" she asked.

"All the world calls you Elizabeth Taylor," he said. "I want to call you what no one else does."

For Elizabeth's appearance at *The Heiress's* premiere, Helen Rose had designed something "sexy and sophisticated," in this case, a strapless gown with a snowy Polar Bear fur cape. Monty sat gazing at Elizabeth, fingering his lucky red dice on the way to the premiere of his latest movie.

Hedda Hopper spotted Elizabeth straightening Monty's tie before they entered the zany, pagoda-inspired movie palace. The next day, Hopper printed, "These magnificent lovebirds are very soon going to be married."

Inside, as *The Heiress* flickered across the screen, Monty slid farther and farther into his seat until he was sitting on his coccyx.

Elizabeth had high praise for the movie, constantly reassuring him how great he was.

Leaving the theater, Monty was accosted by an aggressive reporter, who wanted to know what he thought of *The Heiress*. Brushing him aside, Monty said, "I hated the fucking thing. Let me out of here."

After the film, Monty and Elizabeth were driven to the home of William Wyler, who was hosting a party for A-list movie stars. Here, she met one of the film industry's favorite British actors, David Niven. He later said, "Monty and Elizabeth looked like twins. I'm sure Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden, looked just like them."

Later, she was seen chatting with Clark Gable, who told her that he was sorry they didn't get to appear together on the screen.

"I heard Tracy is going to play your dad in *Father of the Bride*. I could have played that role."

Gary Cooper came up to her. "I've never dated a gal with lavender eyes before, but I sure would like to," he

told her.

Back on her doorstep, Monty escorted her to the stoop and kissed her on the forehead. "I promised Paramount I'd stay sober while escorting you. Now Marlon Brando and I are going to let it rip. Get stinking drunk."

"I'd like to join you guys some night," she said.

"You do so at your own risk," he said. "We might double rape you."

"That would be okay," she said, stepping inside and shutting the door.

Built into the deal that Louis B. Mayer had arranged between MGM and Paramount, MGM would receive \$35,000 for ten weeks of Elizabeth's services during her loanout for the production of A Place In the Sun. On October 2, 1949, Elizabeth and Sara left together for location shooting on Lake Tahoe, high in the Sierra Nevada mountains on the border between California and Nevada. The Sierra Nevada was where the desperate and snow-bound Donner party, a century before, had regressed to cannibalism as a means of surviving the winter.



above, left: novelist **Theodore Dreiser** right: director **Josef von Sternberg** "explicit condemnations of capitalism and materialism in America."

A Place In the Sun was based on Theodore Dreiser's celebrated novel, written in 1925, An American Tragedy. It was inspired by a notorious criminal case that unfolded in New York State in 1908. Chester Gillette was put on trial and convicted of drowning his girl friend, Grace Brown, although he maintained all the way to the electric chair that he was innocent. The event occurred on Big Moose Lake in New York State's Adirondack mountains.



Players in the real-life version of American Tragedy
Chester Gillette (left) and **Grace Brown**

An earlier version of the film, entitled An American Tragedy and released in 1931, had starred Phillips Holmes

in Monty's role, Sylvia Sidney in Shelley Winter's part, and Frances Dee as the rich girl (i.e., the role played by Elizabeth). It was directed by Josef von Sternberg, a German-Austrian director already widely known at the time of his film's release, based on his having helmed Marlene Dietrich in *The Blue Angel*, the film that launched her as an international success.

Dreiser's novel from 1925 and von Sternberg's film from 1931 had each been interpreted as explicit condemnations of capitalism and materialism in America. But as New York author Norman Mailer told Shelley Winters about the 1951 film version, "I hear the script is being watered down so much it's going to taste like warmed over piss."

When Shelley told that to Elizabeth, she went to Stevens, the director of the 1951 version, and asked him, in more diplomatic terms, what he thought about that.

He responded, "I'm not going to blame American society like Dreiser did. I'm turning this movie into a psychological drama. Our hero's downfall is that he has this uncontrollable passion for the most glamorous woman on the screen today—read that Elizabeth Taylor."

But Mailer's charge was to some extent accurate. In Washington, Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin, aided in no small part by the FBI's director, J. Edgar Hoover, had already launched their notorious commie witch hunts, and much of Hollywood was terrified. Paramount brought pressure on Stevens to ensure that *A Place In the Sun* did not evolve into an anti-capitalist tirade, and that it did not appear to glorify the proletariat working class as portrayed on screen by Monty.

In response, he referred to both McCarthy and Hoover as "two disgusting fags." And when he read the script, he told Elizabeth, "Its message is that sex in America is the way to both rise and ruin."

Sara, in contrast, was thrilled that Elizabeth would be directed by Stevens, one of the hottest directors in Hollywood at the time.

Stevens did not have an impressive beginning in Hollywood, having launched his involvement there as a gagman for Hal Roach and later directing Laurel and Hardy. In the 1930s, he became famous for directing such films as *Alice Adams* (1935), with Katharine Hepburn; and *Swing Time* (1936) with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. He would later direct Elizabeth in both *Giant* (1956), and the disastrous *The Only Game in Town* (1969).

One critic referred to Stevens as "a big, raw-faced man who looked just like a character in one of his westerns, escaping from an Indian about to scalp him."

Actually, Elizabeth didn't learn until later why Stevens had selected her for the film. "I wanted the girl on the candy-box cover, the beautiful girl in the yellow Cadillac that every American boy, some time or other, thinks he can marry."

The staff had been instructed not to swear in front of Elizabeth. But that ban was lifted after the first day, when a stream of foul-mouthed invective flowed from her mouth.

She told Stevens, "I can outcuss, outdrink, outsuck, and outfuck the best of them." He was startled. She was so different from her movie magazine image.

"I realized after the first week that a lot of guys in Hollywood had had that pussy," Stevens told his crew.

As factory girl Alice Tripp, Shelley Winters appeared onscreen in tacky clothes with no makeup, playing a 1950s girl from the wrong side of the tracks. Guys knocked up girls like that but didn't want to marry them, figuring they could do better on the other side of the tracks.

Shelley told Elizabeth, "After this role, I will for the rest of my life play the girl most men would like to murder."

Shelley's role was originally intended for Audrey Totter, but MGM refused to release her. Then Stevens briefly considered Gloria Grahame, but her boss, Howard Hughes at RKO, refused to release her, too. Monty had lobbied for the role of Alice to go to Betsy Blair, who was married at the time to Gene Kelly. Coincidentally, Kelly had, for years, had a crush on Monty.

Stern-faced Anne Revere, a descendent of Paul Revere, the hero of the American Revolution, played the role of Monty's mother. Soon after, she was blacklisted for her liberal politics during the McCarthy era witch hunt. Bowing to studio pressure, Stevens cut most of her scenes from *A Place In the Sun*, and after that, probably because of her political positions, she didn't appear in another movie until 1970.

During the cool October nights of 1950, Elizabeth escaped from the clutches of Sara and hid out with Monty, getting to know him. Like his sometimes lover and rival, Marlon Brando, rail-thin Montgomery Clift had been

born in Nebraska. When he signed to play Elizabeth's doomed lover in *A Place In the Sun*, he met a woman twelve years younger than himself. Since the age of fifteen, he'd been appearing on Broadway, making his film debut in Howard Hawks' western, *Red River* (1948), in which he played the highly strung adopted son of John Wayne as part of a tense relationship both on and off the screen. Addicted to both alcohol and drugs before he met Elizabeth, Monty was also deeply conflicted about his sexuality. He often said, "I love women, but I prefer to have sex with men." Monty's male lovers came and went.



Elizabeth Taylor with Montgomery Clift in *A Place in the Sun*

By breaking into films, he started a migration of young New York actors to Hollywood—Marlon Brando, Paul Newman, James Dean, Steve McQueen, Anthony Perkins, George Peppard, and many others.

Shelley Winters later said, "Elizabeth and I once made a bet about how many of those actors we would eventually seduce. I think she won."

Dustin Hoffman, Robert De Niro, and Al Pacino would follow in Monty's footsteps with this edgy, intense, and mutely eloquent style of acting.

Monty was unlike any man she'd ever met. He appeared on the set wearing a scruffy T-shirt washed last season, and a pair of jeans that had been fresh sometime before World War II. He also sported a ripped leather jacket that looked as if an RAF pilot had worn it during an ejection from his airplane during the Battle of Britain.

Monty uttered enigmatic statements that only she seemed to fully understand. "There is an evil in Hollywood that confronts me at every turn. I am unable to handle it. No one can be taken at face value. Everyone is a liar. I feel I'm climbing a ladder to this giant skyscraper, and I have an overwhelming desire to fall off and drop into space."

Although he didn't plan to embrace her as a lover, Monty was mesmerized by Elizabeth's physical beauty.

"My god," Monty said. "She has black sable eyebrows and eyes so deceptively blue that they appear violet in a certain light." She stood only five feet two inches tall, although she always lied about it, claiming she actually stood five feet, four inches. Amazingly, on screen, she photographed as if she was tall.

"She was indeed the kind of woman a guy like my character, George Eastman, would kill for as a means of reaching his place in the sun." Monty asserted.

Their first scene was set in midsummer, although it was filmed during October. The film crew had to hose away a light snow that had fallen the night before. The script called for both Elizabeth and Monty to appear in bathing suits beside and in the lake. Monty refused to disrobe because of his insecurities about his willowy, hairy frame, with only Elizabeth appearing in a bathing suit.

"In a bathing suit, I look like a monkey," Monty told Stevens.

[For years, Monty made frequent visits to a skin specialist on West 57th Street in Manhattan for electrolysis, with the intention of removing a thick pelt of hair from his thin chest and narrow shoulders. Elizabeth would also undergo such treatments.]

"You know what really caused Monty and Elizabeth to bond?" a drunken Roddy asked one night at a party. "All that excess body hair that both of them suffered with."

Stevens was not satisfied with Elizabeth's scene in the lake, and ordered one retake after another until Sara protested, claiming that her daughter was menstruating and was likely to get terrible cramps. Then she made the amazing charge that this sequence in the cold water would prevent Elizabeth from ever having children.

After the filming of the lake scene, Elizabeth spent the next three days in her bedroom, since Sara would not let her return to work. Throughout the two decades that followed, Elizabeth would insist that she would not work when having her period, a stipulation written into every one of her contracts.

Stevens found Elizabeth a temperamental star, difficult to direct. He accused her of "spitting fire at me."

"Does the Princess of MGM have distemper (sic) today?" At one particularly difficult moment, he archly reminded her that the title of the picture was not *Lassie Comes Home* but *A Place In the Sun*.

Ivan Moffat, the film's associate producer, later observed, "In Elizabeth's arms, Monty Clift was enveloped by the mothering tentacles of the world...In some hirsute, androgynous way, they did indeed look alike," Moffat said. "In close-ups, they looked like a brother and sister committing incest."

Stevens told Monty and Shelley, "Elizabeth is a sex time bomb waiting to explode."

"Then what am I?" Shelley asked. "Chopped liver?"

"In this picture, that's exactly what you are," the director responded.

"At night, Monty coached Elizabeth in her role by becoming Angela Vickers—delivering her lines, complete with facial expressions and gestures. "It was amazing to behold," Elizabeth said. "It was as if he became the essence of femininity that Angela Vickers represented, yet it never bordered on drag queen grotesqueness."



Elizabeth Taylor, fashion icon, in a much-copied gown designed by Edith Head

For months after the film's release, copies of Elizabeth's white gown, a design by Edith Head, were replicated and purchased by young women across the globe. The design featured a tight bodice embroidered with white daisies and a skirt of ivory tulle over white silk. The designer later remarked, "Elizabeth in the gown was like sunlight moving over the water of a crystal blue lake."

When Monty saw her in the white gown, he said, "Bessie Mae, your tits are fantastic, just fantastic!"

As Elizabeth told her two closest male confidants, Dick Hanley and Roddy McDowall, "I've fallen in love with Monty. I know it's my own misfortune. At first, I denied to myself that he was homosexual. But when he began showing up on the set with hustlers he'd picked up in a bar, I was forced to face reality."

"We have this incredible bond," she said. "Our relationship will not die. But instead of lover, it must turn into something else—soul mate, sister, mama, confidant."

Their intimacy became so close that she'd invite him into her quarters and would take a bath in front of him. As she'd later tell Roddy, "It never excited Monty."

During the course of the filming, Elizabeth wrote girlish love letters to Monty. Rather callously, he turned them over to his current hustler trick, who saved them and later tried to sell them to a magazine. But there were no takers.

Brenda Maddox, author of *Who's Afraid of Elizabeth Taylor?*, brilliantly described another gown designed by Edith Head that Elizabeth wore on screen:

"As Taylor pulls Clift out onto the balcony, compelled by a passion that will send him to the electric chair, she wears a gown of jet-black velvet with a vestigial shred of white broderie anglaise edging her breasts. In the dark, away from the glare of the party, they do a scene that can only be described as oral sex."

In the flickering light, and almost mirroring their own behind-the-scenes drama, Monty says, "How can I tell you how much I love you? How can I tell you all?"

She responds, "Tell Mama...Tell Mama all!"

Elizabeth had objected to her dialogue. "Who in hell wrote this shit?" she asked Stevens, knowing that he was the one.

Twenty years later, she saw the film again. "Now I understood the line. Stevens wanted to suggest that Monty and I had a relationship so deep it began in the womb."

When Stevens first viewed the close-ups of Monty and Elizabeth, he proclaimed, "I have mated Hollywood's most beautiful screen duo. Not since Greta Garbo emoted with John Gilbert in *Flesh and the Devil* (1926) has the public seen two such perfect faces."

Rarely has a screen couple been photographed so divinely as in the final reel, when Elizabeth visits Monty on death row, where he has been sentenced to the electric chair for the alleged murder of Shelley Winters, his pregnant former girlfriend. In the film, the script called for the character played by Winters to die of accidental drowning, though he made no effort to save her. Aggressive prosecutors convinced the jury it was murder.

In his cell for a farewell, the character played by Elizabeth swears to the condemned man, "I will love you until the day I die."

The depiction of Elizabeth, tremulous and frightened in a little cloche hat, would be flashed on screens around the world and would become one of her most iconic images.

Back in Hollywood for the final takes, Sara invited her old friend, Hedda Hopper, onto the set to watch Monty and Elizabeth make love. At the end of the scene, the columnist, wearing a wide-brimmed, shocking pink picture hat, came up to Elizabeth. "Where in hell did you learn to make love like that? All this time, I've been telling my readers you are a virgin. You obviously are not."

When Hopper left the set, Monty denounced her as "an old gobbler."

Hopper called Monty "a pantywaist." She'd long ago learned that Monty was a homosexual when she'd heard that he'd been arrested in New Orleans on a morals charge. In spite of what she already knew, she continued to promote Elizabeth and Monty in her column as "two lovebirds," predicting that wedding bells would soon be ringing for the beautiful couple.

In a cheap publicity trick, Paramount publicists behind Elizabeth's back released to the press the news of their upcoming marriage. Across the country, Americans read over morning coffee—CLIFT AND TAYLOR TO WED.

Elizabeth broke down in tears, shouting "Monty will blame me for this. He'll never speak to me again."

When Winters was later asked if she felt left out when Monty and Elizabeth became so close, she said, "Like hell I was [left out]! I was making love to both Marlon Brando and Burt Lancaster. Monty was the lonely one, in spite of Elizabeth's presence. He was the loneliest man I've ever known and the best actor, too. Don't tell Marlon I said that."

After the shooting of the last scene of *A Place in the Sun*, Elizabeth expected Monty to make plans for the continuation of their relationship. Emotionally drained, he told her he was flying to New York for a drive to Connecticut, where he would be a guest of the notorious Libby Holman at her estate, "Treetops," set on fifty-five acres of grounds between Greenwich and Stamford.

Libby was nearly twice Monty's age. Noël Coward referred to her as a "fag hag," and told anyone who would listen that she'd been a star of Broadway musicals during the late 1920s.

When Holman heard of Monty's growing friendship with Elizabeth, she was very resentful, denouncing Elizabeth as "a teenage limey nympho."

Holman wasn't one to cast aspersions on others. Even though she'd never been officially declared guilty in any court, the torch singer had been implicated in the controversial suicide (or murder?) of her first husband, Zachary Smith Reynolds, the 22-year-old tobacco heir. He was a homosexual, as was her second husband, actor Ralph (pronounced "Rafe") Holmes, twelve years her junior, who also committed suicide or was murdered.

Like everyone else in America at the time, Elizabeth had already read about Holman's notorious life. She warned Monty, "Please be careful of her. She's the Black Widow. You may be the next one murdered."

Actress and stage personality Tallulah Bankhead confessed to being Holman's occasional lesbian lover. Holman and Bankhead frequently shot barbs at each other, Tallulah observing, publicly and frequently, "I entertain Libby only between murders." Holman responded in kind, at one time saying, "Tallulah's voice is a mixture of British and Pickaninny."

As journalist John Parker wrote, "As Monty Clift's personal conflicts over his Hollywood career and his homosexuality intensified, Libby became a willing participant with him in long bouts of experimenting with drugs and strange sexual excursions into strip joints and whorehouses, which went against his apparent leanings, but satisfied her perverted whim. Monty told of wild scenes at Libby's magnificent home, filled with the aromas of erotic eastern perfumes and joss-sticks, topped up with marijuana and pep pills.

When Monty departed from Hollywood after the filming of *A Place In the Sun*, Elizabeth told him, "Look, Monty, I'm always here for you whenever you need me." He said nothing else, but gave her a gentle kiss on the lips and walked away.

She ran from the set in tears and stayed in her dressing room for two hours.

Many years later, Monty made a confession to Frank E. Taylor, the producer of *The Misfits*, in which he was starring with Marilyn Monroe and Clark Gable in the last picture either Monroe or Gable would ever make.

"I did try to have sex with Elizabeth one time, but couldn't rise to the occasion," Monty said.



Libby Holman

Taylor herself claimed, years after Monty's death in 1966, "He also confessed to me that he had a small penis and that that was the secret tragedy of his life." In the first and unexpurgated edition of Kenneth Anger's *Hollywood Babylon*, he referred to Monty as "Princess Tiny Meat."

"Is nothing sacred?" Monty asked when he read that and before he called his lawyer to get the reference removed in the subsequent edition.

Elizabeth asked Paramount to let her attend a special screening of *A Place In the Sun* with Dick Hanley. At the end, she gave her own movie review to Dick: "Monty is the most sensitive and magnetic actor on the screen today. He's not afraid to be vulnerable. At first, he draws the audience in with his sheer beauty, but it is his barely concealed torment, as reflected on his face and in his body movements that keeps that audience glued to

their seats. I plan to make movie after movie with him. I have truly found my lifetime partner on and off the screen."

"We may go to bed together in the future, but it's all too obvious that we'll have to conduct a ménage à trois with some trick of his," she told Dick at dinner that night after seeing the movie.

Returning to Metro, Elizabeth bombarded Benny Thau's office and virtually demanded that he lobby for her to get the lead role in *I'll Cry Tomorrow*, the story of a nightclub singer, Lillian Roth, and her lifelong struggle with alcoholism. "I can pull it off," Elizabeth said. "Hell, I'll become a drunk just to get the part."

She was bitterly disappointed when the role went to that fiery redhead, Susan Hayward. "Dame Bitch," became Elizabeth's name for Hayward.

"Deanna Durbin is a fading memory, and Margaret O'Brien grows more obsolete every day," Elizabeth said to Thau. "A Place In the Sun will change my movie life. No one will ever call me a child star again, except in a historical reference."

Upon the release of *A Place In the Sun*, Charlie Chaplin hailed it as "the greatest movie ever made about America." Writing in *American Cinema*, Andrew Sarris claimed, "Those gigantic close-ups of Elizabeth Taylor and Monty Clift kissing were unnerving—sybaritic—like gorging on chocolate sundaes."

The critic for *The New York Post* wrote that "As for Miss Taylor, she has only to pass a camera to provide abundant reason for a man to commit murder, or any other crime of violence, in her favor."

Some critics hailed her as "the virgin temptress." It required the passage of two decades before more modern critics could more accurately describe Elizabeth's performance: "She's the ultimate cock-tease," wrote one reviewer in 1970.

For his performance as a loner and misfit in *A Place In the Sun*, Monty was nominated for a Best Actor Oscar, as was Marlon Brando for his memorable role as the brutish Stanley Kowalski in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*. But these Actors Studio candidates ultimately lost to Humphrey Bogart for his role in *The African Queen*, arguably his greatest performance.

A Place In the Sun had its release date postponed for a year because Paramount did not want to compete with its epic *Sunset Blvd.* in the Oscar race. That film starred Gloria Swanson as the fading silent screen vamp, Norma Desmond. Monty, ironically, had originally been offered the role of Joe Gillis, but turned it down, the part eventually going to William Holden, launching him into super stardom.

Monty feared that the role would evoke his own real life drama unfolding at that time with the older, richer, Libby Holman.

For the most part, critics had previously condemned Elizabeth's film performances. But after *A Place In the Sun*, she was actually praised for her acting, and not just for her beauty.

The critic for *Boxoffice* wrote, "Miss Elizabeth Taylor deserves the Oscar this year."

Elizabeth observed, with irony, "I wasn't nominated because I'm beautiful. If you look like I do, nobody gives you an Academy Award."

In contrast, Shelley Winters was nominated for an Oscar, but lost it to Vivien Leigh for her memorable portrayal of Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams.

After her unrequited love affair with Monty, Elizabeth was depressed, but not for long. "She was too full of life to remain in her bedroom moaning over something that could not be," Roddy recalled. He telephoned her there and volunteered to escort her to a party with his friends at Lucey's Restaurant.

At first, she rejected his offer, but he finally prevailed upon her to go. "Forget Monty," he told her. "The world is filled with gorgeous men, and if you and I play it right, we'll be able to have most of them."

"At the restaurant, I'll introduce you to this handsome rich devil who's been pestering me to bring the two of you together," Roddy said. "But there's a drawback."

"He's a serial killer?" she asked.

"Not that," he told her. "But girls—or boys, as the case might be—usually have to go to the hospital to get stitched back together after a night in the hay with him. I'm talking about Nicky Hilton."



A Place in the Sun

CHAPTER TWELVE

So This Is Marriage (Nicky Hilton)

WHAT A PIP!

After circling each other for months, Elizabeth and Nicky finally met. It was an Indian summer afternoon in October of 1949. He was awed by her beauty, and had been ever since he'd seen her at Jane Powell's wedding party at the Mocambo.

He photographed badly, but in person, he was extremely handsome, speaking in a soft Texas drawl. He was tall and broad-shouldered and wore a tailor-made suit from Savile Row in London. He had a reputation as a playboy, and his dark brown eyes suggested mischief and desire at the age of twenty-three.

Even though he looked like he'd just been graduated from college, he was a man of the world, having launched affairs with members of both sexes since he was fourteen years old. He was at ease with people, having spent his teenage years meeting movie stars, industrial tycoons, presidents, senators, and even fading members of the European aristocracy.

Nicky almost never worked, but he held two important positions—one as the vice-president of the Hilton Corporation, and the other as the manager of the swanky Bel Air Hotel, which he referred to as "my fuck pad."

As it happened, it wasn't Roddy McDowall, but Pete Freeman, son of Paramount's chief, Y. Frank Freeman, who introduced Nicky to Elizabeth. He'd invited both Nicky and Elizabeth to a lunch at Lucey's, a Mexican restaurant on Melrose Avenue across from the Paramount lot.

Elizabeth arrived wearing a violet sheath dress which made her eyes appear more violet than blue.

Nicky was half an hour late, a harbinger of chronic tardiness and irresponsibility to come. But in the meanwhile, Gloria Swanson stopped by Elizabeth's table, as she was waiting there with Freeman. Swanson was filming Sunset Blvd. for Paramount. "You have a marvelous face, child," she told Elizabeth. "We had faces during days of the Silents. With your expressive face, you would have made it back when pictures didn't talk. Today, any little high school debutante can be put up on the screen and called a movie star. Norma Shearer even promoted Janet Leigh. Joanne Dru... please!... Barbara Hale...oh, dear, I'm getting ill."

Elizabeth told her how honored she was to meet such a great star.

"One final word of advice," Swanson said. "Take lovers, but don't marry them. Marriage is a trap for a big star."

Two days later, Elizabeth ran into Janet Leigh on the Metro lot. She avoided reporting on Swanson's dig at her, but raved about meeting Nicky Hilton. "He exudes masculinity—what a guy!" Elizabeth said. "He seems like a decent, clean-cut, all-American boy, except when those wild eyes of his undress me, symbolically speaking. We come from very different backgrounds, but we have much in common. We both like hamburgers with onions. That's not all. We both adore Enzo Penza."

Penza, a basso profundo from Milan's La Scala opera house, was currently appearing in two musicals at MGM. Nicky and Elizabeth played his recording of *Some Enchanted Evening* time and time again.

When he dropped out of Baltimore's Loyola College at the age of nineteen, Nicky joined the Navy, where he had a number of sailor lovers, most of whom fell for him when they saw him in the shower.

At the time he met Elizabeth, Nicky was involved in a torrid affair with his former stepmother, Zsa Zsa Gabor, who had married Conrad Hilton, Sr. in April of 1942. Because of Hilton Sr.'s ownership of his hotel chain, newspapers had dubbed him "the man with the 100,000 beds."

The Hungarian bombshell divorced Nicky's father in 1946, but her affair with Nicky continued. At the Bel Air hotel, she'd make "Dracula Goulash" for him before bedtime. Zsa Zsa once asserted that her stepson had "a ten-inch penis and the sexual stamina of a racehorse."



Love and publicity, Hollywood style, in the Atomic Age **Nicky Hilton** with **Elizabeth Taylor**

After his divorce from Elizabeth, Nicky dated Terry Moore. She told a reporter, "He had absolutely the largest penis—wider than a beer can and much longer—I have ever seen. To make love to him was like fornicating with a horse."

When he wasn't dating Zsa Zsa, Nicky was seen with actresses Denise Darcel and Jeanne Crain, or else with socialites like Kay Spreckles and Hope Hampton. Ironically, Conrad Hilton, Sr., had previously dated both Spreckles and Hampton.

After returning home from that lunch at Lucey's, Elizabeth found a box with three dozen long-stemmed yellow roses. Nicky had taken the time to learn the species of her favorite flower. The card he enclosed read, "To bring back the sun—Nick."

That night, after repeatedly smelling the yellow roses, Elizabeth called Roddy. "I've met that darling man, Nicky Hilton. The most eligible bachelor in America, as you well know. All the girls are after him."

"And half the boys, too," Roddy chimed in.

"That's understandable," she said. "He's so sexy. I know he wants me. A girl can tell."

"I can see a page from the history books now: Elizabeth Taylor married Nicky Hilton, and the couple lived happily ever after—just like in the movies."

"But, Roddy, some dreams come true," she said.

"And others are meant merely to be dreamed."

Nicky and Elizabeth began to date each other seriously, and she described him in glowing terms to Dick Hanley, who knew him.

"Nicky is Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," Dick warned her. "You see the side he presents to the world. There's another side to him—a compulsive gambler, woman-beater, alcoholic, closeted heroin addict, sex maniac. It doesn't matter to him if he's with a man or a woman. He believes that all cats are gray at night."

Nicky invited Elizabeth to go riding along Bel Air's bridle paths, and often took her to the beach and to Hollywood parties. He escorted her to lavish dinners, but on occasion, he dined more modestly at the Taylor home on Elm Drive. For his first dinner there, Sara made her specialty, steak-and-kidney pie. With a fork, he isolated the pieces of kidney, but as a Texan, he ate the chunks of steak.

When Nicky's relationship with Elizabeth became serious enough, he felt it was time to introduce her, along with Sara and Francis, to his own father, Conrad Sr.

A Hilton limousine carrying Francis and Sara pulled up for dinner at Conrad Hilton's sixty-four room mansion in Bel Air. "My god," Francis proclaimed when he emerged from the limo. "We've arrived at Shangri-la!"

Inside, tuxedoed servants raced about, and formally dressed butlers in tails offered drinks. Maids in black uniforms with frilly aprons waited to fulfill every request. "Each of them looks like she should be called Fifi," Sara said.

The mansion was like a boutique hotel, with sixteen bedroom suites and twenty-six bathrooms, with fixtures plated with fourteen-karat gold. Along with five kitchens came an equal number of wet bars. Sara was amazed at the dozen marble fireplaces, each in a different pattern or color of marble, ranging from scarlet red to mint green.

As an art dealer, Francis noted the 18th-century panels painted by the French artist, Jean-Baptiste Hult, and he was awed by Hilton's collection of Ming vases.

Nicky showed the Taylors around the house, or at least around a portion of it, promising Elizabeth that he'd take her on a tour of the grounds the following day.

Tap-dancing Ann Miller was Conrad Sr.'s companion for the evening. The dancer-actress had been having an affair with the hotel magnate, although in her memoirs, she claimed "we were just good friends."

"Yeah," said one maid. "Friends who sleep in suites in the same bed together."

Miller recalled that "Connie was a little jealous that his son had acquired a beauty like Elizabeth Taylor. I think he would have preferred to have her for himself."

Acting as chaperones, Y. Frank Freeman and his wife drove Elizabeth and Nicky to the Hilton vacation retreat at Lake Arrowhead. Once there, Freeman, although nominally on vacation, conducted business for Paramount on the phone, while Elizabeth and Nicky were left virtually alone. It was here, beside this beautiful lake, that he first made love to her.

They were assigned adjoining bedrooms with connecting doors. At two o'clock on their first morning there, he opened the doors between their rooms and stood in the dim light, completely nude.

Elizabeth would later confide to Roddy that as a lover, Nicky was tender and gentle with her, never pressuring her or going too far. "He was so very responsive to my needs, yet so very skilled at bringing me pleasure. It's easy to fall in love with a man like that. I have truly found my Prince Charming."



BE MY GUEST!
Hilton dynasty patriarch **Conrad Hilton** (left photo)
with (top right) **Zsa Zsa Gabor** and (lower right) **Ann Miller**

Nicky and Elizabeth would often sneak away to the home of his younger brother, Baron Hilton, who was already married. Later, they'd retreat to a wing of his house where they would not be interrupted.

Elizabeth's friends noted that a panic seemed to have consumed her, as her romance with Nicky became more serious. She desperately wanted to flee from the protective womb of Sara, yet on the other hand, feared she might become the closely guarded possession of another man.

Roddy McDowall, meanwhile, had taken a temporary lease on an apartment in The Dakota, the most fabled apartment building in Manhattan. Roddy's contract at Fox had expired, and his lanky teen years had come to an end. He was trying to rejuvenate his career, hoping to find work on the Broadway stage. On an impulse, she'd accepted an invitation to fly to New York to see him. His roommate was their mutual friend, Merv Griffin.

Sara wanted to accompany Elizabeth as chaperone, but Elizabeth defied her, rejecting her offer. When Nicky objected to her trip, she decided to defy him, too, traveling there without him.

In New York, Monty Clift joined Elizabeth, Griffin, and Roddy for nights on the town. They became regulars at Gregory's, Monty's favorite bar on Fifty Fourth Street and Lexington Avenue.

As author Ellis Amburn wrote, "Often joined by a nineteen-year-old, whom Monty was trying to seduce, and Kevin McCarthy, they always huddled in a wooden booth to the right of the bar, chain smoking and drinking. None of the other customers—pimps, winos, a few undergraduates, and middle-aged women nodding over drinks bothered them or even recognized them. One night, Monty flaunted a cute chorus boy in front of Elizabeth."

She had long known that Kevin was Monty's best male friend, and also that he was one of the most talented actors in New York. Before introducing him to Elizabeth, Monty told her that "Kevin is the love of my life." He had married Augusta Dabney in 1941. Monty told Elizabeth that in his loneliness, he often went to the McCarthy apartment at night to sleep between the actor and his wife.

Kevin came from a distinguished family. He was the brother of Mary Mc-Carthy, one of the best known writers in America, and also the cousin of U.S. senator Eugene McCarthy, who ran for President in 1968, challenging Robert Kennedy right before his assassination. Kevin would soon be nominated for the Best Supporting Actor Oscar for his appearance in the film version of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*.

Elizabeth soon learned that a movie script was arriving almost daily at Monty's apartment, but that he didn't bother reading any of them. He told her, "I'm not doing any more movies for the time being."

Elizabeth, Monty, and their friends often ended the evening at Bickford's an all-night gay cafeteria patronized by hustlers. Sometimes, Monty would approach one of the young men for rent, asking, "Would you like to fuck a movie star?"

She noted sadly that Monty had become a confirmed alcoholic, whereas she was just launching a lifetime of heavy drinking herself.

Monty took them to jazz joints like Condon's, and on one night, Elizabeth went with Kevin and Monty by taxi to Chinatown, later ending the evening walking around the Bowery.

One of their most raucous evenings was at a restaurant in Greenwich Village. Each of them ordered lemon meringue pie for dessert. Monty put his face down on the table and began to lick the meringue off the top. For a laugh, a drunken Griffin pushed Monty's face into the pie. A food fight erupted, with Elizabeth joining in.

Management called the police, but when two studly patrolmen came in and discovered Elizabeth wiping pie off her face, she persuaded them to let them go if she'd give the manager a hundred-dollar bill. He gladly accepted, and the drunken party fled into the night.

Sometimes, neither Monty nor Roddy were available, so Griffin volunteered as Elizabeth's escort at such haunts as the Stork Club and 21, a former speakeasy. Word soon got back to Hollywood that Griffin was dating Elizabeth. Columnist Walter Winchell promoted this faux romance in his column, although he obviously knew that the Taylor/Griffin association was platonic. He'd once said, "Merv Griffin is as queer as a three-dollar bill."

Griffin didn't deny the romance, since he led a life in the closet and was always eager to promote publicity that he was heterosexual.

Although he didn't tell Elizabeth, Roddy learned that while she was away, Peter Lawford, their mutual friend, supplied the hotel heir with a steady stream of beautiful starlets eager to break into the movies. "Nicky returns the favor by letting Peter occasionally go down on that tree trunk he carries in his trousers," Roddy told Griffin.

Both Roddy and Griffin, and especially Monty, felt that Elizabeth should break off her romance with Nicky. Yet they didn't want to "bad mouth" Nicky in front of her, based on their fear of offending her.

One night, Roddy and Griffin decided to play matchmakers, hoping to interest Elizabeth in another potential boyfriend.

"I have an idea," Griffin said. "I met this sweet kid at RCA Victor. Eddie Fisher. He's also under contract there. Real cute. Jewish. I bet Elizabeth will go for him. If she doesn't, maybe Eddie will give me a tumble?"

"I hear he doesn't swing that way," Roddy said.

"In my case, he might make an exception," Griffin said.

"Dream on," Roddy said. "Let's invite him. He's sure to be awed by Elizabeth, at least."

Merv Griffin arranged tickets to the Broadway Theater where Mae West was appearing in a popularly priced

revival of *Diamond Lil*, which she had written herself and had first performed in April of 1928. In his memoirs, Merv remembered the play as *Catherine Was Great*, which Mae had brought to Broadway in 1944. Ironically, the original producer of that play back in 1944 had been the flamboyant showman, Mike Todd, who in years to come would marry Elizabeth.

As Griffin entered with Elizabeth, even though the lights had dimmed and the curtain was about to go up, a murmur was heard from the audience. Word spread quickly that Elizabeth Taylor had entered the theater and was being ushered to her seat. Only the opening of the curtain silenced the crowd.

All thoughts of Elizabeth vanished as a usually blasé New York audience greeted Mae's appearances with applause and huzzahs lasting five minutes. In this mixture of comedy and melodrama, Mae seemed to take delight in reviving her "classic," still getting laughs from such now-familiar lines as "I'm one of the finest women who ever walked the streets."

Reviewers still critiqued the play as "pure trash . . . or rather impure trash," but through it all the buxom, blonde Mae prevailed in her Gay Nineties garb. She still maintained her reputation as "the world's wickedest woman." Ironically, in years to come, Elizabeth herself would be dubbed as such in the hate press.

Out of courtesy, Griffin and Elizabeth went backstage to pay their respects to the star of the show. She was engaged in a noisy fight with producer George Brandt, and was furious that some critic had written of the "dromedary dip with which she walks," and she was demanding a retraction. The producer was patiently trying to explain to her that she couldn't force a reviewer to retract something like that.

Seeing Elizabeth, Mae, who had changed into a white satin robe, became all smiles. She was introduced to Griffin, but apparently had never heard of him.

Elizabeth complimented Mae on her wisecracks. "You were wonderful. You are so Americana. You're in the great tradition of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, W.C. Fields."

"Please!" Mae protested. "Don't mention that old drunkard Fields to me. He once stuck his filthy paw up my dress to see if those stories about me were true. He learned I'm a real woman down there. Not a transvestite!"

The aging sex diva invited them back to her dressing room, which Griffin later asserted had more flowers than the funeral of a head of state. He remembered her "looking like a pagan love goddess, getting ready for the mating season."

After arranging herself, Mae advised Elizabeth to "stick to the movies— don't go on the wicked stage. The damn producers, when they go on the road, will try to book you into an outhouse and try to ruin your play, washing it right down the tur-let." Elizabeth was surprised that she still spoke in pure Brooklynese.

Mae liked to give advice, and she had plenty of it for Elizabeth. "I know everything worth knowing about show business," Mae said. "First, you've got to insist to a director that at least one redheaded actor be hired. Redheads are good omens. I've got one appearing in this play with me. I run my fingers through his red hair every night before going on. Second, you've got to surround yourself with a real swish, maybe two. A woman always looks more feminine when she's got a swish hovering over her, doing her hair, her nails, tightening her dress."

"I'll keep that in mind, Miss West," Elizabeth said.

"Now the important part," Mae confided in a confessional tone. Before facing the camera or going on stage in front of an audience, select the husky of the crew. Demand that he give you an orgasm if he wants to keep his job. When I was doing *Catherine Was Great* for that God damn bricklayer, Mike Todd, I had this sri, who not only supervised my yoga lessons, but could give me an orgasm in thirty seconds. Some men can't do that after sweating over a woman's body all night. After orgasm, a woman looks more beautiful, more regal than ever. Don't you agree, Griffin?" She looked him up and down skeptically, as if seeing him for the first time. "On second thought, you're not a man to answer such a question."



Vaudevillian / Love Goddess
Mae West

About fifteen minutes later, Griffin escorted Elizabeth out of Mae's dressing room. The blonde goddess stood at her door. Ignoring him, she gazed into Elizabeth's violet eyes. Mae was no longer impersonating herself but looked like a real woman for the first time that night—not a caricature. She also appeared fifteen years older.

She took Elizabeth's hand. "There was a time, dearie, when I was as beautiful a woman as you are tonight."

* * *

After their exit from Mae's dressing room, Griffin put Elizabeth in a taxi to haul her to the Broadway hangout, Lindy's, whose patrons looked like a cast of characters released from *Guys and Dolls*. All the comedians hung out here—even Bob Hope, who dropped in whenever he flew in from California. On any given night you could see Jack E. Leonard trading insults with Jack Carter or Joey Bishop. Milton Berle was a regular.

As Griffin entered Lindy's with his "arm candy," even this rather sophisticated Broadway crowd stopped eating and started rubber-necking. Martha Raye they were used to, not Elizabeth Taylor, the screen goddess. One awe-struck young waiter, an aspiring actor, almost spilled a double order of matzo ball soup onto Mary Martin's table.

Since she'd already eaten a big dinner, Elizabeth had come here for one reason, and that was to sample Lindy's celebrated cheesecake. Frank Sinatra had recommended it as a "must" on her visit to New York, although he claimed his mother could make a better one.

As Elizabeth dug into her cheesecake, Griffin looked up to see "Uncle Miltie" heading for their table. Milton Berle usually ignored Griffin, but tonight greeted him like his best friend. "Baby, I've missed you. We've got to get together. After all, you're my favorite band singer."

Griffin knew that this effusive greeting was just staged so that he would introduce him to Elizabeth. After being introduced to the "King of Comedy," Elizabeth merely smiled before digging back into a large dab of her cheese-cake.

Knowing all eyes were on him, Berle sat down in their booth and attempted in vain to engage Elizabeth in conversation. She just wanted to eat the cheese-cake and get out the door. Looking disappointed, he finally got up and left, returning to his own table.

"Why did you snub Uncle Miltie?" Merv asked.

"Never heard of him," she said.

"Don't you watch television?" he asked.

"Never," she said. "It bores me."

"But he's one of the most famous entertainers in the business, the King of Comedy."

"Since when did he dethrone Bob Hope?"

Soon after, Griffin excused himself "to go to the little boy's room."

Standing at the urinal, he was surprised to see Berle enter and take a position beside him. He reached in and pulled out what looked like a foot-long cock, one of the biggest Griffin had ever seen.



Milton Berle

"What's with that stuck-up little bitch you're dating tonight?" Berle asked. He shook his penis. "She needs for me to stick this whopper up her cunt. I'll have her screaming all night for more."

Griffin quickly zipped up and headed back to Elizabeth, who was surrounded by fans complimenting her on her fur coat.

As he was shepherding her into a taxi, she said, "Women usually compliment my beauty, not my fur. I'll have to get rid of it. No woman should have her apparel detract from her looks."

As she snuggled into the fur for the ride back to her hotel, she said, "That was the best fucking cheesecake I've ever had in my life."

* * *

When Roddy and Griffin learned that Jane Powell was going to be in New York, they decided to throw a joint party for both Elizabeth and Jane at their sublet at the Dakota. In his memoirs, Griffin claimed that the party took place at his suite at the Hotel Meurice, but Eddie Fisher accurately remembered in his autobiography that the venue was The Dakota.

Perhaps the ever-closeted Griffin did not want his public to know that he was rooming with one of Hollywood's best-known homosexuals, Roddy McDowall. Griffin especially wanted to conceal from the public that they were sometimes lovers.

Ever since he'd met Eddie Fisher at RCA Victor studios, Griffin had wanted to get to know him better. Using Elizabeth as bait, he decided to call Eddie and invite him to the party.

Griffin was jealous of Eddie's success as a singer, and knew that their recording studio was predicting big success for him. Yet he also had a secret crush on Eddie, even though Roddy assured him that "You'll strike out with him. I know Eddie. He's a connoisseur of beautiful women."

"So is Nicky Hilton, and he puts out for men," Griffin said.

"Regardless of what people say, lightning doesn't strike twice," Roddy warned.

When Griffin called Eddie, the singer at first didn't believe that Elizabeth would actually be at the party, but he agreed to come over anyway. Although the invitation was for two o'clock, he arrived at 1:45pm.

"Oh, yeah, right," Eddie said skeptically, once he was inside the apartment. "I'm sure Elizabeth Taylor is going to show up at any minute."

"Actually," Griffin said, "she's already here." He led Eddie into the bedroom which he shared with Roddy.

Seated on a padded stool in front of a vanity mirror, she was applying the finishing touches to her makeup. Unlike Milton Berle, she knew who Eddie was. She gracefully turned and smiled at him. At first he didn't know what to say.

He later recalled the moment. "I was awestruck by her extraordinary beauty. I mean, by that point I had been around a lot of beautiful women, but I'd never met anyone like her. I fell in love with her that afternoon. I can still close my eyes and see her sitting there."

Griffin had disappeared to answer the buzzer, as Roddy was busy in the kitchen. It was Monty at the door, another honored guest. For the first time in his life, the actor had arrived somewhere on time.

Rushing back to his bedroom, Griffin announced to Elizabeth, "Monty's here." Taking one final look for reassurance in the mirror, Elizabeth rose and headed for the living room and Monty.

"She brushed right past me and went to the side of her co-star in *A Place In the Sun*," Eddie said. "At that point I might not have existed. I spent most of my time that day talking to Roddy and Jane, but I cast frequent glances at Monty and Elizabeth, who seemed engaged in some epic battle."

Griffin later revealed what was going on between Elizabeth and Monty. "It was her final attempt to get Monty to marry her before he headed back to Hollywood. Even though Monty told me he'd never marry anyone, Elizabeth was persistent."

At the end of the party, Eddie went over to tell Elizabeth good-bye, but she was still engaged in her dispute with Monty. She brushed Eddie aside. He later told Griffin that he saw her back in Hollywood when he was visiting the MGM lot. "She was obviously furious and talking out loud to herself. She walked right past me and didn't even look at me. At that time I could never have believed that one day she'd marry me. You figure."

Griffin returned to Hollywood to accept an engagement at the Cocoanut Grove in the Ambassador Hotel. On his first night back, he was tired from the flight and ordered dinner from room service. There was a knock on his door. Thinking it was a waiter, he opened the door to discover a drunk Nicky Hilton standing there. His clothes were rumpled, "and he looked like he'd come to decapitate me," Griffin later confided to Roddy.

Griffin called Roddy in New York the following day to relay what happened. "Nicky was too drunk to beat up anybody," Griffin claimed. "The night ended when I stripped him of all his clothes—yes, most definitely his underwear, too—and put him to bed. You did not exaggerate. That's some equipment on that stud. I spent the night enjoying it while Nicky snored."

After that, Nicky no longer viewed Griffin as serious competition for Elizabeth's affection. According to Griffin, "As he departed, Nicky told me, 'I'd heard that you might be a fairy. Elizabeth always gravitates to them—take that Monty Clift, for instance.'"

Griffin called Elizabeth, but didn't mention his encounter with Nicky the night before. She tried to explain her reasons for wanting to marry Nicky. At no point did she mention love. "I love jewelry," she said. "Nicky's rich—or at least his father is. Connie Hilton could buy me all the jewelry my little heart desires."

After his singing engagement, Griffin moved into Roddy's house in Los Angeles. Nicky visited on a few more occasions, but only when he was drunk. "When he's sober, which is rare, he's a warm and generous person," Griffin told Roddy. "But on liquor or drugs, he turns violent. He takes heroin, too, you know. He's also a racist, ranting about 'kikes' and 'niggers' all the time. One night he beat the shit out of me. I was black and blue. But the next morning he had no memory of it."

On another night, Nicky arrived at Roddy's house in a shiny new black Cadillac which Conrad Sr. had acquired for him. Griffin had never known him to be that wild before. He carried a loaded .38 revolver. For fun, he began shooting out the lights in Roddy's house until Griffin wrestled the pistol from his drunken hand.

When Roddy returned to Los Angeles, a check was waiting from Conrad, Sr., as reimbursement for the damages. "For god's sake, don't invite him here again," Roddy told Griffin. "Poor Elizabeth. What hell is heading her way? Should we warn her about Nicky?"

"You can't tell a girl like Elizabeth what to do," Griffin said. "When she wants something, she goes after it, and won't listen to anybody. She'll find out for herself. I have a feeling that Nicky will be just the first of several husbands for Elizabeth, and that all of them will be disasters."

Late in 1949, Elizabeth returned to Hollywood and to her sizzling romance with Nicky, who had found plenty of companionship during their separation. She'd been scheduled to begin, almost immediately, the filming of her latest MGM picture, *Father of the Bride*, alongside veteran actors Spencer Tracy and Joan Bennett, who'd been cast as her onscreen parents. They had last appeared together in the wisecracking melodrama, *Me and My Gal*, eighteen years earlier.

A blandly handsome actor, Don Taylor, who had served in the Air Force during World War II, was cast as her husband-to-be. After having lunch with him, Elizabeth told director Vincente Minnelli, "About all we have in common is a last name."

She didn't like her role, finding it evocative of those ingénues she'd played in MGM films during the late 1940s. Now, in the new decade of the 50s, she wanted meatier, more dramatic parts. "I was tired of playing daughters."

Minnelli had told her that Jack Benny had desperately wanted the role of the penny-pinching father, but was turned down, which the veteran comedian found humiliating. He'd even submitted to a screen test to get the part.

Tracy was perfect for the role, and the script revolved around his trials, tribulations, and the mounting expenses of marrying off his daughter.

After Katharine Hepburn rejected the part, Bennett was selected for the thankless role of the mother because of her coloring, her dark hair, and certain facial features she shared in common with Elizabeth.

After meeting her, Bennett said, "An enduring star like me goes through periods. In the 1930s, I was the winsome blonde ingénue. By the forties I was the sullen temptress with raven tresses. Now, for the first time, I'm the chic matron. One day, it will happen to you."

Louis B. Mayer was delighted with Elizabeth's plans to marry Nicky Hilton, and scheduled the release of *Father of the Bride* as a means of taking advantage of the massive publicity which her real-life wedding would generate. As the aging head of MGM, he was about to be replaced by Dore Schary, who told MGM executives that he viewed Elizabeth "as a surefire moneymaker for MGM in the 1950s."

When Elizabeth heard of Mayer's upcoming departure, she said, "I will shed no tears for the disgusting old shithead."

The first day Elizabeth reported to the set of *Father of the Bride*, Schary came out to welcome her and to introduce her to the film's director, Vincente Minnelli, who was married at the time to Judy Garland. The unhappy couple had produced a daughter, Liza.

During the first day of the shoot, Francis dropped by to see his daughter, but ended up spending more time with Minnelli.

"Vincente and Francis really hit it off," Elizabeth later told Dick Hanley.

Elizabeth, however, was genuinely surprised when Francis began showing up on the set every day, not as a means of taking her to lunch, but to spend time, usually alone, with Minnelli in his dressing room.

Elizabeth often ate lunch in the commissary with Dick, who knew everything happening in and around the studio. "What goes here?" she asked her confidant.

"My darling," Dick said. "You're a woman of the world at this point. Francis and Vincente are having an affair. He and Adrian have broken up."

"My father and Minnelli?" she asked in astonishment. "I can't believe that. The man has the head of a lizard. Not only that, but he wears lipstick, probably a tube of it borrowed from Judy."

In later years, Joan Bennett shared her memories of working with Elizabeth. "I was surprised that she was only a teenager, but had taken to downing big highball glasses of Jack Daniels like Frank Sinatra. She seemed very upset about a lot of things."

"Nicky Hilton often visited the set," Bennett said, "and he was nuts. Both Spence and I knew that, but neither of us had the nerve to warn her. Who did? She was hell bent on matrimony at any cost. For her, it was love on the rebound, as Monty had dumped her. Elizabeth didn't have the right equipment between her legs for Monty, if you'll forgive my vulgarity. One day, she offered to introduce Nicky to Spence and me. Spence told her, 'Skip

it!”

Character actor Leo G. Carroll, a cartoonishly serious-looking Brit with an imposing brow, years later, recalled his experience on the film. “Nicky Hilton came by several times, but he seemed hopelessly bored with the making of a film. I had a feeling he wanted to be somewhere else. As for Elizabeth, she was a real princess. Everybody, including Minnelli, catered to her, when he wasn’t lusting after her father. The first week, she arrived at MGM in a shiny new black Cadillac, a gift from somebody, probably Conrad Sr. She told me, ‘A car is the best mode of escape for a girl who feels that the people around her are smothering her.’”

Schary called her into his office one day and told her that if *Father of the Bride* became the hit he anticipated, he envisioned casting her in a series of newlywed pictures with Don Taylor.

“I hope you don’t,” she said. “Newlywed pictures sound more like roles for Janet Leigh. Don is a nice guy, but I find him sexless. There is no chemistry between us. I once invited him to my dressing room and changed my dress right in front of him. There I was, stark nude. You know what he did? He turned his head and looked at the fucking door, which I think he wanted to escape through.”

Elizabeth’s most intriguing visitor on the set was Judy Garland, who on a nearby set was filming *Summer Stock* (1950), the last picture she’d make for MGM before she was fired. At first, Elizabeth was apprehensive, fearing that Garland was going to pick a fight over her husband’s romantic liaison with Francis.

Garland carried a flask with her, and appeared tipsy, not drunk. Elizabeth always admired her sharp wit. “Schary told me that Vincente is directing a picture that’s a sort of genial jab at the nuptial rites of upper middle class suburbia in America. I also heard somewhere that Mayer wanted it edited into a depiction of a typical American family in that bracket. What a joke!”

“I don’t quite understand,” Elizabeth said.

“Oh, I’m sure you guys will pull it off brilliantly,” Garland said, “but let’s hope the American public never discovers what’s really going on behind all this happy schmaltziness.”

“I’m aware,” Garland continued, “that my husband and your father have become the dearest of pals. But there’s so much more bubbling away at MGM these days. Take Spence, for example, the man who took my virginity when I was fifteen years old, younger than you. He’s a closeted homosexual engaged in a platonic relationship with Hepburn, who’s a secret dyke who long ago put the make on me. Your mother-in law in the film, Billie Burke, is another closeted lesbian who, when she was married to Flo Ziegfeld, used to seduce only the most beautiful of showgirls.”

Garland continued: “Joan Bennett is an elegant whore. She and Spence first slept together back in 1932, when they made *She Wanted a Millionaire* (1932). She’s fucked everybody from Bing Crosby to Errol Flynn. She even fucked John Emery, Tallulah Bankhead’s former husband. He’s known for having the biggest dick in Hollywood. Bennett gave Myron Selznick—David’s brother— blow-jobs, and right now, she’s shackled up with Jennings Lang, her agent. And there will be hell to pay if her husband, Walter Wanger, finds out.”

[Garland was right about a looming scandal. On December 13, 1951, Wanger did indeed find out, and shot off one of Lang’s testicles, for which Wanger received a four-month prison term.]

“What? No scandal about Don Taylor?” Elizabeth asked.

“Not really. Dick Hanley told me that Don is a chronic masturbator, sometimes five times a day. He told Dick that he finds his right hand more satisfying as a sexual outlet than someone else’s genitals.”

“You left out one of the stars in the picture...namely me,” Elizabeth asked, provocatively.



Movie star **Elizabeth Taylor**
as a fantasy bride at a
fantasy wedding for MGM

"Oh, darling, you are as pure as the drifting snow...emphasis on 'drifting.'"

Tracy later told Bennett, "That Hilton boy will be the first of Elizabeth Taylor's many husbands. I suspect she's the marrying kind."

On the final day of the shoot, Elizabeth told Tracy that, "Every time I walked down the aisle to the altar with you, I was living it. It was like I was rehearsing for my own upcoming marriage. Nicky is going to treat me like an angel and make love to me morning, noon, and night."

"Sounds tiring to me," Tracy quipped. "Never be too romantic, or too unrealistic entering into marriage, or into any relationship for that matter. Remember, someone else, not you, is writing the script."

Oscar night—March 29, 1951—was celebrated at the RKO Pantages Theater in Los Angeles. Father of the Bride had been nominated for Best Picture, Best Screenplay and, for the performance of Spencer Tracy, Best Actor.

The film, however, produced no winners, and at least one very sore loser. "That fucking Academy didn't nominate me, and I was the one who made that god damn movie," Elizabeth said.

One reviewer interpreted Father of the Bride as "a 1940s comedy released in a humorless decade, the 1950s."

Right before Christmas of 1949, Nicky was ordered by his father, Conrad Sr., to attend a business conference in Houston, Texas. He didn't want to go, but his father insisted. He would return in time for Christmas, which the Hilton family planned to celebrate with the Taylors.

Monty Clift had flown into Los Angeles to discuss a movie deal, and he invited Elizabeth to a party hosted by the author, Norman Mailer. Mailer was celebrating the upcoming cinematic adaptation of his bestseller, *The Naked and the Dead*, originally published in 1948 when the author was twenty-five years old, about the physical and emotional carnage of World War II. Monty was considering starring in the movie version of the novel, which would focus on a screenplay by Lillian Hellman.

Monty suggested that they double date with Shelley Winters and Marlon Brando, and that they arrive at the party as a foursome. Elizabeth agreed, as she was eager to meet Marlon.

In her memoirs, Shelley Winters provided only a limited hangout, not revealing too many of the details associated with that party. But she was on target when she wrote: "Norman invited everybody in Hollywood, both left and right, and you didn't do that in 1949. Adolphe Menjou was there, snubbing Charlie Chaplin. Bogart was giving Ginger Rogers the fish eye. Monty, Elizabeth, and Marlon were very uncomfortable."

Elizabeth had absolutely no interest in politics, but she was thrilled to be hanging out with the Hollywood

elite, feeling very grown up. She was introduced to such stellar members of the A-list as directors Cecil B. De Mille and John Ford, along with composer Leonard Bernstein. She and Judy Garland had a "kiss-kiss" moment together.

Elizabeth was also introduced to actor Larry Parks, with whom she would soon star in a film. At the time, she didn't know that J. Edgar Hoover was investigating him for alleged communist activities. She spoke briefly with Gene Kelly and his wife, Betsy Blair. Monty's friend, Kevin McCarthy, gave Elizabeth a wet kiss on the mouth.

As proof of her new status as an adult, Elizabeth later claimed, "I was hit upon by several big names, most of whom were drunk."

A drunken Bogie accosted her and said, "Hey kid, when are we going to make a movie together? I'm looking forward to our love scenes. The trouble with you, kid, is that you've never been properly fucked." She moved quickly away from him, only to run into another left-winger, actor John Garfield. He told her that "Jewish dick is the best and the biggest" if she wanted to sample it.

Marlon said to her that the only reason he'd come to the party was to meet Charlie Chaplin. At the star-studded event, Marlon and Chaplin talked for an intense half hour. Regrettably, Marlon got more than he wished for when Chaplin directed him in the disastrous *A Countess from Hong Kong*, co-starring Sophia Loren, in 1967.

Marlon brought Chaplin over to meet Elizabeth, and she had a few minutes alone with him, finding him a braggart.

She later told Marlon, "I found Chaplin disgusting and a bore. I know he's famous for his love of teenage girls, but he insulted me. He told me he's good for at least six bouts a night, and he also claimed that he has a foot-long penis, which he refers to as the 'eighth wonder of the world.'"

"Did you make a date with him to sample it?" Marlon facetiously asked.

"Not bloody likely," she answered.

In one of the bathrooms, one which had been exclusively designated that evening as a ladies' powder room, Elizabeth encountered Shelley and told her about her meeting "with the great Charlie Chaplin."

"Been there, done that," Shelley said. "As you know, I had this torrid affair with Sidney Chaplin. During that time, I also managed to accommodate both Charlie Sr. and Charles Chaplin, Jr. In other words, I fucked all three of them. So did my former roommate, Marilyn Monroe."

"Monroe must make the rounds nightly," Elizabeth said sarcastically.

"She sure does," said Shelley. "One drunken night at our apartment, she even fucked me."

"I'm sure she'll eventually get around to fucking me, too," Elizabeth said, little knowing the degree to which her words were prophetic. "From the way I see it, Monroe is working her way through every listing in the *Player's Directory*, the *Screen Directors Guide*, and the *Producers Guild Book*."

When Shelley learned that Elizabeth had not met the host of the party—Norman Mailer—she ushered her over to chat with him. Shelley said that she was very grateful to Mailer, who had intervened with George Stevens to get her the role of Alice Tripp in their movie, *A Place in the Sun*. "I returned the favor to Norman and let him fuck me."

Except for Marlon and the host himself, everyone was well dressed at the party. Mailer looked disheveled, wearing a casual print shirt and slacks with socks that nestled down around his ankles. His first words to Elizabeth were, "Welcome to the ugliest city in the world."

As Shelley wandered off to pursue John Garfield, Mailer spoke to Elizabeth about their joint friend, Monty. "I love your boyfriend," he said. "He's a very sensitive artist, not our typical fucked-up movie star. He's not cocky, he's not self-centered, and he plays it low key. He's like one of us, not some thimble brain movie star cashing in on his looks. The trouble with Hollywood is that there are too many god damn movie stars out here."

Mailer went on to assert that "Hollywood is all wrong for Monty. It brings out all sorts of fear and guilt in him about who he is. He should be back in New York."

Then the author went over to a fruit bowl and handed Elizabeth a big fat banana. "Put this in your bloomers to protect yourself."

She looked astonished. "What in the hell for?"

"Fredric March over there is drunk and going around feeling up the young women," he said. "When he reaches between your legs and feels that banana, he'll think you're a man in drag."

On the night of the party, Mailer was living with the French writer, Jean Malaquais, and they were working on a script together, *Lonelyhearts*, for Samuel Goldwyn. All three of them wanted Monty to play the lead in this script based loosely on Nathanael West's novel of the same name. Ultimately, Goldwyn would reject their script, defining it as "un-American."

In 1958, Monty would star in a much different and much weaker film called *Lonelyhearts*, also loosely based on West's novel. Dore Schary wrote the screenplay.

At one point, Shelley approached Elizabeth in panic. "You've got to help me. Burt Lancaster is just arriving, and he's threatened to beat the shit out of me if he ever catches me with Marlon. I'm leaving with him now to avoid bloodshed."

"What shall I tell Marlon?" Elizabeth asked.

"Oh, tell him I've gone to have a miscarriage. Anything."

Shelley hurried off, having stridently informed Lancaster that she needed to be driven to another party immediately. In her haste, she grabbed Elizabeth's beaver coat.

Later, Elizabeth made excuses to Marlon, who agreed to drive Monty and Elizabeth back to their respective homes. Throwing a fit when she discovered that someone had stolen her coat, Elizabeth stood in the pouring rain with Monty while Marlon fumbled, trying to find his keys. By the time he located them, all three of them were dripping wet.

Marlon invited them to his home, where he lit the logs in his fireplace and went to find robes for them until their clothes were dry.

The next day, Shelley called, wanting to find out what happened. Elizabeth explained that someone had stolen her coat and that she'd become soaked, and later caught a cold. "At Marlon's, we pulled off our clothes to dry, and one thing led to another," Elizabeth said.

"What in hell does that mean?" Shelley asked.

"If you must know, we had a three-way," Elizabeth said.

"I can believe that Marlon would fuck anything that moves, but I find it hard to believe that you got plowed by Monty," Shelley said.

"Actually, as it turned out, Marlon fucked both Monty and me," Elizabeth said.

"I don't know if you're making up this story just to upset me...or what."

"Every word is true," Elizabeth said.

Two weeks later, a photo of Shelley was taken as she was being escorted to a movie premiere by actor John Ireland. She was wearing Elizabeth's beaver coat.

For the Christmas holidays of 1949, Conrad Hilton, Sr., invited Elizabeth, Sara, and Francis to a hotel he'd recently purchased on Lake Arrowhead.

On Christmas Eve, the Hiltons and the Taylors opened their presents, Elizabeth discovering that Nicky had given her a super expensive set of diamond earrings with dangling white pearls.

On Christmas Day in the hotel's library, Nicky asked Francis for permission to marry Elizabeth, who was still seventeen and had not yet finished high school.

"I'd be delighted if you took Elizabeth as your bride," Francis said. "You can give her so many things."

Elizabeth spent the rest of the night alone with Nicky, who used the occasion to propose marriage to her. She accepted, but cautiously, agreeing to his proposal only after he'd promised to let her continue with her film career.

Nicky was Roman Catholic, and he wanted Elizabeth, even though she had little enthusiasm for it, to join the Catholic church. She did agree to sign a document that she would rear any of their children in the Catholic faith. She also had to sign a document that she would never practice birth control or get a divorce.

Francis wanted his daughter to have a high school diploma, but MGM's little red schoolhouse was not legally qualified to provide one. Howard Strickling, head of MGM publicity, solved the problem by making an arrangement with Los Angeles University High School, where Debbie Reynolds, Elizabeth's future rival in love,

was already enrolled as a bona fide pupil.

Elizabeth would be allowed to wear a cap and gown and join in the graduation ceremony, thereby receiving a diploma, even though she'd never attended the school.

Dozens of students who had legitimately earned their diplomas crowded around her, asking for her autograph.

Conrad Hilton, Sr., jumped the gun and telephoned Louella Parsons with news of his favorite son's engagement to Elizabeth. The next morning, the entire world seemingly was aware of the news. Because of the worldwide publicity, Conrad Sr. noted a massive increase in bookings throughout the Hilton Hotel chain.

News of Elizabeth's engagement to Nicky soon became the hottest topic of gossip in Hollywood. In her column, Hedda Hopper openly speculated that Elizabeth might not follow through with her plans to marry Nicky. Because she had run out on both Glenn Davis and William Pawley, Hopper had labeled her "Liz the Jilt."

When she next appeared in public, Elizabeth was wearing a five-karat diamond engagement ring.

Her bridal shower was staged by members of the S.L.O.B club, the initials standing for "Single Lonely Obliging Babes." Partly as a publicity device, Elizabeth and Betty Sullivan had established this Hollywood Club for bachelor girls. Betty was the daughter of the famous New York columnist Ed Sullivan, "Mr. Show Business."

Elizabeth officially resigned from her position as the club's president that day because she was on the verge of losing her status as a "single, lonely, and obliging babe." After the shower, she asserted, "I got a hell of a lot of loot."

Before her wedding, she put through a final desperate appeal to Monty. "Will you come and see me after I return from my honeymoon?"

"Somehow, Bessie Mae, I don't think dear Nicky Hilton is my kind of guy. I'll not be calling on the newlyweds."

"But you promised me that we'd always be friends, that you'd always stand by me regardless of what happened to me," she protested.



After a mediocre education, the high school graduate is congratulated by her mother, **Sara**.

He gently put down the phone.

Fifteen MGM seamstresses had worked for two months making Elizabeth's high-necked satin wedding gown, a design by Helen Rose. Like Snow White, she was dazzling. "Her wedding gown didn't show half as much tit as did Princess Elizabeth when she married Prince Philip," Rose claimed.

The gown was decorated with seed pearls and lilies of the valley, with a tight cinch waist to emphasize her slimness.

The bridesmaids wore organdy gowns in tones of buttercup yellow. In celebration of the season (springtime) they carried clusters of yellow tulips and daffodils.

For her trousseau, famed couturier Ceil Chapman had called, volunteering his services and creating a chic wardrobe for her upcoming travels on the Continent.

Acquaintances of Elizabeth, many of whom were not included on the guest list, called Elizabeth and pleaded with her to let them come to her wedding. She agreed to their requests, until she ran out of seating. Patricia Neal called and begged for an invitation. "Okay," Elizabeth told her, "but you must bring a present—and don't be stingy, baby."

Arriving daily at the Taylor household was what Sara defined as "a queen's ransom" that included a staggering array of blue Wedgwood china, Swedish crystal, Wallace sterling silver flatware, and initialed Italian linens (only in pink).

Francis presented his daughter with a Frans Hal painting—the one he had famously acquired between the wars at a flea market in London—and a "Breath of Spring" mink coat. Sara gave her a white mink stole paid for by MGM.

Uncle Howard Young sent a \$65,000 pearl ring from New York. To make room for the armada of gifts that had flooded in, Sara was forced to move the furniture out of her living room and even stuff the bedrooms with overflow bounty. It included a forty-five piece sterling silver service from the Gorham Silver Company.

There is a line in *Father of the Bride* when Spencer Tracy tells Elizabeth, who's interpreting the role of his daughter, "You look wonderful, kitten, just like a princess in a fairy tale."

She remembered that line. On her real wedding day, she said, "That is exactly how I felt, a real princess in a fairy tale. I just knew, like Cinderella marrying Prince Charming, that Nicky and I would live happily ever after."

One hour before Elizabeth was scheduled to depart for the church, her doorbell rang. Sara answered it herself, thinking it was another messenger with wedding gifts. She faced an angry William Pawley, Jr., who barged into the house without an invitation. Sara didn't feel she could constrain him.

He headed straight for Elizabeth's bedroom, where he confronted her behind closed doors for about fifteen minutes. Sara heard Elizabeth shouting at him, but dared not enter the room.

When Pawley came storming out, she stood silently by until he'd let himself out. Then she rushed to Elizabeth's bedroom, finding her daughter in tears. "What did he want? Or say?"

"It's none of your god damn business," Elizabeth told her mother. "Now let me get on with this fucking wedding."

Among the onlookers gathered at the church, an alert photographer managed to snap a picture of an angry Pawley among Elizabeth's adoring fans.

The ceremony was held at the Catholic Church of the Good Shepherd in Beverly Hills.

The wedding was scheduled for the afternoon of May 6, 1950. Flanked by a police escort blasting their sirens, she was driven to the church in an MGM limousine. On a bizarre note, an odd choice back in 1950, she demanded that the driver wear a pink uniform.

Some 5,000 fans, the largest gathering in Hollywood since the funeral of Jean Harlow way back in 1937, turned out in the stifling heat, the thermometer registering 104°F. The police and MGM security guards tried to control the mob. There was a fear that after the wedding, the fans would break through the barriers and rip Elizabeth's wedding dress to shreds so they could retain a souvenir of the event.

MGM boasted "more stars than there are in heaven," and many of the biggest names turned up for Elizabeth's wedding. Greta Garbo, the former queen of MGM, a figure who had made her last movie in 1941, was invited too, but she cabled her regrets: "I do not believe in marriage."

A fleet of black limousines carried the MGM hierarchy. They had been more or less commanded by Louis B. Mayer to attend, even if they didn't like Elizabeth. In a touch of press agent irony, honored guests included Spencer Tracy, her screen father, and Joan Bennett, her screen mother, sitting with her real parents, Sara and Francis. Bennett, one local wag observed, seemed almost to be competing with Sara for photo ops.

William Powell summed up the attitude of many MGM stars. "I didn't particularly like Elizabeth Taylor. But Mayer told me to get my ass over there." Mickey Rooney showed up, bragging, "I've already had her." Whether he had or not is still a matter of some dispute.

Stars came dressed in their finery, including Janet Leigh, Greer Garson, Ginger Rogers, Esther Williams, Walter Pidgeon, Ricardo Montalban, Red Skelton, Peter Lawford, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Margaret O'Brien, Roddy McDowall, Phil Harris, Debbie Reynolds, Gene Kelly, Gloria DeHaven, Fred Astaire, Van Johnson, Arthur Loew, Jr., Rosalind Russell, and Terry Moore, who would later have an affair with Nicky Hilton. Of course, columnists Hedda Hopper, Louella Parsons, and Sheilah Graham were there, too.

Mayer, who detested Elizabeth, occupied the most central and visible pew in the church, dabbing at his eyes with a red silk handkerchief. Upon entering the church, he'd told the press, "I feel I'm losing a daughter."

Mara Reagan also showed up. She would soon marry Howard Taylor, Elizabeth's beautiful brother, which caused sadness among Roddy's homosexual friends, who had hoped that he would join their colony.

After Monsignor Patrick Concannon pronounced Nicky and Elizabeth husband and wife, "Nicky gave the bride the longest kiss in recorded history," according to Ann Miller, who showed up as the "date" of Conrad Hilton, Sr. After the kiss continued to embarrassing lengths, the monsignor intervened, warning the couple to "save it for later."

The wedding ceremony took just twenty minutes. When it was over, Elizabeth's name was changed to Mrs. Conrad Hilton, Jr. "He is my darling," she later told the press. "I shall love no other until my dying day."

After the wedding ceremony, Elizabeth and Nicky stood in the doorway of the church, posing for pictures. She begged Nicky "to kiss me once more." That kiss, too, went on for such a prolonged time that Francis eventually interrupted with the quip, "Get a room, kids."

MGM paid for the lavish reception at the Bel Air Hotel, where Sara noted in horror that her daughter could hardly stop kissing Nicky to shake the hands of some six-hundred guests.

The governor of California, Earl Warren, showed up at the reception to kiss the bride. He was later appointed as Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

At the reception, it took Elizabeth and her new husband almost four and a half hours to shake the hands of all their guests. Elizabeth soon tired of "all that kiss-the-bride shit." Nicky was clearly bored.

As she got into a limousine for the northbound trek toward her wedding night, she whispered to Sara, "Oh, Mother, Nick and I are one now...for ever and ever."

On the way to their honeymoon night, Elizabeth snuggled up to Nicky in the back seat of an MGM limousine. "We no longer have to slip around when you want to fuck me. After our so-called 'wedding of weddings,' we're legal now. I'm no longer your bitch, but your wife."

He sat solemnly in his seat, staring at the coastal road ahead. As she'd later confide to friends, "I got the feeling that Nicky was sorry he'd married me."

A lavish suite filled with flowers had been selected for their honeymoon in a Hilton-affiliated resort on Pebble Beach on California's Monterey Peninsula, near Carmel. Before arriving at the resort, Elizabeth told Nicky, "I know that some people call me the most beautiful woman in the world. But they need to change that title. Because of you, I am the happiest woman in the world."

The honeymoon was a disaster, hitting Elizabeth like a bolt of lightning and forcing her into a new reality about her husband.

It began when a bellhop referred to Nicky as "Mr. Taylor." Nicky slapped the young man, but later gave the manager a hundred dollar bill to give to the bellhop with an apology for his violence.

In the back of the limousine during the ride to Carmel, he'd been drinking heavily and was already drunk upon his arrival.

After dinner, Elizabeth retired to the bridal suite, which for some reason contained three bedrooms. She dressed in her specially designed negligée, and waited and waited for Nicky's return. She spent most of the night sitting alone on the terrace that overlooked the Pacific. She went to bed at 2am and fell asleep.

Sometime around four in the morning, Nicky came back into the suite and woke her up. She'd never seen him so drunk. He looked half dressed, having come from a room he'd rented for himself and two hookers whom he had patronized before during one of his previous visits to the hotel. Perhaps the prostitutes wondered why he was seducing them on his honeymoon night, in the immediate wake of his widely publicized marriage to "the world's most beautiful woman."

Nicky and Elizabeth indulged in their first of many fights. Finally, he told her to "go to hell" and retreated into one of the suite's bedrooms, where he slept until noon.

When he awakened, showered, and dressed, he went down to the lobby, where he found Elizabeth making purchases in the overpriced, on-site boutiques and charging the expenses to their room.

He apologized for his behavior the previous night, and she forgave him, telling him that she understood that he had “the jitters.”

That night, the resort’s chef prepared a special seven-course celebratory banquet for them. Nicky drank more than he ate, and Elizabeth had little appetite. Like he’d done the previous night, Nicky did not return to the bridal suite until dawn. He was in a particularly foul mood because he’d lost \$100,000 the previous evening when he’d been driven to a private residence where an illegal gambling casino was operated by the mob.

When she confronted him and started making accusations, he struck her, sending her sprawling onto the floor. As she sobbed, he retreated into one of the bedrooms.

Zsa Zsa Gabor, who was still Nicky’s lover, later said, “He was truly his father’s son. Connie pursued the most glamorous women on the planet, including moi, but he had no talent for actually living with them once he’d won them over.”

Once again, on the morning of the third day of his marriage, Nicky apologized for his behavior, and once again she forgave him. Earlier that morning, she’d called Sara, asking her if she should leave Nicky. “Do so and you’ll be mocked and ridiculed in the press. You’ve made your bed. Now sleep in it. I’ve made my own marriage work, in spite of the fact that I married a homosexual.”

“Over lunch that afternoon, Nicky told her that when he drank, his mood shifted, and he was filled with rage and anger. She pleaded with him to give up drinking. “Without that crutch, I couldn’t get through life,” he confessed.

That night, after dinner and after three more bottles of champagne in the bar, he returned with her to the bridal suite.

He was no longer the skilled seducer he’d been before. As Elizabeth’s biographer, Alexander Walker, put it, “He didn’t waste time letting girls know what he wanted, and how. He’d already been involved in one unpleasant episode with the daughter of a family friend, which had been hushed up.”

Walker must have been referring to a weekend in Palm Springs when Hilton had brutally sodomized a seventeen-year-old and sent her to the hospital for stitches. His father, Conrad Sr., paid off the girl’s family with a \$10,000 check, and the episode was hushed up.

Even to her closest confidants, Elizabeth relayed very little of what happened during her three-night honeymoon in Carmel. She did admit to Dick Hanley that “Nicky wanted me to perform unspeakable acts on him. He told me that when he goes to bed with a woman, he is not satisfied until he has plugged all three holes. His idea of passion involves spitting into a woman’s mouth— disgusting, revolting. Before our marriage, he had been such a gentle, considerate lover. On my honeymoon, I learned that I had married Mr. Hyde.”

Dick later said, “During that time in Carmel, Nicky and Elizabeth realized for the first time that they lived in completely different worlds. He had no interest in the movie business, and she had even less interest in the hotel business. They didn’t really have anything to talk about. He was a playboy used to his freedom. He liked variety in his sex life with young men and young women. He often said he liked sexual partners ‘who will do anything I ask.’ He didn’t want to feel owned by any woman. ‘I want to be as free as a bird ready to take flight at any minute,’ he told me.”

“Nicky viewed a movie contract as tantamount to slavery. Both he and Elizabeth were spoiled brats. They’d been catered to all their lives. Elizabeth’s world had always revolved around her, her wants and her needs. From the day he was born, Connie Hilton had given his son anything he wanted—the world’s most expensive hookers, an airplane, a new Cadillac every time he wanted one, and a banker who always paid off his gambling debts.”

Back in Los Angeles for Mother’s Day, Elizabeth told Sara, “All the world knows Elizabeth Taylor as movie star, not Elizabeth Taylor, housewife. It’s a role I can’t play.”

“You’d better learn,” Sara told her. “When you get back from your honeymoon, Mayer wants you to play an expectant mother in Father’s Little Dividend, the sequel to Father of the Bride. Tracy and Bennett will be your parents again, Don Taylor your husband.”

“The idea sounds like a crock of shit to me!” Elizabeth said.

From Los Angeles, the newlyweds journeyed to New York via Chicago, to sail on the Queen Mary from the

Port of New York for a three-month holiday in Europe, paid for by Conrad, Sr.

In New York, Elizabeth registered at the Waldorf-Astoria, a Hilton-owned property since 1949, as Nicky was called into the manager's office for an emergency call of some sort from Conrad, Sr. Of course, he treated the hotel like his New York home, which it was.

The desk clerk handed her an envelope from Conrad Sr., containing some shares of Waldorf-Astoria stock. "You're part owner now," he wrote on a card. "So feel perfectly at home here."

She later bragged to friends, "In New York, I stayed at my hotel, the Waldorf."

The presidential suite was glorious and filled with flowers. Before dinner, Nicky attacked her. He preferred his sexual encounters with his wife to be tantamount to rape. As Elizabeth later told Janet Leigh, "If Nicky doesn't cause you pain and make you scream, then he feels he's failed as a man."

After she cleaned up and made herself presentable after a bubble bath, Nicky informed her that they were having dinner at the hotel with his best friend, the Texas oil magnate Glen McCarthy. Ironically, the James Dean character in *Giant*, a movie that loomed in Elizabeth's future, would be based on McCarthy.

Over dinner, Elizabeth found the Texan gauche, especially when he'd had a lot to drink. Like her husband, McCarthy was a racist, denouncing "niggers." He also was virulently anti-Semitic. Yet when he went to the toilet, Nicky told her that he often took Jewish or black women as his mistresses, although he abused them horribly, and, in some cases, sent them to the hospital.

At the end of the meal, McCarthy announced that he was going "on a rampage to find me the hottest poontang in New York City." He invited Nicky to accompany him, and Nicky accepted, leaving Elizabeth alone at the dining table.

She ordered another bottle of champagne, and sat there drinking it alone until she was approached by the hotel manager.

"Mrs. Hilton," he said, "I hate to intrude on your privacy. But Mr. Hoover has heard that you and Mr. Hilton are on your honeymoon at the hotel, and he wishes that you'd drop by his suite for a celebratory drink."

"You must be talking about Herbert Hoover, since J. Edgar Hoover is not the marrying kind," she said.

"Exactly," he told her.

"I'm free now, if you'd like to escort me to his suite, she said. "Regrettably, Mr. Hilton is engaged in a business conference tonight."

The next morning, very early, Elizabeth, from the Waldorf, awakened Sara in Beverly Hills. Nicky had returned to the suite at around 7am, and he was in the suite's second bedroom, sleeping it off.

She told Sara that she had spent the first night of her honeymoon in New York alone "except I stayed up until midnight talking with Herbert Hoover. He seemed pleasant enough for an old goat, and he feels he should not be blamed for the Great Depression. He also told me he misses his wife, who died five years ago."

"What did you say to him?" Sara asked.

"I advised him to get a new wife, one who's a bit younger and healthier."

"I'm sure he appreciated that, dear. Very sound advice."

"I told him that I had just gotten married and already my husband was running out at night," Elizabeth said.

"What sort of presidential advice did he give you to handle a situation like that?"

I think President Hoover blamed me for Nicky's straying. He told me, 'When a man strays, it's usually because he's not getting what he needs in the boudoir.'"

Elizabeth brought so many steamer trunks aboard *The Queen Mary* that Nicky complained bitterly about paying the freight surcharges. Even though he was a rich man who ran up enormous gambling debts, he could be very stingy with money, especially when it had to do with Elizabeth's vast wardrobe.

"You'll also be buying out every fashion house in Paris, so why in the fuck do you need all these clothes with you?"

He became even more enraged when he learned that he and his new bride would not be occupying the ocean

liner's bridal suite. It has been presented gratis by Cunard to the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, as part of Cunard's lifelong commitment to the ex-Royals for free travel aboard any Cunard ocean liner.

In the Hilton's suite, an invitation was waiting for the following night from the Duke and Duchess, who wanted to have dinner with them. Nicky seemed to have little interest in the royal couple, but Elizabeth, partly because of her English heritage, was awed by the invitation, and could not wait to relay details of the evening to Francis and Sara.

Elizabeth didn't know at the time that the Duchess was impressed with anyone rich and famous, regardless of their pedigree.

She was dazzled by Wallis' jewelry—so awed, in fact, that she would, decades later, at the estate sale of the jewelry that had belonged to the (by then deceased) Duchess, pay \$577,000 for a diamond-and-platinum brooch patterned in the shape of the "Prince of Wales feather." For that piece of jewelry, Elizabeth would outbid Prince Charles.

Both the Duke and Duchess were pillars of fashion, always attired immaculately in the latest haute styles. Elizabeth hoped that the former king would relay some pointers about dress to her new husband, partly because Nicky preferred ties adorned with illustrations, including some patterned with bathing beauties.

Elizabeth had not fully developed her own sense of fashion yet. She and the Duchess talked about jewelry and Paris couture, while Nicky seemed bored and the Duke actually fell asleep at table before the end of the dinner.

The following day, Elizabeth and the Duchess bonded again in the play room, discovering that they both had a fondness for canasta. They met every day of the transatlantic crossing for card games, while the Duke preferred to play bridge in another area of the ship.

During the late afternoon, the Duke and Nicky often went together to the ship's steam room, reserving it just for themselves. One night, shortly before dinner, Nicky returned to the quarters he shared with Elizabeth and said, "Guess what? The Duke of Windsor gave me a fabulous blow-job in the steam room. Forget all that press shit about the love affair of the century. He's a fucking cocksucker, one of the best, and I should know. A real sword-swallower."

"You allowed him to do that to you?"



WELCOME TO HELL
Wallis Warfield Simpson (The Duchess of Windsor) and the former King Edward VIII (aka, **Edward, the Duke of Windsor**)

"Hell, yes!" he said. "What was I supposed to do? Turn him down? After all, he was once the King of England and the Emperor of India."

Later that night, Nicky staggered to the casino after drinking far too much at dinner. Once again, he dropped \$100,000, the same amount he'd lost at that mob-operated gambling house in Carmel.

Returning to their suite at four o'clock the following morning, he woke Elizabeth up primarily to fight with her. By dawn, she was seen wandering the decks of the Queen Mary alone. He'd beaten her very badly, taking out his rage at losing all that money on gambling.

During her first day out in the sun aboard ship, when Elizabeth appeared in her play clothes, revealing a lot of skin, Nicky was heard yelling at her, "Hey, monkey, come over here." The hypertrichosis of her childhood had reappeared. She tried to seek a treatment within the Queen Mary's beauty salon, complaining, "My husband calls me 'The Hairy Ape.'"

The steward noted how Nicky bossed her around. "Go find me a waiter and tell him to bring me a drink." Or else he'd tell her loudly, "C'mon, hon, we're going to watch a Robert Mitchum movie."

She'd shout back at him, "I've seen Holiday Affair twice—and that's enough."

A staff member reported that Nicky then grabbed her and pushed her against a bulkhead. "Listen, bitch, you'll do what I say or else I'll smash your face in. Take your fucking choice."

During the long voyage, a lifelong friendship was formed between the Duchess and Elizabeth. Partly because of her lesbian streak, the Duchess was powerfully attracted to the beautiful young star, although Elizabeth shocked her by wearing blue jeans during the day. In 1950, that apparel had not yet become fashionable.

Also sailing to Europe aboard the Queen Mary was Elsa Maxwell, who informed the Duchess, "I've got to meet the Hiltons, have dinner with them, and get to know them."

The Duchess agreed to set up an onboard dinner for their final night afloat, but warned, "They act like a couple at the end of a marriage instead of a young man and wife on a honeymoon. But they're rich and important."

Maxwell, at mid-century, was known as "The Hostess with the Mostest." As she said of herself, "Not bad for a short, fat, homely piano player from Keokuk, Iowa, with no money or background." She was traveling aboard the Queen Mary with her longtime lover, the Scottish socialite and singer, Dorothy Fellowes-Gordon, whom Maxwell lovingly referred to as "Dickie."

The hostess organized parties for prominent social figures. She was also a sort of international pimp, introducing A-list men to celebrated women. She claimed that she had introduced Prince Aly Khan to movie goddess Rita Hay-worth and Aristotle Onassis to opera diva Maria Callas.

At dinner that night, Maxwell dominated the evening, delivering one bon mot after another. "Someone said that life is a party. You join in after it's started, and leave before it's finished." She also said, "Under pressure, people admit to murder, setting fire to the village church, or robbing a bank, but never to being a bore."

Was she talking about both Nicky and the Duke of Windsor?

Back in their suite, Nicky told Elizabeth that he found the evening disgusting. "There you were sitting between the two most internationally famous dykes in the world—the Duchess of Windsor and Elsa Maxwell."

Before disembarking from the Queen Mary, Maxwell promised Elizabeth and Nicky that she would throw a lavish party for them at Maxim's in Paris. She didn't plan to pay for it herself, but would charge the guests \$1,000 per couple to enter.

"I know everybody in Paris, my dear," Maxwell said to Elizabeth. "Who would you like to attend your party?"

Put on the spot, Elizabeth could think of only one French personality. She blurted out, "Maurice Chevalier."

"A dear old friend," Maxwell said. "Of course, he'll be there along with everybody else worth knowing. If they are not at your party, that means they are not important and aren't worth your time."

Most Parisians saw Nicky Hilton's picture for the first time when he checked into the swanky George V, where photographers had been waiting for his arrival with Elizabeth.

Paris Match wrote, "He was chewing a large wad of gum, how very American, and he spoke in monosyllabic tones. He is the heir to a vast fortune but wore an ill-fitting suit, far too baggy. He also has the smile of a ferret."

In their suite at the George V, Nicky told Elizabeth that he was going downstairs to the bar to have a drink. The hotel bar was known for attracting the most expensive prostitutes in Europe at the time. He didn't return to the suite until five o'clock that morning. A violent argument ensued in which she called him a "whoremonger," for which she was severely beaten.

Both Elizabeth and Nicky pulled themselves together to be the guests of honor at Elsa Maxwell's gala staged

for them at Maxim's. As the press noted, Elizabeth had never looked lovelier than in a spectacularly stylish gown designed for the occasion by Christian Dior.

In addition to celebrities, Maxwell rounded up a gaggle of mostly deposed aristocracy of the lost kingdoms of Europe, including counts and their countesses, dukes and their duchesses, some ex-kings, and several couples who had attached a Marquis or a Marquise in front of their names.



Professional Hostess to the postwar
glitterati: **Elsa Maxwell**

Among the latter were included Henri and Emmita de la Falaise (a.k.a. Le Marquis et La Marquise de La Coudraye). In the 1930s, he had been married to screen vamp Gloria Swanson. He invited Nicky and Elizabeth to lunch and to attend the Prix de Paris horse races with them in the Paris suburb of Longchamps.

Nicky accepted for them. Before she'd leave Paris, the Marquis would place a personal call to Elizabeth, telling her that if she ever decided to divorce Nicky, that he could arrange for her to marry a titled "personage," for a fee, of course.

Maxwell's self-anointed duties that evening involved presenting Nicky and Elizabeth to the VIP guests, although they didn't understand why their first introduction was to a rather dull-looking man who seemed as if he might fit the role of an insurance salesman to chicken farmers in the hinterlands of central France. Vincent Auriol stood before them, chatting, asking Nicky if Conrad Sr. planned to open Hilton hotels in Paris and in Cannes.

Nicky was noncommittal, uttering a "maybe." Then he excused himself to go to the bar, and Auriol spoke for another ten minutes to Elizabeth, who signaled Maxwell to come and rescue her. When Auriol had departed, Elizabeth asked Maxwell, "Who in hell was that? An out-of-work actor looking for character roles?"

"Vince, my dear, is the President of the Fourth French Republic. He's a socialist, and I don't care much for that type, but he called me and asked me to invite him. You don't want to turn down a request from the President of France."

"Oh, I see," she said. "He's the equivalent of our President Truman."

"Exactly," Maxwell said. "But I did receive another call about you. It was from Mohammed V, the Sultan (later, King) of Morocco. He is willing to deposit five million dollars in gold bars in a bank of your choice in Zurich if you will divorce Nicky and marry him."

"I'll get back to you on that," Elizabeth said. "Howard Hughes, the cheap bastard, offered me only one million dollars."

For Elizabeth, the star attraction of the party became Gérard Philipe, a devastatingly handsome French actor. As he was being escorted by Maxwell to meet her, Elizabeth whispered to the Duchess of Windsor. "I'd give up Nicky for that one. He's gorgeous."

In accented English, Philipe murmured pleasantries and kissed Elizabeth's hand, and then said, "It is true. You are the world's most beautiful woman."

"Where have you been hiding all my life?" she asked him. "You are, without a doubt, the world's most

beautiful man.”

“I fear film critics usually reserve that title for my rival, Louis Jourdan,” he said.

“I hope that in the future, I can make films with you—and not with Jourdan,” she said.

[Ironically, she would one day, with Richard Burton, make *The V.I.P.s* (1963) with Jourdan. Regrettably, like Marilyn Monroe, Philippe was slated to die at the age of thirty-six.]

At long last, Elizabeth met Maurice Chevalier, the only guest she’d made a point, specifically, to invite. The veteran French showman spoke with her for about fifteen minutes, whispering to her: “Marlene Dietrich, whom I adore, is always spreading this rumor that I’m impotent. But since you wanted to meet me, I’d like to arrange a rendezvous at my apartment to prove to you that her mischievous lie is not true.”

Before Elizabeth could bow out from that proposal, she faced the legendary French cabaret and film entertainer, Mistinguett, who planted a long, wet kiss on Chevalier’s lips. Chevalier then introduced Mistinguett to Elizabeth, who—despite the fact that Mistinguett was a legend throughout the French-speaking world—had never before heard of her.

“Mistinguett and I have been appearing together since 1919, making love on and off the stage, and watching the sun rise over the Seine on many a morning,” said Chevalier.

Mistinguett kissed Elizabeth on both cheeks and said that Maxwell had asked her to mount the stage at Maxim’s in about thirty minutes and sing her signature “Mon Homme.”

She fulfilled her promise. The moment she went on stage, an almost reverent hush fell over the chattering guests. Mistinguett, as always, gave a beautiful rendition of her ode to undying love: “Sur cette terre, ma seule joie, mon seul bonheur.”

From his position beside Elizabeth, Chevalier translated the words, whispering in her ear: “On earth, my only joy and happiness, is my man.”

During the song, a very short woman in a simple black dress approached and stood beside Elizabeth. When Mistinguett finished her number, the woman stood on her tiptoes and whispered, “I could have sung it better than that bitch.” When the lights brightened, Elizabeth recognized her as Edith Piaf, one of the genuinely famous singers, internationally, of the postwar era.

Then an overfed Orson Welles came up to Elizabeth and gave her a lustful kiss before introducing her to the Maharajah of Kapurthala. Then Welles spun around and brought the French author and artist, Jean Cocteau, into her presence. This was the first time she’d ever seen a man wear a black cape lined with chartreuse-colored silk.



The overdressed French cabaret entertainer **Mistinguett**

Elizabeth was not aware of Cocteau’s reputation, but was amazed at his appearance, a fakir-thin body with legs so willowy they evoked broomsticks. He extended a frail hand that looked as if it would be crushed if squeezed too tightly. She would later tell Maxwell, “He had a certain fish-eyed look and the saddest eyes I have ever seen.”

You and I, ma chère, are going to spend eternity together,” Cocteau told her.

"I don't think I understand," she said.

"You see, we are standing at the doorway to hell. I will be there before you, but you'll be on the way one day to join me. Together, we'll live forever, experiencing the tortures of the damned."

"I certainly hope not," she said, turning to meet the next guest Maxwell was presenting to her.

Maxwell had carefully instructed Nicky to stand in line with Elizabeth, greeting all the guests in the same way he'd done during his wedding reception in Bel Air. But he kept wandering off. Elizabeth spotted him returning to her receiving line with Maxwell and another young man, who was talking with great animation to Nicky.

Maxwell introduced Jimmy Donahue to Elizabeth, describing him as, "You know, the heir to all those Woolworth five-and-dime stores."

He paid her scant attention, continuing to be mesmerized by Nicky. Donahue's biographer, Christopher Wilson, in *Dancing With the Devil*, summed up his subject:

"Blonde and slender, Jimmy Donahue was the archetypal postwar playboy. He could fly a plane, speak several languages, play the piano, and tell marvelous jokes. People loved him for his wit, charm, and personality. The grandson of millionaire Frank W. Woolworth, he was the cousin of Barbara Hutton, one of the richest women in the world....Gay at a time when the homosexual act was unmentionable, Jimmy was notorious within America's upper class and loved to shock...At the time Elizabeth met him, Donahue was about to embark on a long affair with both the Duke and Duchess of Windsor."



Jean Cocteau to E.T. "Together,
we'll live forever,
experiencing the tortures of the
damned."

After a few minutes of idle chat with Elizabeth, Donahue wandered off with her husband, getting lost amid the splendor of the restaurant's belle époque décor. Maxwell had also disappeared.



Debauched Woolworth heir
Jimmy Donahue

Barreling in on her next was Porfirio Rubirosa. "We meet again, beautiful angel, without Doris Duke and Errol Flynn. Perhaps the two of us can forget them if we have each other."

"Rubi!" she said. "What a delight."

"Welcome to Paris," he said. "I noticed that your new husband often deserts you, which is a dangerous thing to do in a room filled with the most deadly of international sharks."

"Maybe he needed something from Woolworth's five-cent store," she said.

"I know Jimmy very well, as I am planning to marry Barbara Hutton, his kissing cousin." Rubirosa said. "Any man who wanders off with that Jimmy won't be seen again at least until morning. Please, let me be your escort through the rest of this evening as a means of guiding you safely through Elsa's international riffraff."

"It's a deal, big boy," she said. "I'm just a hopelessly lost little teenage girl far away from home and her mama."

"I am the maiden's prayer," he said, taking her arm.

"So I've heard," she said with a smirk.

After endless chitchatting and endless goodbyes, with promises of future lunches and future parties before her departure from Paris, Rubi guided Elizabeth out of Maxim's and into a waiting taxicab. He ordered the driver to stop four blocks from the George V so that they could walk through the nearly deserted streets of Paris.

"I bet I'm not the first girl you've rescued on her honeymoon," she said to him.

"Not the first," he answered, "Nor the last, I'm sure. But when I'm with the world's most beautiful woman, I can't think of yesterday or tomorrow...only tonight."

Elsa Maxwell was the first person who called Elizabeth the next day at the George V, to find out what had happened with Rubirosa. "My dear, you don't have to go into all the clinical details. From Doris Duke, Joan Crawford, Tina Onassis, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Dolores del Rio, Evita Peron, and even from Manouche, I've heard about that sex organ of his—eleven inches long and thick as a beer can. I also know Rubi can go all night."

"You said it all," Elizabeth told her. "There is nothing else for me to add to your wonderful description. At least I know why he's dubbed 'Rubber Hosa.'"

"What you did last night is called 'a revenge fuck,'" Maxwell said. "A very common occurrence in high society marriages. Husband runs off with somebody else. Wife takes on another lover in his absence. I heard that Nicky is attending a three-day party with Jimmy at this château in the Île de France. Don't expect to see Nicky again until sometime on Wednesday. I'll have to speak to that Jimmy and tell him what a low-down cad he is to make off with a woman's husband on her honeymoon. For him, it wouldn't be the first time."

"I want Nicky to come back to me," Elizabeth said, "I love him so. I can't believe how insensitive he is."

"Let me give you some advice," Maxwell said. "Let him go away whenever he wants. But collect those diamonds; stock up on Hilton stock; and shop the fashion houses of Paris, but buy only the most expensive gowns. And take up with any hot lover your heart desires. I've got a long list of desirable men who want to date you. I might even fix you up with a king here or there, one who has lost his throne to the communists, but made off with the state treasury."

"It's not the kind of life I envisioned for myself," Elizabeth said.

"It's rare for a person to write the scenario of his own life," Maxwell said. "God...or more likely The Devil...does it for us. Happy times to you on the Côte d'Azur."

Nicky did return on Wednesday and spent his time in the bar of the George V. Elizabeth came down to join him and encountered Chevalier there, enjoying cocktails with Mistinguett.

Elizabeth courteously acknowledged Chevalier, but ignored Mistinguett. She had a reason for her rudeness.

Someone on the hotel staff had translated a comment the French performer had made to the Parisian press about Elizabeth the day after their meeting at Maxim's. Mistinguett had not been impressed: "Elizabeth Taylor can't act; her voice sets your teeth on edge, and all she does is flash diamonds and show décolletage. I guess she'll go far."

"One of the saddest sights I ever saw was Elizabeth sitting in the bar of the George V begging her young

husband to come upstairs and go to bed with her,” said Chevalier. He later told Elsa Maxwell, “Every man in Paris wanted her, and she was having to beg for sex from her husband. I spoke about it to Marlene Dietrich. She found the story appalling. ‘I would never beg for sex,’ Marlene told me. ‘And I predict that MGM will never be able to turn Taylor into a femme fatale like me.’”

On June 12, 1950, Elizabeth and Nicky flew to England to attend the London premiere of *Father of the Bride*. Nicky stood inside the lobby of the theater, fuming, as Elizabeth signed autographs for some 2,000 of her British fans.

Nicky told the theater manager, “I don’t think I can stand another day of being Mr. Elizabeth Taylor. You won’t believe this, but in America, I’m much more important than she is—and a hell of a lot richer.”

Nicky always found London boring, and he was anxious to fly to the French Riviera, with its gambling casinos, where they had scheduled stopovers in both Monte Carlo and Cannes. Their first stopover was in Cannes where Nicky had booked the bridal suite at the Carlton. Here, they joined Europe’s *haut monde*.

Alerted to their arrival, French photographers practically mobbed them, and soon after, Nicky punched one of them in the face. After his camera fell to the pavement, Nicky stomped on it before rushing into the relative safety of the hotel. Elizabeth understood enough French to realize that a lawsuit would be pending.

During his first night in Cannes, Nicky deserted her and headed for the casino. He could not take her along, because she was not old enough to satisfy the age requirements of French law. When fans tried to crowd into the hotel lobby to get a look at her, Nicky angrily told the manager, “I didn’t marry a girl, I married an institution.”

One night, he ran off with two French hookers and drove with them in a rented car to St-Tropez. He remained absent for two nights. Elizabeth was in the lobby gift shop of the Carlton when she saw him return, picking up his messages at the front desk. An argument immediately ensued. He knocked her down onto the lobby’s marble floor, calling her “a dirty little whore.” He also claimed that, “While I was away, you must have fucked every beach boy in Cannes.”

The fall injured her already weak back, and the manager summoned an ambulance, which hauled her off to the local hospital. There, she was ordered to rest for three days. At no point did Nicky come to visit her.

Two gendarmes, however, came to visit her, suggesting that she press charges, but she refused. She did, however, decide that she wanted to leave Europe. An immigration officer journeyed all the way from Nice to discuss her options. Under normal circumstances, she would have had to visit his office, but he wanted to meet her. He explained that she and Nicky were traveling on a joint passport, which could not be used for her single return. Besides, Nicky had possession of the passport. She’d have to apply to the U.S. consulate for an individual passport, which was bound to involve her new husband. When all the red tape became too much for her, she abandoned her whim.

Elizabeth may have been away from Hollywood, but the town had not forgotten her. Louella Parsons’ spies reported that the Hilton/Taylor marriage was in trouble. In her column, Parsons wrote: “Their fights get nastier and nastier. The biggest blow-up came in the south of France. Nicky leaves his bride alone night after night in favor of the gambling tables. This is a new and unbearable situation for her. No man has ever ignored her before. In Hollywood, she was always the center of attention, like Shirley Temple before her star flickered out.”

Sam Marx at MGM told the press, “Elizabeth is going into this marriage sexually unawakened.”

When she read that, she was furious. “Tell Sam he can stick a fourteen-inch dildo up his ass. How does he know if I’m sexually asleep or awake? Was he following me around all this time with a god damn camera?”

When the unhappy couple checked out of the Carlton Hotel in Cannes, Elizabeth and Nicky were driven by limousine to Monte Carlo. A hotel van followed them with all her luggage. Reservations had been made at the very up-scale Hotel de Paris, close to the casino.

During her so-called honeymoon in Monte Carlo, Elizabeth expected to spend her nights alone while Nicky

patronized the Monte Carlo casino. Indeed, on his first night there, he exited from the hotel's very grand entrance and strolled down the street to the casino. A monument to opulence, it, along with the Opera in Paris, had been designed by Charles Garnier, and had welcomed luminaries who had included Sarah Bernhardt, Mata Hari, King Farouk of Egypt, and Prince Aly Khan.

Through the intervention of her new friend, Elsa Maxwell, invitations to gala events in Monte Carlo arrived the following morning. Two that particularly appealed to Elizabeth included invitations from the shipping tycoon, Aristotle Onassis, for supper aboard his yacht; and one from Prince Rainier III for a dinner at his palace. Both men had included Nicky in the invitation, but he rejected both offers, asserting that his luck at long last had changed, and that he was on the verge of a winning streak at the casino.

Elizabeth decided to accept the invitations and to go alone. Her rebellious streak was reinforced because of Maxwell's support.

When she informed Nicky that she would attend the dinners without him, he told her she could not. "Send them your regrets."

"I will not!" she said defiantly.

He slapped her face. "You're such a god damn whore," he yelled at her before storming out. "Don't you leave this hotel suite."

The more immediate of the two invitations had come from Onassis. Elizabeth, following his instructions, arrived aboard his yacht, Olympic Winner, while it was anchored in the Port of Monte Carlo.

With the appearance of a man in his early 40s, he elaborately welcomed her aboard. He wore tinted glasses under hair the color of squid ink. He was smoking a cigar and did not have a pretty face, but his strong personality was charismatic and made up for other failings.

By now, she was familiar with older men making the usual compliments about her beauty. Onassis had a different twist, however, referring to her as "a modern day Aphrodite."

Over vintage champagne, she settled in to get to know Onassis. She asked about his wife, Athina ("Tina") Livanos Onassis, whom he'd married in 1946 when she was seventeen.

"She's resting at our château near Antibes, and we are expecting a child around December."

Tina had been quoted in the paper as having said, "Celebrities are important to Ari. All of his fantasies are connected with them."

He told her that beautiful women like his wife cannot be moderate. "They need an inexhaustible supply of excess. That's why I rented this beautiful villa for her. It has forty-two rooms with a staff not quite as large as that of Buck-ingham Palace. The Duke and Duchess of Windsor used to live there. You must come and stay with us this weekend."

"That sounds divine," she said.

"Tina likes me to provide her with a lot of places to live—a home on Sutton Square." (He failed to name the city.) "A permanent suite at the Plaza in Buenos Aires, and a villa in Montevideo. An apartment on the Avenue Foch in Paris, a seaside villa outside Athens."

Over a dinner of Iranian caviar and lobster, he told her fascinating stories of the sea. She was shocked to realize he believed that mermaids were real, claiming to have seen three in his lifetime.

"A millionaire should always live a bit above his means," he told her.

"I don't think you need to tell my new husband that," she said. "He already knows it, throwing away vast fortunes in gambling casinos."

"That's what keeps Monte Carlo rolling," he said. "That damn casino brings in enough money so the locals don't have to pay income taxes."

She told him that she found him so easy to talk to he could become her Father Confessor.

"I'd rather you think of me as a potential lover, but Father Confessor will do," he said.

She poured out a litany of complaints about Nicky, making reference not only to his gambling, but his desertions, his womanizing, and his brutality.

"He must be Greek," Onassis said. "I tell you, all Greek men, without exception, beat their wives. It's good for them."

"I can see that we will not always agree on everything," she said. "Nicky also withholds sex from me. He

makes me beg for it.”

“Now that is unforgivable,” he said. “I can’t imagine any man not giving you sex morning, noon, and night.”

Waiters kept filling her tulip-shaped glass with champagne, and provided Onassis with glass after glass of his favorite drink, ouzo.

After he’d heard her complaints, he recommended that she get an annulment. “You tell me he’s Catholic. If the marriage is annulled, he can marry his second wife in the church. Your marriage will never have existed, and you’ll be completely free to marry again, too. Call me a matchmaker. I may have your new husband already selected for you. He’s the man you’re having dinner with tomorrow night at his palace.”

“Prince Rainier!” she said. “I hope he’s young and handsome.”

“He’s young and reasonably handsome, and he’s looking for a wife. If he does not produce a male heir, this principality will revert to France. That means locals will pay French taxes for the first time, probably at a rate that’s higher, much higher, than what they’re paying to Monaco now.”

I’m not sure the prince would want to marry an American film star,” she said. “It might be too shocking.”

“Quite the contrary. If he married a film beauty, it would attract international publicity and bring thousands of high rollers to Monaco to lose their fortunes in the casino. Marriage to Rainier would make your marriage to the Hilton boy look like a minor side show at a roadside carnival.”

“Would I have to give up my career?” she asked.

“Of course, my dear. After all, the Prince can’t marry a working woman. But becoming a fairytale princess would mean more than being a movie star. You’d be known as Princess Elizabeth.”

“There’s already a Princess Elizabeth,” she said.

“Yes, but not for long. In London, I was told that her father is slowly dying. She’ll soon be known as Queen Elizabeth.”

“Well, we’ll see what chemistry there is between us tomorrow night,” she said. “He might not find me appealing.”

“That, I doubt.”

Before the night ended, she accepted his invitation for a weekend at his château.

“My wife will be there, but I’d prefer it if you didn’t bring your husband. I can’t tell you why at this point.”

At the gangplank, he gave her a sloppy kiss.

During a transatlantic call to her mother the following morning, she raved about Onassis.

“The only drawback is that at the end of one of his dinner parties, he gives you a liver-lipped wet kiss, but that is a small thing to endure for the pleasure of his company. The next time you hear from me, you may have to address me as the Princess of Monaco.”

Before Sara could probe any deeper, Elizabeth had hung up the phone.

The following morning over a late breakfast, Nicky was in a foul mood, which had become customary for him. His winning streak at the casino had turned into a losing streak, and he vowed that he would return to the casino over the upcoming weekend “to win back the bundle I lost—and a hell of a lot more than that, too.”

She told him she hoped he wouldn’t object to her spending the weekend “with Mr. and Mrs. Onassis at their château.”

“Frankly, my dear, as Rhett Butler told Scarlett O’Hara, ‘I don’t give a damn.’”

Then he wandered off for the rest of the afternoon as she spent the rest of the day beautifying herself and reading about the Grimaldis before her dinner that night with the prince at his palace.

From reading the popular magazines, she knew that he was a sports-loving outdoors man addicted to fast boats, fast cars, and fast women, with deep-sea diving thrown in as a hobby.

She also learned more about his pedigree, including that the Grimaldis came from the oldest ruling family in Europe. There was much speculation as to when he would marry and produce a male heir. Seemingly none of the Monegasques wanted their little country to return to French control...and French taxes.

As for the Prince, his blood did not run as blue as it seemed. Elizabeth learned that his mother had been born to a woman out of wedlock, and that his grandmother had been a cabaret dancer. Her mother (i.e., Prince Rainier's great-grandmother) took in laundry for a living.

That night, as Nicky headed for the casino again, the palace sent one of its limousines to retrieve Elizabeth and transport her to her royal dinner.

Inside the palace, she stood for fifteen minutes in a grand reception chamber, waiting for Rainier. As she recalled, "My biggest fear was that I had not worn the proper hat, though my Dior gown was perfect."

Almost without warning, the Prince appeared, walking toward her. He was better looking than his pictures, with a cleft chin, hair, like Onassis, the color of squid ink, sapphire blue eyes, and a perfectly trimmed mustache that reminded her of Clark Gable's. He stood only five feet, six inches, and was dressed in a well-tailored navy blue yachting outfit, as he'd been at sea all day.

She curtsied before him, as she had for Princess Elizabeth in London. "Your Highness," she said.

"How do you do?" he asked her in perfect English, with no French accent, as he'd attended schools in England.

"I am very well," she said, "and honored to be here."

"Forgive me for arriving late," he said. "We had trouble at sea, and it left me no time to change for dinner."

He showed her around the palace and led her into his private gardens, spotlighted at night. He told her he wanted to install a zoo here. "The gardens are at their most beautiful this time of year. Look at those plumes of bougainvillea climbing up the palace walls."

"I didn't know that roses came in so many colors," she said, as she wandered past those flowers to take in the snapdragons, tulips, and carnations.

From the terrace, he showed her his kingdom, beautifully lit at night. He explained that it was divided into four districts, with the capital, Old Monaco, which he called "Monaco Ville," sitting atop Le Rocher ("The Rock").

Perhaps because of his military background, he seemed very formal with her, a bit stiff, really. The talk was idle, although he did tell her that he wanted to visit the United States for the first time.

"Please let me be your guide," she volunteered. She felt nervous around him, afraid of committing some faux pas. In the years ahead, she would dine and even sleep with royalty, but at this point, as a late teenager, she was insecure in such an august presence.

At the end of their evening together, he escorted her to the entrance of the palace, where he personally opened the door to a limousine and guided her inside. Before departing, he said, "Please give my regards to your husband. Perhaps his father would consider opening a Hilton in Monaco one day."

As the car drove her back to the Hotel de Paris and an empty bridal suite, she feared she had not made a good impression on Prince Rainier. After all, according to his reputation, he was used to seducing the most sophisticated and beautiful women in France, including the gamine-faced French actress, Gisèle Pascal.

The next morning, she telephoned Onassis aboard his yacht to arrange the details of her upcoming weekend visit. "I don't think I broke through to Prince Charming," she said. "I tried to storm the walls of the Grimaldi Palace, but it was too steep for 'lil ol' me."

"I wouldn't be so sure of that," he told her. "Over the centuries, European royals have learned to conceal personal emotions."

After an early morning "rape" from Nicky, she was driven by Onassis' driver to the Château de la Croe in Cap d'Antibes. Set on 14 acres of prime ocean fronting land in one of the Riviera's most expensive municipalities, it had been built in 1927 by a British newspaper magnate and later owned by the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. A vision in magenta, she stepped out of the limousine, and was greeted by Onassis and his young wife, Tina. In contrast to Elizabeth's dress, Tina wore a simple white silk blouse and black slacks with leather sandals.

Accustomed to greeting royalty and the titans of industry, Tina was a gracious hostess and an amusing storyteller. Over late morning tea, she sat alone with Elizabeth. "Before I met Ari, I was dating a man closer to my own age. But I found Ari so charming and so romantic that I fell for him."

"With such a wealthy father, you must have lived a life far more luxurious than a mere princess," Elizabeth said.

"My father, Stavros Livanos, owns a great shipping empire, but he's tight-fisted with money. He pays his Greek sailors one British pound a month. When they complain, he reminds them that if they work a thousand

months, they will have saved a thousand pounds. Of course, he doesn't take into consideration what they might live on in the meantime. His idea of being extravagant involves bringing us a paper bag filled with chestnuts for roasting. He walks five miles to avoid paying a taxi fare."

"When Ari started dating me, I was so young, my father accused him of being a child molester," Tina said. She told Elizabeth that her family came from the eastern Aegean island of Chios (aka Hios or Khios), the legendary birthplace of Homer.

Tina was only three years older than Elizabeth, and the two women bonded, discovering that each of them had a love of horses. Tina promised to take Elizabeth riding in the morning along the Riviera's coastline.

After a lavish Greek dinner, Tina and Onassis were ready to retire, but after Tina left, Onassis called Elizabeth aside. "I have a very important guest arriving at around eleven o'clock, a person most anxious to see you. Would you wait in the library and greet this special guest?"

"Of course," she said. "Since you are friends with everybody, it might be anybody from Winston Churchill to Greta Garbo."

At around eleven, the butler knocked on the door and admitted the mysterious guest. It was Prince Rainier. She curtsied before him. "Your Highness, we meet again."

"A double pleasure in so short a time," he said, taking her hand and kissing it tenderly.

She realized at once that the Prince had come for what her future friend, Michael Jackson, would define as "a sleep-over."



Athina Mary "Tina" Livanos Niarchos
(1926-1974) with her first husband,
Aristotle Onassis

The next morning, Onassis took the Prince and Elizabeth on a tour of his grounds, pointing out the gazelles, a gift from the King of Saudi Arabia.

After she returned to the United States, Elizabeth was very close-mouthed about her midnight tryst with the Prince of Monaco, even supplying her best friend, Roddy McDowall, with few details.

She did admit, however, that she'd had her first "waterbourne fuck."

"What does that mean?" he asked.

"On Sunday morning, we had a bubble bath in this huge gold-plated, swan-shaped tub with gold-plated fixtures shaped like fish," she said. "It once was in the suite of the Ritz Hotel in Paris and before its reinstallment in the Château de la Croe, it was used by the corpulent Edward VII—you know, Queen Victoria's son. He got stuck in one of the smaller tubs, so the Ritz had this big tub specially designed for the King. Rainier and I put it to good use."

Roddy pressed her for more details, but she told him, "case closed."

"Please tell me more," he said. "You know I'm a size queen. I want to know how many princely inches, girl."

"Okay, but that's all I'm telling you," she said. "A princely six, and not a centimeter more."

After her departure from Monaco, Elizabeth continued her on-again, off-again affair with Prince Rainier, even though, in 1956, he married the blonde goddess Grace Kelly.

On several occasions, Elizabeth was seen entering the Prince's private address in Paris. One reason she was

so secretive about their affair was that she wanted to maintain at least a surface friendship with Grace Kelly. Had Kelly remained in Hollywood and continued with her movie career, she would almost surely have clashed with Elizabeth, as they'd have competed for the same roles.

"Let's face it," Clark Gable once said, "By the mid-1950s, there were only three goddesses left in Hollywood—Elizabeth Taylor, Marilyn Monroe, and Grace Kelly. The others were getting a bit long in the tooth—forgive me, Ava." [Ava Gardner, though still a beautiful woman in spite of her constant heavy drinking, was ten years older than Elizabeth.]

Originally, the lead female role in *Giant* had been offered to Kelly, with her lover, William Holden, as her co-star. But eventually, the parts, of course, went to Elizabeth and Rock Hudson. Kelly was also offered the lead role as Maggie the Cat in Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. When Elizabeth took it over, a reporter asked her if she minded "taking over Grace Kelly's sloppy seconds."

"I've spent a lifetime taking the sloppy seconds of other women," Elizabeth quipped. In the tamer 1950s, such a comment was not printed.

Historically speaking, however, it was Kelly who took Elizabeth's sloppy seconds, since Elizabeth had seduced Prince Rainier first.

[As the years passed, the Rainiers were often seen with Elizabeth at galas and charity events, including the 1974 premiere of her film, *Identikit* (a.k.a. *The Driver's Seat*), based on a 1970 novella by Muriel Spark. Its premiere was staged as part of a benefit for the Red Cross in Monaco.

In the film, Elizabeth played a psychotic German housewife who flies to Rome in search of the ideal lover, but finds the perfect murderer instead.

Critics, including Elizabeth herself, have denounced *The Driver's Seat* as the worst movie she ever made. Andy Warhol had a cameo role within it. In later years, his estate would make millions off his lithographs of Elizabeth.

The Taylor/Rainier passion for each other was still flaming as late as 1981, when the Prince and Princess Grace attended the Broadway opening of *The Little Foxes*, a revival of a play by Lillian Hellman, in which Tallulah Bankhead had enjoyed a triumph in 1939.

In C. David Heymann's book, entitled *Liz*, he quoted Felice Quinto, the backstage photographer for the Broadway run of *The Little Foxes*. Quinto claimed that both of the Rainiers came backstage to congratulate Elizabeth for her performance.

"Somehow, he left Grace behind for a private talk with Elizabeth," Quinto claimed. "Rainier was worse than John F. Kennedy. He dragged Elizabeth into a dark corner, and they kissed—more than just kissing in a friendly manner—for three or four minutes. They were literally all over each other."]

In Rome, the honeymooning Nicky Hilton had compiled a list of the six most deluxe bordellos in the city, with the intention of visiting many of them, without telling Elizabeth where he'd be going.

Fortunately for her, Monty Clift was in town to attend the Roman premiere of *The Heiress*. At their reunion dinner in a hard-to-find restaurant off the beaten track near the Colosseum, he told her he'd just attended the London premiere of his film. On that occasion, he'd also been presented to Queen Elizabeth.

"After the presentation, I was invited to dinner at the Café Royal by Laurence Olivier, Monty said. "He called me 'darling boy' and propositioned me."

"I won't ask you if you accepted his invitation," Elizabeth said. "I don't really want to know."

"The next night I had supper with Noël Coward, who told me I was the world's most beautiful man."

"I'm sure Coward also called you 'darling boy,' too," she said.

The next night, Monty and Elizabeth dined with Tennessee Williams and his Sicilian-American lover, Frank Merlo. Monty told the playwright and his companion that in Rome, he was indulging in "a fuckathon with gorgeous Italian hustlers. I could live in this Eternal City eternally," he said.

Williams later claimed that he got "the spark of an idea" for his novel about Italian gigolos, *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*, from listening to Monty talk about the hustling scene in Rome.

At his home in Key West years later, shortly after Monty and Elizabeth had co-starred in the film version of his

drama, Suddenly, Last Summer, Williams recalled that long-ago evening in Rome.

"Here I was, dining with what the press called the most beautiful man and the most beautiful woman in the world. If only their fans could see them in real life: Monty ordered raw ground beef, really bloody, which he proceeded to eat with his fingers. Blood ran down his lips. Elizabeth ordered two big pasta dishes. My dear Frank here has a foul mouth, but Elizabeth topped him. Fortunately, we dined in a trattoria in Trastevere, and in those days, no one spoke English, so they didn't know what she was saying."

"Monty was a farter. It was awful. He said it was a medical condition, some bug he had picked up in Mexico. At the end of each course, Elizabeth let out a loud belch. Frankie and I at that meal had to endure a poison gas attack that evoked the trenches of World War I."

Monty had to cut short his Roman adventure to rush back to New York. His close friend and mentor, Libby Holman, had called him to tell him that her seventeen-year-old son, Christopher Reynolds, had died in a climbing accident during his ascent of Mount Whitney.

At one point, Elizabeth ran away from Nicky and hid out while working as an extra on MGM's ancient Roman epic, Quo Vadis?. Nicky had become enraged and smashed a room filled with 16th-century antiques at their rented villa. Conrad Sr. spent thousands of dollars in replacement costs.

Nicky spent his last night in Rome with Elizabeth, during which she was brutally raped by her new young husband.

The next morning, she flew with him to Berlin to christen the newly constructed Berlin Hilton. She was horrified to find much of the city still in ruins. She told Nicky that the city evoked that romantic Marlene Dietrich movie, A Foreign Affair (1948). "Was Marlene a former girlfriend, or is she a current girlfriend, for all I know?" Elizabeth asked him.

"A gentleman from Texas never kisses and tells unless he's a politician braggart like that guy my father knows, Lyndon Baines Johnson."

At the end of their stay in Berlin, Nicky and Elizabeth flew to Paris once again. Both had been invited to a lavish Paris ball, the social event of the season. For her farewell to Europe, she wanted to make a dazzling appearance. She spent a small fortune, the equivalent of about \$60,000 in today's coinage, for her appearance in a Balmain gown. She also made an arrangement with a Parisian jeweler on the Place Vendôme to wear \$150,000 worth of diamonds.

After only an hour at the ball, Nicky told her he was going out gambling, as he'd heard of this town house in the 17th arrondissement where gambling flourished. She pleaded with him not to leave her stranded at the ball.

He raised his voice to her, and she shouted back at him, introducing some of the ballroom guests to English-language expletives they'd never heard before. Photographers were there from the Paris newspapers, and their pictures were snapped, appearing the next day on the frontpages of the morning tabloids.

It could be said that the Hilton/Taylor honeymoon ended in a knockout punch when he struck her in front of many witnesses, sending her sprawling to the marble floor.

After Nicky stormed out of the building, Elizabeth looked up to stare into the handsome face of Gérard Philipe, the charismatic young actor she'd met through Elsa Maxwell.

"We meet again," he said, gallantly. "If your leg isn't broken, would you dance with me? After that, we'll watch the sun come up over Paris."

"You're on," she said. "My father told me that if you get knocked down in life, pick yourself up and start again."

"And so we shall," he said, as she was lifted from the floor into his muscular arms.

In September of 1950, a grim-faced Nicky was photographed at Cherbourg boarding the Queen Elizabeth for his trip back to the port of New York. Elizabeth had purchased a French poodle, naming him "Bianco." She held him tenderly in her arms.

Elsa Maxwell was on the return voyage, too. She noticed that Elizabeth looked haggard, having lost twelve pounds. She'd also taken up chain smoking and was drinking more heavily than before.

In her memoir, *Elizabeth Takes Off*, she wrote: "By the end of the voyage, it was clear that my husband was having great difficulty in reconciling himself to me, as well as to my celebrity. He became sullen, angry and abusive, physically and mentally. He began drinking. He taunted me in public."



French romantic heartthrob
Gérard Philipe

In New York, from her hotel suite, the first person she called was Roddy McDowall, who occupied that rented apartment in The Dakota with Merv Griffin. Roddy was still looking for work.

He asked about the honeymoon, as he'd heard terrible stories about it from the Continent.

"At this point," she said, "all that is needed in the melodrama starring Elizabeth Taylor and Nicky Hilton is for THE END to flash up on the screen."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Wild About Wilding

LOVE IS NOT NECESSARILY BETTER

THE SECOND TIME AROUND

Back in New York, Elizabeth seemed overjoyed to be on America's shores once again. But her happiness would not last long.

She faced an aggressive press which asked her if a divorce was imminent. "Nicky and I have resolved our problems—call it a period of adjustment. Most couples go through that. I'm going back to Hollywood, where I'll be a proper wife to him, even at the sacrifice of my career. I'll even learn to cook. Right now, I'm trying to master the art of frying an egg, and I'm also going to learn the right temperature at which to boil water."

That was her public front. What was going on behind the scenes was a different matter. Nicky had booked a two-bedroom suite at the Plaza Hotel. His first night with her was romantic, a cozy candlelit dinner followed by "hot sex," as she'd describe later to Roddy McDowall.

She was mildly disturbed that Nicky had placed a loaded pistol on his night-stand beside their bed. Around it, he'd wrapped a rosary. One of his future lovers, Joan Collins, recalled his having such a rosary-wrapped weapon. He told Elizabeth that he wanted the pistol close at hand, as he feared reprisals from some sexual partners he'd mistreated who might seek revenge.

Roddy met with Elizabeth for dinner the following night. He was appalled at both her mental and physical condition, fearing she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. "She was smoking two packages of cigarettes a day and looked gaunt."

He told her that he was in the process of reinventing himself after child stardom. "Of all of us movie kids, you've been the only one who glided seam-lessly from child star parts into adult roles." She had heard that many times before.

She told him that she was having dinner the following night with Monty Clift. Roddy warned her that he was a complete mess. "He drinks everybody under the table. He never meets a pill he doesn't pop or a drug he doesn't take. One night, he brought three hustlers back to his apartment and had sex with each of them. Before they left, they beat the shit out of him, and robbed him of all his valuables, even his watch and that ring you gave him."

Twenty-four hours later, Elizabeth was spotted dining with Monty at his favorite Italian restaurant, Camillos. She noticed that he was shaking, and she even had to light his cigarettes. "I'm losing it," he told her. "I feel a cold black night is descending on me, and I have no clothes to protect me from the elements."

A call to her from Kevin McCarthy the following morning informed her that he'd had to rush to Bloomingdale's Department Store to rescue Monty. "I found him there, prostrate and half naked." Apparently, he'd gone to buy some casual clothes, but faced with crowds of autograph seekers, he experienced a meltdown. Bloomingdale's management was relieved to see him rescued and removed from their premises without undue publicity.

The next afternoon, she visited Monty at Regent Hospital, where McCarthy had checked him in the night before. He was going through "cold turkey" withdrawals from all pills, drugs, and booze. He was shaking all over and sweating profusely. She held him in her arms. "Oh, Bessie Mae," he said, "I think I'm going to die young... very young."

She offered him all the comfort she could muster and promised to stand by his side her entire life, regardless of what happened. "I'll never desert you... never!"

After she returned from the hospital to her lodgings at the Plaza, Elizabeth faced her own life, which was in turmoil. David Brett, in his biography, *Elizabeth Taylor: The Lady, The Lover, The Legend*, wrote that Nicky, after his return to New York from his honeymoon, embarked on another sex-and-gambling spree, this time with

a well-known actor.”

The actor, in fact, was more than well known: He was the internationally famous Tyrone Power. The matinee idol had begun an on-again, off-again affair with Nicky, the Hilton heir, during the post-war years.

The following evening, after visiting Monty in the hospital, Elizabeth returned to the Plaza in a state of uncertainty about where Nicky was. She hadn’t heard from him all day.

As she entered the suite’s living room, she found Nicky in his briefs, drinking with Power, who had his trousers on, but wore only an undershirt. He had always been on the list of men she considered the most handsome in Hollywood, but because Power worked for 20th Century Fox, and because she was employed by MGM, their paths had not crossed. She had, of course, followed his romantic escapades in the fan magazines, most of which had occurred when he was married to the French actress, known only as Annabelle, his co-star in *Suez* (1938). He’d been romantically linked to Joan Crawford, Judy Garland, Betty Grable, Rita Hayworth, Sonja Henie, and Loretta Young, among others. He’d had a tumultuous and widely publicized affair with Lana Turner before he’d dumped her.

Very few of his fans knew about his bisexuality at the time, but he’d had a history of being one of the “kept boys,” of Howard Hughes, and he’d also had affairs with Laurence Olivier, Noël Coward, Robert Taylor, Errol Flynn, and the film director Edmund Goulding. Powers was also widely known in the Hollywood demi-monde for seducing his best friend, César Romero, and George Sanders, the bisexual husband of Zsa Zsa Gabor, Nicky’s former mother-in-law. He’d also had an affair with the Argentine dictator, Eva Peron.

Elizabeth found Power mesmerizing as she chatted pleasantly with him over glasses of champagne. Perhaps fearing that her presence was unwanted, she excused herself and retreated to her bedroom, locking the door behind her.

About an hour later, a drunken Nicky pounded on that door when he realized it was locked. Reluctantly, she opened it, finding him standing there completely nude and drunk. “I’d like to talk to you,” he said.

“What in hell about?” she asked.

“Ty wants a three-way with us,” he said. “He’s had three-ways with Lana Turner and Howard Hughes, and really enjoys them. How about it? I know you want him. Everybody does.”

“NO! Forget it!” she said, slamming the door in his face and locking it again. He went away and didn’t bother her for the rest of the night.

After a troubling pre-dawn, she fell asleep at seven that morning and slept until noon, when the hotel maid woke her up.

Stumbling into the living room, she found the other bedroom empty. Power and Nicky were nowhere to be seen. On the coffee table, she picked up a hastily scribbled and unsigned message written in pencil—FLYING TO LOS ANGELES.

Over coffee, she read Dorothy Kilgallen’s column, which informed the world that Lana Turner had arrived in New York and had checked into the Plaza Hotel. On a few occasions, Elizabeth had sat with Turner during early morning make-up sessions at MGM.

On an impulse, she called Turner, who agreed to meet downstairs for afternoon tea. A few hours later, Turner made a grand entrance into the Palm Court, dressed in an olive green suit with pink accessories.

After some shared gossip about Louis B. Mayer’s upcoming departure from MGM, Turner got to the point: “I heard Ty visited you and Nicky in your suite last night. That must have been fun. I’m still in love with him, you know.”

“I didn’t know that,” Elizabeth said.

“He was my only lover who took the time to find out what I was as a human being—not just a pretty face with a shapely body. I call him ‘the man who got away.’ Imagine turning me down for that international trollop, Linda Christian.”

Publicly, Turner always denied that she ever saw any evidence of homosexuality in Power. Privately, she seemed well aware of his sexual proclivities. “Let’s face it, Elizabeth. I fell in love with a bisexual –and so did you with Nicky Hilton. And in a flash, almost within the hour, Ty could switch from being a hetero to a homosexual. He left me without a word because he can’t stand confrontations. Perhaps Nicky will do the same to you.”

“I suspect that I will be the one who abandons ship,” Elizabeth said.

“For your sake, I hope so,” Turner said. “Ty is incapable of making a commitment to another man. He turns to men for physical love, but prefers emotional bonds with women, if that makes sense.”

“You could well be describing my friend, Monty Clift,” Elizabeth responded. “It makes perfect sense. I think Nicky is the same way.”

“Ty was the most sensitive and gentle man I’ve ever known,” Turner said. “I don’t think I’ll find anyone like him again.”

“Nicky is the most violent and destructive man I’ve ever known,” she said.

“Then you must leave him,” Lana said. “Otherwise, he might do something that will permanently mar your face. It’s not worth it. Put your career first, not some man. I know that makes me sound like a heartless vamp—and I’m not. I would never get involved with a person who might threaten me or even kill me.”

Ironically, when Turner said that, the gangster Johnny Stompanato lay in her future.

Before leaving, Turner said, “I’ve always thought of you as a child star. But I can see you’re very grown-up. I fear that in the future, you and I may have conflicts over certain men and over certain film contracts. I just learned that MGM is considering making a movie called *The Queen of Sheba*. Guess who is being considered for the female lead? Lana Turner, Elizabeth Taylor, and this upstart whore, Marilyn Monroe, who is sucking every cock in Hollywood that’s unzipped for her. It’s one way to get ahead in the film business, I guess.”



Elizabeth’s competition: **Lana Turner**
depicted above in August, 1946

Then, as an afterthought, Lana said, “By the way, in the future, let’s both deny that Mickey Rooney ever fucked us.”

To avoid the press, MGM used one of its New York publicists to arrange the transport of Elizabeth and her massive quantities of luggage back to California. It was falsely announced that she’d be flying directly to Los Angeles. Instead, she boarded an airplane headed to L.A. with a scheduled layover in Chicago.

To her surprise, Nicky had learned of her ploy, and was waiting for her at the Chicago airport. In the back of a limousine hauling them to the Blackstone Hotel, he begged for her forgiveness of his past indiscretions, and pleaded with her to give him another chance. Before they reached the hotel, she was madly kissing him back. As the driver later reported to the Chicago Tribune, “Elizabeth Taylor was all over Mr. Hilton.”

A day or two later, along with her trunks filled with designer clothing, she flew onward, with Nicky, to Los Angeles, where they checked into a five-room suite at the Bel Air Hotel. At the time, he owned forty-one percent of the stock of this supremely prestigious hotel.

Two nights later, Jane Powell hosted a welcome home party for Elizabeth and Nicky, inviting young friends who included Dick Hanley.

"Nicky was clearly bored," Dick recalled. "With sarcasm, he even attacked Jane for serving a buffet supper where the guests were expected to sit on the floor. He told me that even in Texas, Jane's party would be viewed as pure corn-pone."

In the aftermath of that party, Nicky fled to Las Vegas for three nights, hitting the casinos and running up gambling debts. Seemingly, he had forgotten everything he'd said to Elizabeth in Chicago, about "I can't go on without you."

Years later, she learned what actually happened during his trip to Vegas. He'd flown there with Marilyn Monroe and installed her in a sprawling suite, giving her a pair of diamond earrings. Between September and December of 1950, he would spend three more off-the-record weekends with Monroe in Palm Springs.

Back in Hollywood at MGM, Elizabeth was filming *Father's Little Dividend*, the sequel to *Father of the Bride*. The sequel followed a predictable pattern within young marriages: Petty quarrels and reconciliations preceding the eventual hysteria surrounding the arrival of a first-born in the house.

Don Taylor once again was her less than dynamic screen husband, and for the second time, Spencer Tracy and Joan Bennett played her screen parents.

Producer Pandro S. Berman recalled visiting Elizabeth on the set of *Father's Little Dividend*. "She looked weary and forlorn. I remembered her for having a sharp tongue and a keen sense of humor. But she no longer thought anything was funny. She didn't laugh. She complained of pains in her stomach. Because she was drinking and chain smoking, she had lost the fresh-faced beauty she'd shown in *Father of the Bride*."

As the filming neared its end, Elizabeth discovered that she was pregnant in real life and not just on the screen. Privately, she revealed to both Dick and Roddy that she didn't know if Nicky was the father. "Perhaps it was Rubirosa's. If the kid comes out of me with the longest baby dick in the world, I'll know it belongs to Rubi. If it pops out of my womb speaking French, then it belongs to Gérard Philipe. I had unprotected sex with both of them."

One Monday, after one of his weekend disappearances in Palm Springs with Monroe, Nicky came home angry and drunk. Elizabeth might have been acclaimed for having the most beautiful face in the world, but he told her, "I'm god damn tired of looking at that face of yours." He called her "a fucking bore," and told her that he'd changed his mind. "I want a divorce after all."

Their fight occurred at the Pacific Palisades home he'd rented. He admitted that he'd been having an affair with Monroe and that she wanted to marry him. "She's a real woman, not a hairy ape like you. The only hair on her body is on her pussy, where it belongs."

Elizabeth struck him in the face, and he responded by knocking her down onto the floor. Then he kicked her several times in the stomach.

As she'd later claim, "He literally kicked my baby out of me." Then he rushed out the door, ignoring her screams of pain. Crawling to the nearest phone in agony, she called Sara, who summoned an ambulance.

Elizabeth was rushed to the Cedars-Sinai Hospital where the doctor confirmed that she'd had a miscarriage. She rested for two days, but was not physically harmed in any other significant way.

Later, she told Sara, Francis, and her friends, "I realized at this point that there could be no reconciliation between Nicky and me. It was not like those silly screen spats Don Taylor and I were having when we filmed *Father's Little Dividend*."

When Dore Schary at MGM heard of the impending divorce, he said, "Perhaps we should follow *Father's Little Dividend* with yet another sequel entitled *Father's Darling Divorcée*."

At around midnight, she received an urgent call from Conrad Sr. in Houston. He refused to describe the reason for his urgency, but insisted that he had to speak to his son—"a matter of life or death."

She telephoned the Bel Air Hotel and learned that Nicky was in his suite, but that he was not answering the phone or the urgent knocks on his door.

Getting dressed, Elizabeth drove to the hotel, fearing that Nicky might be incapacitated and perhaps needed to be rushed to a hospital.

Letting herself into the suite with her own key, she entered the darkened living room. There was a light shining from the bedroom. She heard voices, one of them a woman giggling. She stopped at the door and looked in horror at Nicky and Monroe fornicating. She yelled at him. "Your father wants you to call him at once. Why not tell the blonde trollop you'll fuck her later?" Then she turned and headed back to the suite's entrance.

He did not pursue her.

Monroe, however, with a towel wrapped around her otherwise nude body, came after Elizabeth, following her into the living room. "I'm sorry, Miss Taylor, for taking your husband away from you. He prefers me to you. You're beautiful and I'm sure you'll find another man. Somewhere, someone out there must find you desirable."

"Get out of my sight, you brazen little tart," Elizabeth shouted at her. "You can have Nicky Hilton."

As Elizabeth headed into the hall, Monroe stood at the door, calling to her. "Miss Taylor, I loved seeing you in the movies when I was a little girl."

In fury, Elizabeth stood before the elevator doors. Actually, Monroe was six years older than she was, which made that parting remark from her all the more infuriating.

Leaving the hotel, Elizabeth drove to Beverly Hills to spend the night with her parents. Only Sara was home. In addition to Elizabeth's mental anguish— or perhaps because of it—she was suffering from another bout of colitis and another ulcer. Her mother put her on a diet of Gerber's Baby Food.

The next day, Sara, with two hired assistants, drove two vans to the Hilton's rented home in Pacific Palisades and removed all of her daughter's possessions.

After seven months of orchestrating publicity about a "made in heaven" marriage, MGM released a statement to the press, presumably from Elizabeth, although it had been written by Howard Strickling in MGM's publicity department.

"I am sorry that Nick and I are unable to adjust our differences, and that we have come to a final parting of the ways. We both regret that decision, but after personal discussion, we realize that there is no possibility for a reconciliation."



Hitting on a Hilton: **Marilyn Monroe**

Stunned by the finality of the announcement, Nicky impulsively decided he wanted her back after all. She refused to see him or accept his urgent phone calls. He bombarded her with yellow roses.

In a telegram, she notified him that, "All the long-stemmed yellow roses in the world will make no difference. You and I are through."

He telegraphed her back, "The thing between MM and me is over. I found out the tramp is seeing at least eight other men. She must schedule one every hour. Come back to me. I promise to be a good boy from now on, a real family man."

She wired back, "Your promises have the market value of rat's piss."

Elizabeth's lawyers proceeded with her divorce. Two nights before her appearance in court, she met with Janet Leigh, telling her, "My fairytale marriage didn't even make it past the honeymoon night before the harsh reality set in. I never knew the real Nicky Hilton. He was on his best behavior until he married me. I think he's psychotic."

She also told Leigh that Sara wanted her to move back home. "I'm not going to. I've rented my own apartment. At the age of eighteen, I'm experiencing a nervous breakdown, probably the first of many I'll suffer

in my life. But going ahead with the divorce is the first grown-up decision I ever made by myself."

Nicky did not appear at the divorce hearing, although he was represented by two high-priced attorneys. On January 29, 1951, in a Santa Monica court, Elizabeth testified before a judge.

Until the last hour, Sara maintained that the marriage could be saved. She did not want to see Elizabeth "walk away from the Hilton millions." Elizabeth steadfastly refused to listen, and Sara and Francis opted not to go with her to court.

In a barely audible voice, she told the court that "Mr. Hilton was indifferent to me and used abusive language."

Since it quickly became clear that she was having great difficulty speaking, her attorney (also her agent), Jules Goldstone, decided to limit his questions to interrogations that would require only an affirmation.

"Mrs. Hilton, starting from the beginning of your marriage, your husband was very argumentative for no apparent reason and would become very violent. That recurred repeatedly during your marriage. In addition, he spent most of his time away from you."

She uttered a weak "yes."

"You have a substantial income from your work as a motion picture actress, and I understand you wish to waive any alimony."

Again, she uttered a weak "yes." Later, she explained her decision, claiming, "I do not want to be rewarded for failure."

"And you seek the return of your maiden name?" Goldstone asked. "Henceforth, you want to be known as Elizabeth Taylor, not Elizabeth Hilton?"

Again, another soft "yes."

On the stand, she could have related a litany of horrors she'd suffered with Nicky, including rape, beatings, and the attack where he kicked her in the stomach and caused a miscarriage. But she chose not to, admitting only the weakest grounds for divorce, claiming he insulted her mother and was rude to her in front of her friends. She didn't want to cause Nicky any disgrace or to hurt him, she told her friends. "I really don't like playing the role of the wronged woman." The judge, Thurmond Clarke, granted the divorce on grounds of mental cruelty, not physical abuse.

Her answers of "yes" became a "no" when Nicky's lawyers petitioned the court to have the marriage annulled, so that he would be free one day to re-marry in the Catholic church. Defiantly, she refused his request, and the judge denied Nicky's request.

She covered her face with her white-gloved hands and sobbed. The kindly judge invited her into his chambers to give her a cigarette before facing an aggressive cabal of photographers and reporters gathered outside.

Her marriage to the man she had promised to love "until my dying day" had ended after just seven months and twenty-four days.

Before she left the courthouse, the judge gave her some advice. "Perhaps you should seek a husband who is older and more mature the next go-around."

Outside the courtyard, as reporters rushed her, Elizabeth turned and faced them defiantly. "I never want to hear anyone mention the name of Nicky Hilton to me again." Then, with Goldstone, she got into the limousine that MGM had sent to rescue her.

MGM's final reaction to Elizabeth's divorce was to demand the return of her \$3,500 wedding gown.

In Texas, Conrad Sr. told the press, "My son was not prepared to be married to a movie star, and Elizabeth refused to give up her film career. Nicky could not stand the crowds of adoring fans who demanded autographs while he stood helplessly by. The reporters and photographers followed him wherever he went, and he had not privacy. Nick was resentful, hot tempered, and acted badly under all the pressure. Sometimes his temper really flared, and he stalked out."

"They never had a chance," Conrad Sr. continued. "Beauty was the prime cause of the breakup. Elizabeth is a princess who isn't allowed to lead a normal life, and those near her are affected, too. If she had been a shade less beautiful, if she had been a counter girl at Macy's instead of a movie star, if Nicky had been older, wiser, less headstrong...who knows?"

In the aftermath of the divorce, Nicky was furious at Elizabeth and at those around her. He told a reporter, "Marriage to her was like life in a goldfish bowl. One time a battery of reporters and photographers invaded our

suite—it happened all the time—and one of the buzzards said to me, ‘Hey, Mac, get out of the way. I want to snap a picture of Elizabeth Taylor.’”

Although Elizabeth had waived alimony, Goldstone fought Hilton lawyers for several months over a property settlement. Finally, she won the right to retain all the stock her father-in-law had offered her. She was also granted complete ownership of all the presents given to the couple at their wedding. In today’s market value, an economist estimated that all that loot would be worth two million dollars.

In the next few weeks, the newspapers were full of speculation about who Elizabeth would marry next. The public had begun its life-long fascination with her love life.

Possible candidates included Peter Lawford. It was even suggested that she might marry “the handsome blonde god, Tab Hunter.” At that time, the American public did not know he was a homosexual.

The most speculation centered on a possible marriage to Monty Clift. “They were meant for each other,” Louella Parsons proclaimed over the air, although she surely knew better than that.

Howard Hughes, never one to give up easily, once again came knocking on Elizabeth’s door with the offer of jewelry and, this time, two million dollars— double the amount he’d offered before.

He also made an offer that almost no star in Hollywood would have refused. Knowing that she was reaching the end of her MGM contract, and that the contract was paying her \$2,000 a week, he proposed setting up Elizabeth Taylor Productions and agreed to finance her first six films whether they made money or not. She rejected even such a seductive proposal.

On a less frenzied note, the press continued to follow the romances of Nicky Hilton. They included affairs with Joan Collins, Terry Moore, and the blonde starlet Barbara Payton, who later became a drug addict and a hooker. For a while, it was rumored that he was going to marry nineteen-year-old Betsy von Furstenberg, a German countess who wanted to become a film star.

The British temptress, Joan Collins, asserted that Nicky was “a sexual athlete. Between his brother Baron, his father, and himself, those boys possess a yard of cock.”

As Elizabeth watched Nicky date such women as Mamie Van Doren and Jayne Mansfield, Nicky read in magazines about her interactions with a string of men who included Ted Briskin, ex- husband of Betty Hutton; George Stevens, Jr, son of the director of *A Place in the Sun*; producer Ivan Moffat; and once again her ever faithful Arthur Loew, Jr.

Nicky said, “Every man should have the opportunity of sleeping with Elizabeth Taylor, and at the rate she’s going, every man will.”

He would wait seventeen years after his divorce before he married again, this time to another teenage bride, oil heiress Patricia McClintock. The year was 1958.

Many observers have written that Elizabeth never saw Nicky again, but privately Roddy knew better. In the years after their break-up, Elizabeth and Nicky arranged to spend several weekends together. Twice they met at the Connecticut estate of her rich uncle, Howard Young. Also, on occasion, they arranged a secret rendezvous at the Thunderbird Hotel in Palm Springs where she traveled incognito, registering herself as “Rebecca Jones.”

As she told Roddy, “A girl has a hard time finding a love machine like Nicky. I did see him on occasion whenever I needed a really good fuck. At a time when many uptight American housewives didn’t even know women were supposed to have orgasms, Nicky invented multiple orgasms.”

After a life of dissipation, Nicky died at age forty-two in 1969. The press noted that Elizabeth did not attend the funeral, nor did she send flowers.

However, on the first anniversary of his death, Dick Hanley made arrangements for her to pay a midnight visit to the Holy Cross Cemetery in Culver City, California. Accompanied by two security guards, she placed a wreath of yellow roses on his grave.

She told Janet Leigh, “We married much too young. I’m so sorry I hurt him. I think in his own way he did love me very much.”

It was up to Richard Burton to deliver a latter day epitaph to the hotel heir. “Nicky’s life could not have been totally unhappy. After all, he did get to live with Elizabeth for a while.”

In the wake of her divorce, Elizabeth moved into a two-story apartment complex covered with ferns at 10600 Wilshire Boulevard. She lived upstairs over newlyweds Janet Leigh and Tony Curtis, who were often referred to in the press as "America's Sweethearts."

As Leigh recalled in her memoirs, "The building was a hot property, and it was infested with photographers and reporters once it was discovered. No possibility of clandestine operations here. One false move and you would be on the front page."

The beautiful young MGM star must have been dealing in hyperbole, or else she didn't have a clue as to what was going on in her apartment building, especially with her sex-crazed bisexual husband.

"I visited Elizabeth Taylor often in her bachelor quarters," said Dick Hanley. "There was a lot of hanky-panky going on there, mostly from Tony Curtis, who started cheating on Janet even during the first month of their marriage, the first week, perhaps."

Before his marriage to Leigh, Curtis had double dated on five occasions with Elizabeth and her beau of the moment. She found this "Kid from the Bronx" amusing and enjoyed his frankness. "I spent my first months in Hollywood going around with a lump in my pants chasing after girls," Tony confessed to Elizabeth.

The inevitable happened: Leigh had to fly to San Francisco for four days, and Elizabeth invited Curtis up for dinner during her absence. Since she had not mastered the art of cooking, she ordered Chinese take-out.

"I was still despondent over my divorce from Nicky and my self-respect was at a low ebb," she later confessed to Roddy. "For the first time in my life, I was drinking excessively. I know I sound like I'm making excuses, but Tony and I did it. He can be very persuasive when he turns on that charm. It wasn't my greatest lay, but he was sincere."

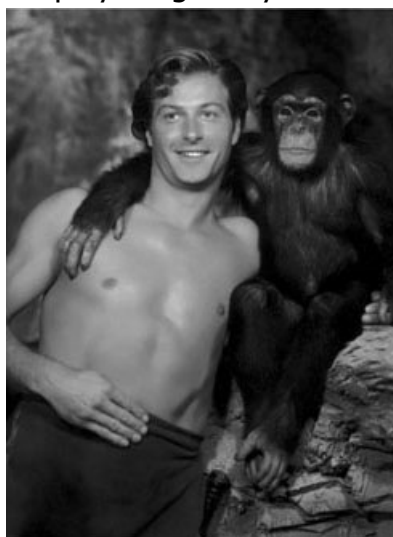
Later, when Curtis was on assignment and away from the apartment complex, Leigh invited Elizabeth downstairs for lunch one early afternoon. In those days, she had compiled a "picture wall" of photographs of herself in the company of various Hollywood personalities. One of the photos depicted Leigh with Lex Barker outfitted as Tarzan. This New York born actor was the first to replace Johnny Weissmuller on the screen as Tarzan the Ape Man.

Half naked and outfitted in a loin cloth, he had visited Leigh when she was filming *Holiday Affair* (1949) with Robert Mitchum. That afternoon, he'd asked her out on a date, and they went together for about three weeks.

Elizabeth informed Leigh that Barker was her dream man, and she'd love to go out with him. "I can call Lex up. I'm sure he'd like to go out with you. You see, he likes his girls very young."

Elizabeth said she'd be thrilled. Three days later, Barker called her. When she opened the door, she encountered a handsome giant of a man, standing six feet, four inches. He was dressed in a black suit, and offered to escort her to the Cocoonut Grove night club at the Ambassador Hotel.

"He was no Ape Man," she told Roddy the next day. "I found that he was well educated, debonair, and sophisticated. It's a bit of a stretch for him to play Jungle Boy."



Lex Barker in *Tarzan's Magic Fountain*
(1949)

He took her out on a number of dates, once inviting her to Malibu to enjoy the beach life, stopping off at his favorite hangout, Malibu Cottage, for drinks.

"I've got to keep my emotions in check," Elizabeth told Roddy. "I could go ape shit—no pun intended—for a guy like Lex. He's a school girl's dream fantasy. He is a great lover, not the King of the Jungle, but the Emperor of the Boudoir. He's never given me the slightest clue that our relationship is anything but physical. But if he proposed marriage tomorrow, I'd go for it."

Three days later, Roddy called Elizabeth, asking her how her affair with Body Beautiful was going. "He hasn't called me in several days," she said. "I fear he's dropped me. You know, every time a cockroach crosses Hollywood Boulevard. What's going on here?"

"I didn't want to tell you this, but Lex has been seeing a lot of Marilyn Monroe."

She exploded in fury. "That blonde bitch! Every time I turn around, that whore is crossing my path. She'd better watch out. One night she might get her tit caught in a wringer, if she fools with me anymore."

One rainy Sunday afternoon, a bored Elizabeth sat in her modest living room, going over a scrapbook Sara had accumulated of her film career so far. Reviewing her past work, she felt, "I have a long way to go," as she'd told Tony Curtis.

He, too, believed that his greatest work lay ahead of him "once Universal gets me out of these god damn Arabian Nights pantaloons."

The silence was broken by the ringing of her phone. It was an unexpected call from Tyrone Power. He apologized "for that last damn mix-up in New York. I'm afraid I did not put my best foot forward with you." He asked her if he could drop by if she weren't doing anything.

Remembering how attractive he was, she asked him to come over that afternoon. Within an hour, he arrived dripping wet but with a cluster of yellow roses. Nicky must have told him that those were her favorite flower.

Over a late afternoon drink, he made no mention of his affair with her former husband, and she avoided the subject as well. When recounting the evening's events with Leigh. Elizabeth said, "Some subjects are just too embarrassing to bring up."

Power's only reference to Nicky was vague. "The best way to get over a former love affair is with someone new."

Over dinner, he almost set the agenda of their relationship before it had even begun. "I always warn people not to fall in love with me, because I'm moody and unpredictable. Sometimes I invite people over for drinks and dinner, but tire of them before the evening is over. I retreat to my bedroom until they are gone."

"At that rate, you'll never compete with Elsa Maxwell as the world's greatest host...or hostess."

Joan Blondell was one of the few stars in Hollywood who learned that Power was dating Elizabeth. She'd had an affair with him when they appeared together in Nightmare Alley in 1947.

She told the author of this book, "Ty just oozed so much charm there should have been a law against it. He virtually seduced every man and woman he went after. His tastes evoked a smörgåsbord. Poor Lana. She never knew what hit her. He was suddenly in her life, making her the happiest woman alive. Then, like a bird in flight, he was gone with the wind."

"Ty and I had a brief affair when he made that geeky movie," Blondell recalled. "It didn't last very long. In a few months or so, I heard he was dating Liz Taylor, although I'm sure both of them were seeing other people at the time. Liz, by the way, ended up getting my third and final husband, Mike Todd."

"If it were 1937," Blondell continued, "Miss Taylor would not have taken either of those guys from me. After all, George C. Scott said I was the sexiest woman ever to appear on the screen."

For some reason, Power never invited Elizabeth out to a public restaurant. Sometimes they shared dinners downstairs with Leigh and Curtis. They also took walks along the beach in the early twilight at Malibu and sometimes went on long drives up the Pacific Coast. One weekend, they drove to Big Sur.

"It was the most idyllic weekend of my life," she told Leigh and Curtis when she came back. "I've never been that comfortable with any man before, certainly not with Nicky, who could ignite into a firestorm at any minute. Ty and I spent hours together reading or listening to music on the radio. We could go for hours without

speaking, but there seemed to be this bond between us.”

“Together, they were the most beautiful couple I’ve ever seen, except for Janet and me,” Curtis said. “But somehow, I didn’t hear church bells ringing. Not at all.”

Leigh said, “Elizabeth told me she wanted the relationship to go on and on, never to end. She told me, ‘Ty is so stunningly handsome and such a sweet, endearing personality—so unlike Nicky.’”



One of the three or four most handsome men in Hollywood: **Tyrone Power**

One drunken night, overcome with nostalgia about the family units that might have been, the delicate subject of their respective “lost children” came up. Power confessed that Lana Turner had aborted a child that he had fathered, and Elizabeth tearfully confessed that Nicky had assaulted her in ways that led to a miscarriage when “he performed an Indian War Dance on my stomach.”

Power then made a wild proposal to her. “Let’s make our own baby. With you as his mother—or her mother—and me the father, it will be the world’s most beautiful baby. It’ll probably grow up to become the biggest star in the world. It can become that whether it’s a boy or a girl.”

As Elizabeth later confided to Leigh, “Ty and I made several attempts, but I never got pregnant. I had a wonderful time trying.”

After Power went with Elizabeth for a screening of *A Place in the Sun*, he seemed jealous of her scenes with Monty. “Critics are referring to you guys as the most beautiful couple on the screen. I want you to appear in a movie with me called *Forever*. It’s by my favorite author, Mildred Cram.”

He explained to her that many of Cram’s novels had been made into films, including his favorite, *Love Story* (1939), starring Charles Boyer and Irene Dunne.

Forever, the sixty-page novella by Cram, had been kicking around Hollywood studios for years, and was once considered as a vehicle for either Norma Shearer or Janet Gaynor.

Unknown to Elizabeth, Power had suggested appearing in the film with Judy Garland when he was dating her. “I practically memorized it [the novella] word for word,” Garland claimed.

Later, Power, in a Machiavellian flip-flop after he began dating Lana Turner, suggested it as a co-starring vehicle for Lana and himself.

The romance between Elizabeth and Power that began one rainy afternoon seemed to disappear in the glare of the sun. As Elizabeth told Roddy, “I didn’t see the end coming. In spite of his protestations, I thought I could change him. Like Lana, I was in such a state of jubilation that I didn’t see the train wreck ahead. Suddenly, days would go by and he wouldn’t call. Then he’d show up with no explanation as to where he’d been. There were nights he could not sleep and would pace the floor until dawn.” She suspected he was deeply conflicted over his sexuality.

“I remember, once when I brought up a future plan involving the two of us, he responded in anger,” she

revealed to Roddy. "He told me that he didn't want to think about tomorrow, only today. Then he started kissing me, and it went on forever. I, too, forgot about tomorrow. We got so carried away, we completely forgot that we'd accepted a dinner invitation from Janet and Tony."

Power later told his gay friend, actor Cesar Romero, that "Elizabeth and I might have continued dating a little longer but, like Lana, she was becoming too possessive. She was so very insecure that it became unbearable to live with her at times. She worried that in a few years, she'd be washed up because she claimed that she was hired by MGM only because of her face and breasts. Once I came back to her apartment and caught her painting wrinkles on this studio blowup of herself so she'd have an idea of what she'd look like when she was old."

Intuitively, Curtis seemed to know that Elizabeth's affair with Power was over before she did. In Key West during the making of Operation Petticoat (1950), Curtis recalled that he let Power into Elizabeth's upstairs apartment one afternoon when she was delayed at the studio.

"We had a few drinks," he said to Cary Grant and some gay friends working on the movie. "It was very hot in the apartment, and Ty suggested we strip down a bit. I guess one thing led to another. We balled each other. Or, more to the point, I balled him. He was a great bottom. By the time Elizabeth got home, Ty had fled. He'd already had his fun for the day."

Somehow, Hedda Hopper got wind of the Taylor/Power liaison and called her to inquire about it. Elizabeth refused to confirm or deny the romance which by then had already ended. She did, however, issue an enigmatic statement to Hopper which was never printed.

"Tyrone Power is a closed chapter in a book never read."

Back in Hollywood early in 1951, Elizabeth learned that Harvard University's Lampoon had named her "one of the most objectionable movie children of the year," claiming that in Conspirator she gave "the worst performance of the decade." She was also cited for being "objectionably ingénue." The Lampoon said that she persists in her career "despite a total inability to act." She also was the recipient of Harvard's first Roscoe ("Oscar" spelled "sideways"), an award for bad acting.

Her reaction to those Harvard students was graphic. "Every one of those fuckers can stick a fourteen-inch dildo up their dingleberry-coated assholes."

Dore Schary at MGM became so alarmed at some of her foul language that he asked her co-stars, Sara, and even some of her friends if they could "clean out her beautiful mouth. We expect words of love and compassion coming from it, and we get talk a whore would find offensive."

At a time when it was dropping stars, MGM wanted to hold onto Elizabeth, seeing great potential in her as a future moneymaker and a potent incentive to lure Americans away from their television sets.

Finally her agent/lawyer, Jules Goldstone, and MGM came to an agreement on a new contract for Elizabeth. It would remain in force from 1952 through 1958, with an escalating salary beginning at \$5,000 a week. Although that sounded adequate for the early 1950s, it was hardly lavish, as the tax bite in effect at the time took ninety percent of the upper tier of her salary.

For her next MGM movie, Love Is Better Than Ever, Elizabeth would be cast opposite Larry Parks and helmed by a young director, Stanley Donen.

She was cast as a dancing teacher, Anastasia, who falls in love with a smart theater agent, Jud, as played by Parks.

His name was billed above Elizabeth's because he'd become a major star in The Jolson Story (1946) and in its sequel, Jolson Sings Again (1949). He was among the first Hollywood personalities to admit that he had been a member of the Communist Party during testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee. As a result, MGM postponed the release of the film until February 23, 1952. After his testimony, Parks' promising screen career went up in flames, and the film became one of Elizabeth's lightweight, less publicized efforts.

During the filming of Love Is Better Than Ever, Elizabeth asked her director, Donen, to prove the validity of its title with a performance in bed. He obliged and a torrid affair began, brief in its intensity but scandalous because Donen was already married.

Once, she tried to explain her attraction to Donen, which did not sound all that physical. "He is witty and wise

and sympathetic to my problems. I know he's always there for me if I need to cry on his shoulder."

Sara, who had been secretly anti-Semitic throughout most of her life, was not impressed with the short, swarthy, twenty-seven year old director. He wasn't rich, and he was also a Jew. When she heard he'd worked with gay actor Gene Kelly and had been a chorus boy on Broadway, she assumed he was a homosexual with no supporting evidence that he was. She called Hedda Hopper and made that accusation, but Hopper wouldn't print it. Sara also told the columnist that "Donen should be run out of town."

MGM hired Marjorie Dillon as Elizabeth's stand-in because of their facial resemblance, height, and body structure. She was also assigned the task of looking after Elizabeth, who was sometimes breaking down into hysterical fits of uncontrollable weeping during the filming of *Love Is Better Than Ever*. "Hours would go by, and she seemed all right and in control," Dillon claimed. "But the least little thing could set her off, and she'd flee from the set and run back to her dressing room, where she sobbed until her eyes were too red to face the camera."

Elizabeth warned Dillon to keep Sara off the set. "If she sets one foot in here, tell Dore Schary I'm leaving and not coming back." Elizabeth threatened.



Director **Stanley Donen** with **Elizabeth Taylor**

Barred from MGM, Sara frequently called Dillon and pumped her for information about her daughter, especially for details about her ongoing affair with Donen. Sara claimed that "under no circumstances will my daughter ever marry a Jew."

Sara also asked Dillon, "Is it true that Donen is divorcing his wife? Where did Elizabeth go last night? Is he sleeping over at her apartment?"

"I didn't tell her anything," Dillon said. "But everybody on the set knew that Donen had become Elizabeth's lover."

Donen and Elizabeth formed a social group, "The Fox and Lox Club." Curtis and Leigh were among the charter members, as were actors Barry Sullivan, Diana Lynn, and Colleen Gray, each a B-list star. "We got together for house parties and Sunday brunches," said Marty Ragaway, a comedy writer and member of the group. "I saw Donen and Elizabeth together on many an occasion. I'd call it a transitional romance for her, love on the rebound."

Each member of Fox and Lox was assigned the task, on one Sunday or another, of hosting the other members. When Donen and Elizabeth were designated as co-hosts for a luncheon gathering of the club within her apartment, screenwriter Stanley Roberts was assigned the task of delivering the silver, cutlery, and porcelain. Elizabeth became seriously annoyed when Roberts was an hour late to a party which was quickly, without cutlery or porcelain, beginning to unravel. On the table was a big chocolate cake with peppermint frosting. As Roberts entered her apartment, she picked up that cake and smashed it in his face. Her guests were shocked and quickly made excuses to leave.

That was the last meeting of the Fox and Lox Club.

Even though Donen was still married, Elizabeth decided to get confessional and go public with her affair. She created a media-feeding frenzy when she showed up with him at the Academy Awards in March of 1951, where members of the press opted to define him as an escort and not as a serious lover.

However, on April 5, 1951, she made an appearance with Donen at the premiere of *Father's Little Dividend* at the Egyptian Theater. In the wake of their joint appearance, rumors spread the couple was secretly planning a

wedding. Photographers ignored the other stars in a frenzy of snapping pictures of Donen with Elizabeth.

Four days after the premiere, Donen's estranged wife, Jeanne, filed for divorce, citing alienation of affection for "another woman." Elizabeth was not named, but the whole world seemingly knew the identity of the "other woman" who had stolen her husband's love.

For the first time, Elizabeth was labeled a homewrecker in the press, a charge that would be frequently leveled at her in the future. When a reporter asked her the name of her next film, she sarcastically said it would be *The Other Woman*.

After receiving so much bad press, she faced reporters and tried to defend herself. "I know I've been spoiled, but I think people are unfairly severe. I'm just a normal girl with the average faults and virtues, but being a movie actress, I wasn't allowed to develop along normal lines. I've been able to wear a plunging neckline since I was fourteen years old, and ever since, then, people expected me to act as old as I look. All my troubles started because I have a woman's body and a child's emotions."

Larry Parks remembered Elizabeth frequently breaking down in tears on the set: "On occasion, she was unable to perform, and Donen offered her much comfort. Her personal life was in shatters, and her mother no longer seemed of much help."

At one point during the filming, she collapsed on the set and was rushed to the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital. Registering under the name "Rebecca Jones," she was diagnosed as suffering from nervous exhaustion.

After she was released from the hospital, she flew on a short visit to New York to see Monty and Roddy. She checked into the Hilton-affiliated Plaza Hotel, assuming her visit would be gratis.

Monty and Elizabeth behaved like lovers, but apparently it was a platonic relationship even though they often slept in the same bed together, cuddling each other against the night. She admitted to her new friend, Truman Capote, that, "I've slept with Monty but we never fucked."

Later, Capote reported that assertion to Tennessee Williams. "It's just as well she didn't fuck Monty," Capote said. "Elizabeth would have been disappointed. I went to bed with him only once. He didn't actually have a cock, just foreskin that looked like a puny piece of dried okra."

Shortly before she was scheduled to check out of the Plaza, the manager presented her with a \$2,500 bill, telling her, "Miss Taylor, we are so sorry that you are no longer a part of the wonderful Hilton family."

Before her departure, and in revenge, she invited Roddy and Monty to her suite, where she ordered three pitchers of martinis for them before they went on a rampage. They removed the stuffing from pillows and crammed them down the toilet. They cut up the draperies and the sheets.

Fans had sent her lots of flowers. They tossed them about the room and emptied wastepaper baskets onto the carpet. As a final gesture, she packed one of her suitcases with Plaza monogrammed towels.

After the breakup of the Fox and Lox Club, Elizabeth accepted invitations to Hollywood parties. One of them originated with that dashing swashbuckler Stewart Granger, who had moved to Hollywood. He carried special greetings from Michael Wilding in London.

Both Wilding and Elizabeth had written letters to each other since getting to know each other during her filming of *Conspirator*.

Granger told Elizabeth that Richard Burton had arrived in Hollywood after vowing for years that he'd never do that. "He's my house guest, and he's here now. He'd like to see you. When he's finished showering, I'll send him out."

"After a few more defections of actors from the Britain, the press will start calling it 'The London Invasion,'" she said.

"Dick is unique," Granger said. "You'll like him or hate him. I met him at a small theater in Hammersmith when I went backstage to congratulate him on a performance. He opened the door to his dressing room, wearing a jock strap, with a can of beer in his hand. He said to me, 'Oh god, a bloody film star.' For us, it was love at first sight. We've been friends ever since."

Within fifteen minutes, Burton, wearing an almost see-through white bathing suit, headed toward Elizabeth, who was lying on a chaise longue. He was immediately attracted to her and wanted to talk. He would later

recall the historic event, likening it to when Romeo first spotted Juliet

"She was the most astonishing, self-contained, pulchritudinous, remote, removed, inaccessible woman I had ever seen," Burton said. "Her face was divine, but her breasts were nothing short of apocalyptic. They would topple empires before they withered. Indeed, her body was a miracle of construction."

"She was so perfect she made me aware of my own imperfections," Burton said. "Every pockmark on my face became a crater on the dark side of the moon. I lifted my hand to cover my cheek. As I did so, it occurred to me that she probably would find my hand as ugly as my face. I lowered it to my side and kept on staring."

She wished him well in his Hollywood career, but warned him "to watch your ass in this town unless you want to get it fucked. Everybody's a god damn phony and a liar. Stars like Crawford and Stanwyck were former whores. There are one hundred pederasts per square mile. Some directors will hire you just to sniff your panties, preferably with skid marks. It's one big parade of hustlers, pimps, dope fiends, alcoholics—you name it. If they're not assholes, they're shitheads. If not that, they're fucking embezzlers who'll rob you blind. Every time you let out a fart in this town, some jerk will try to sue you. Hollywood is nothing but a swarm of greedy locusts."

She was feeling particularly bitter that day, and she seemed to realize that her words shocked him. "Don't they use words like that at the Old Vic?" she asked.

"Yes, in Bloody Olde England they curse like fishmongers, but not necessarily on stage." Then he wished her good day and walked away. Later, he told Granger, "That Elizabeth Taylor talks like a drunken lorry driver."

Elizabeth wanted to know what was going on between Burton and Granger. Out by the pool, when Granger's houseman, an elderly gray-haired African-American, served her a drink, she offered him a twenty-dollar bill to tell her details about what went on in Granger's house at night. Jean Simmons had not yet arrived in town.

"Miss Taylor," the old man told her, "I'm ashamed for my poor old eyes to have seen it. But these two Englishmen walk around jaybird naked, flaunting their junk and getting drunk as skunks. They go at it every night like two jackrabbits in heat. It's against God's will. Our Lord did not create Adam and Adam."

Dore Schary at MGM did not approve of Elizabeth's relationship with Donen and shipped her off to England to film *Ivanhoe* (1952), a costume period drama starring her former flame, Robert Taylor.

On her final night in bed with Donen, Elizabeth promised him that, "I will belong to you forever. I'll be gone only a short time. And don't worry, I won't be fucking Robert Taylor. Been there, done that—not memorable."

After she got to London, however, letters and phone calls to and from Donen gradually ebbed until there were none at all.

Months later, looking back on the interlude of her life that included Donen, Elizabeth told Granger, "Promises are made to be broken. It's the way life works."

For Elizabeth, Donen became "emotionally obsolete" with the arrival of Michael Wilding in her life. But first, there was a major hurdle to overcome, and it was formidable: Marlene Dietrich.

One of the motivations that prompted MGM to cast Elizabeth in *Ivanhoe* (1952), a medieval drama co-starring Robert Taylor, involved getting her out of the country and separating her from the potentiality of scandal associated with her affair with Donen.

She had frequently tuned in to Tallulah Bankhead's *The Big Show*, a ninety-minute radio program that would eventually lure some of the A-list stars in the entertainment business, including Marlene Dietrich and Ethel Merman.

Elizabeth had steadfastly refused to go on the show, but Tallulah referred to her anyway. "Elizabeth, you know, my darlings, married one of the biggest men in the hotel trade, Nicky Hilton." She was referring to Nicky's endowment, which she'd sampled only the week before. "What else could I do?" she asked her friend, TV producer, Stanley Mills Haggart. "I met Nicky at Sardi's and invited him home for a drink. He raped me, and darling, I struggled valiantly. The next morning, when we both woke up at eleven o'clock, I insisted he rape me

again...and be even more forceful if I resisted."

Long before she converted to the Jewish religion, Elizabeth was cast in *Ivanhoe* as Rebecca of York, "the Jewish infidel."

She had protested to Schary that she did not like the script, and that she did not want to appear in *Ivanhoe*, and he retaliated by threatening her with suspension. Eventually, she acquiesced, but lobbied, unsuccessfully, for the role of Rowena, the film's female love interest. But Schary had already contracted with Joan Fontaine to play that part. Elizabeth was therefore forced into the lesser role of Rebecca.

The film was one-fourth shot when she confronted its director, Richard Thorpe, claiming she had been miscast as Rebecca and was pulling out of the role. Briefly, there was talk of replacing her with Deborah Kerr, who had recently co-starred with Robert Taylor in *Quo Vadis?* But when Schary heard of this, he threatened Elizabeth with "hell and damnation," and she reluctantly resumed her role as Rebecca.

The plot was so loosely adapted from Sir Walter Scott's epic novel that the original author might have denounced it if he'd still been around. George Sanders, one of the film's co-stars, referred to it as "historical hokum," and Elizabeth described it as "a piece of cachou."

Even Robert Taylor objected to it, claiming, "I prefer to do Westerns." During the shoot, he told Thorpe, "I'm getting mighty tired of walking around in an iron jockstrap."

Returning from the Crusades in the Holy Land, *Ivanhoe* (as played by Taylor) learns that (the good) King Richard the Lionheart is imprisoned and being held for ransom in Austria. *Ivanhoe*'s demand that the ransom be paid is ignored when the evil Prince John and his corrupted cronies refuse to relinquish their prestige and power. Joining forces with Robin Hood, whose appearance in the movie is very brief, *Ivanhoe* selflessly, and for the good of England, rustles up the money to release King Richard, simultaneously re-establishing a relationship with his father, who disowned him years previously.

In the film, Elizabeth was tried publicly as an infidel witch and a seductress who has taken advantage of *Ivanhoe*, a Christian knight. One critic noted that "Elizabeth Taylor is seen going to the stake with the expression of a girl who has been stood up on a date. So much for martyrdom. Cast her next as Joan of Arc."

When Robert met Elizabeth on the set, he told her he was furious at the terms of his divorce from Barbara Stanwyck. "The bitch got our mansion and all that was in it except for my underwear. Not only that, the dyke was awarded fifteen percent of all my earnings unless she remarries. Believe you me, that one will never remarry. She'll suck my balls dry until I die."

Thorpe, the director, privately told his friends in London that MGM had hired two heterosexual leading ladies, Elizabeth Taylor and Joan Fontaine; three bisexual co-stars—Robert Taylor, Robert Douglas, and George Sanders—and one homosexual Welshman, Emlyn Williams.

I was never invited, but Bob Taylor threw some wild parties with Douglas, Sanders, and Williams," Thorpe said. "A lot of handsome young Englishmen worked either as extras or as page boys, and they often attended these homosexual orgies. We were always worried that word would reach the tabloids in London. Many guys in the cast and crew, who were basically straight shooters, were willing to hang out with these big name stars, perhaps hoping to advance their careers. They ended up getting sucked dry by my male stars, not the female ones."

Thorpe had directed Elizabeth before in *A Date With Judy* and had found her fairly easy to work with, an actress who took directions. But he encountered a very different Elizabeth on the set of *Ivanhoe*. She looked ghostly thin, complaining of an ulcer. She didn't give a performance, but sleepwalked through her role, using a voice that was hardly audible. "Her line reads were so incomprehensible we later had to have them dubbed back in Hollywood," Thorpe said. "We had to hire a voice coach for her."

At MGM, the word was that her drama coach, Lillian Burns Sidney, dragged Elizabeth "kicking and screaming through the entire *Ivanhoe* script until she got it right."

Opening in the summer of 1952, *Ivanhoe* eventually grossed \$6.2 million, making it MGM's biggest earner for that year. Its premiere in New York set a box office record for the studio. *Ivanhoe* was nominated for an Oscar as Best Picture of 1952.

Both Elizabeth and Michael Wilding were filming at Borehamwood (aka Elstree) Studio outside London. Wilding was starring in *Trent's Last Case* with Orson Welles, who had known Elizabeth intimately.

In *Ivanhoe*, Elizabeth as Rebecca falls in love with the knight, as played by Robert Taylor. Off screen, another actor whom she mistakenly interpreted as her “knight in shining armor,” Wilding, became the star attraction in her life.

After filming began on *Ivanhoe*, Thorpe recalled that Wilding dropped in every afternoon for tea with Elizabeth. “At first, he seemed reluctant to start dating a girl so young,” Thorpe said. “I was there when she got the ball game launched.”

“I wish you’d stop treating me as if I had a child’s mind inside a woman’s body,” she said to Wilding. “Why don’t you invite me out to dinner tonight?”

The next morning, Thorpe asked Elizabeth how her date with Wilding went.

“He has the day off, and he’s sleeping it off at my suite at the Savoy,” she told him. “He hit the spot last night.”

“It was all too obvious to me that he’d seduced her,” Thorpe said. “The gleam in Elizabeth’s eyes reminded me of Vivien Leigh in that scene as Scar-lett O’Hara where she wakes up the morning after Rhett Butler has plowed her royally.”

From London, Elizabeth wrote Janet Leigh. In her letter, Elizabeth described Wilding as “a man with sand-colored hair, a broad forehead, and a narrow chin—a cross between Bing Crosby and King George VI.” In many ways, he reminded her of her childhood idol, Victor Cazalet.

At the time she became involved with him, Wilding, in England at least, was at the peak of his matinee idol charm.

After about a week had passed since the debut of their mutual seductions, Elizabeth joined in the praise of Wilding as a great lover. Wilding’s expertise was discussed one night at a party in the Manhattan apartment of Tallulah Bankhead when Bankhead was gossiping, publicly, with Paulette Goddard: “Michael Wilding, unlike Charlie Chaplin, gives endless satisfaction to a woman in bed,” Goddard claimed. “Even though he’s pushing forty, he has marvelous stamina in the sack.”

“Lucky Liz,” Tallulah said. “The bitch always seems to catch those twohandlers, or three-handers, like Nicky Hilton.”

Before his involvement with Elizabeth Taylor, and before his box office disaster in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Under Capricorn* (1949), opposite Ingrid Bergman, Wilding had shot *Stage Fright* (1950) with Marlene Dietrich and Jane Wyman, who had recently divorced Ronald Reagan.

As Dietrich’s biographer, Steven Bach, described Wilding at the time, “he was tall, thin, and elegant as a whip from Asprey’s. He had charm and a dashing way with the ladies. Marlene took one look at Wilding and the laziest gal in town got busy.” In direct competition for the British actor, Dietrich trounced Wyman.

Now, Dietrich faced far more formidable competition in the form of Elizabeth. When not before the cameras, Wilding was dividing his time between visits to Dietrich’s suite at Claridges and Elizabeth’s suite at the Savoy.

It took two or three weeks before nineteen-year-old Elizabeth realized she was competing with forty-nine-year old Marlene Dietrich.

Although Elizabeth had youth and beauty on her side, Dietrich, in her capacity as one of the most formidable femmes fatales of the 20th century, had an allure that had attracted suitors who had included, among many others, Gary Cooper, Howard Hughes, Barbara Stanwyck, Frank Sinatra, Ernest Hemingway, and U.S. Army Lieutenant General James Gavin.

To members of the press, Wilding appeared reluctant to get too involved with anyone. “I have serious doubts about marrying another actress.”

Actually, Wilding was using the fact that he was already married as an excuse to avoid emotional entanglements. It was believed in London that he had not seen his wife, actress Kay Young, since 1945.

Partly as a means of making Wilding jealous, Elizabeth went out on two dates with the blonde heartthrob Tab Hunter, who was in England at the time filming *Island of Desire* with Linda Darnell. These dates, of course, weren't any particular threat, as Elizabeth knew that Hunter's heart belonged to a fellow actor, Anthony Perkins.

The Hunter ploy worked, however. Wilding finally got up the courage to ask Young for a divorce, and eventually booked Elizabeth every night. He'd arrive on time at her suite at the Savoy, but she was never ready. "Punctuality was not her forte," he said. Often, she'd invite him into her dressing room, where she sat in front of her vanity mirror coquettishly applying heavy coats of make-up. He felt she was using far too much make-up for one so young and beautiful. "I understand why Marlene applies so much make-up," he told Elizabeth. "She's trying to erase the ravages of time. But you...."

"I'm trying to make myself look older so you might finally get around to asking me to marry you."

When it became obvious to her that Wilding was stalling, Elizabeth jumped into one of London's taxicabs and asked to be driven to a jewelry store in Mayfair which had been recommended to her. Once inside, she purchased a large sapphire ring encircled with diamonds. Placing it on the fourth finger of her left hand, she announced that afternoon to the press, "I am engaged to Michael Wilding. Look at the lovely ring he placed on my finger."

Her aggressive scheme goaded him into proposing to her. "Of course, I'll have to wait for my divorce to become finalized."

Friends of both Elizabeth and Dietrich, including Stewart Granger, were amazed that they had linked up as a couple. "Michael always preferred the woman as a dominant partner, and Marlene fitted that role perfectly," Granger said. "On the other hand, Elizabeth was searching for a father figure, a man who could dominate her. Personally, I didn't give their relationship much chance, although Michael had a big one, I didn't think that a mere cock would be enough to maintain a marriage."

Maria Riva, Dietrich's daughter, wrote a biography of her mother, in which she maintained that she "preferred fellatio so she could better control the situation." An entry in Dietrich's diary was also published: "Michael is inventive in coitus," she wrote, and I was staining as a result of his steeple chasing and always had to insert a firecracker the minute he dismounted."

Such an entry requires translation: "Staining" is a reference to bleeding, and "steeple chasing" refers to sexual intercourse. A "firecracker" was her nickname for a tampon.

When queried about Dietrich, Wilding was polite, "I kept asking myself, how could such a goddess find the ideal companion in me?"

Wilding had never before seen one of Elizabeth's movies, and she made arrangements for him to view *National Velvet*. She later said, "What a strong-willed and determined girl she was even back then. She says she wants a strong man in her life, but I don't know who'd wear the trousers. I suspect that in a marriage, she would be passive/aggressive."

At the studio, he arranged for her to see his 1949 film, *Maytime in Mayfair*, in which he co-starred with Anna Neagle. Over dinner, after watching the film, he asked, "Well, what do you think of me as an actor?"

She didn't directly answer the question, but told him, "When you're up close and looking down at Anna, you evoke a British gent trying to conceal a hard-on."

As Wilding's romance with Elizabeth deepened, he made it a point to have dinner with his longtime producer, Henry Wilcox, and his frequent co-star, Anna Neagle, who was married to Wilcox. They had long been his confidants.

"He was very honest with us," Wilcox later recalled. "He admitted that he didn't love Elizabeth, but was powerfully attracted to her. Michael was very ambitious in that he wanted to become an international star. He didn't want to be limited to making films only in England. He knew that by marrying Elizabeth, he would become a household name in America. He looked at me with those piercing eyes of his and said, 'Forgive me, Herbert, but you can't make me an international star, and Elizabeth can.'"

Wilcox told him, "If you marry Marlene, you'll be accused of wedding your grandmother. If you marry Elizabeth, you'll be labeled a cradle-snatcher."

Wilding told Neagle, "I'm running after Elizabeth, and she's desperate to catch me."

Wilding confided to Wilcox, "I can't make up my mind. I want both Marlene and Elizabeth."

"I can hardly feel sympathy for you," Wilcox said, "having to choose between two of the most desirable and

famous women on God's good earth."

At a party in London, Elizabeth learned that Dietrich was also having an affair with the terse and acerbic theater critic, Kenneth Tynan, who told Elizabeth, "The secret of Marlene's mysterious appeal lies in the fact that she has sex without gender."

When Elizabeth met Wilcox at the same party in Mayfair, she told him that, "Michael can give me security, maturity, and tranquility. That's what I'm looking for in a relationship." She would later retract that in a memoir. "I found out that unfortunately, you can't get those things just by touching someone else."

Wilding later wrote that, "I dreaded hurting Marlene," yet he chose an awkward way to announce to her that he he'd rejected her in favor of Elizabeth. He invited her to Dietrich's one-woman show in London at the Café de Paris, where Noël Coward introduced her every night, asserting onstage that "God has a talent for creating exceptional women."

Wilding took Elizabeth backstage to Dietrich's dressing room. In her diary, Dietrich later wrote, "Michael was there last night with Liz Taylor, with Michael sitting rather stiffly in a corner and looking at me quite steadily and sadly. I thought that that could not happen to me, seeing him with another woman. I felt quite sick."

"Dietrich got that stupid song all wrong—something about 'Whatever Lola wants, Lola gets,'" Elizabeth later said. "It should be rewritten as 'Whatever Elizabeth wants, Elizabeth gets.'"

During her evaluation of Dietrich's performance, Elizabeth told Wilding, "She's got a throaty kind of glamour, rather old-fashioned for the 50s. But as I understand it, she attracted Hitler and Goebbels. With that perfectly chiseled face, she seems to have discovered the secret of perpetual middle age."

"Even if I couldn't compete on the level of youth and beauty with Taylor, I could always upstage her in glamour," Dietrich told James Stewart, when she was filming *No Highway in the Sky* with him in England. "Sexual allure is all about glamour and illusion anyway, and I'm the mistress of the genre."

When Dietrich had filmed *Destry Rides Again* (1939) with Stewart, these two co-stars had launched an affair, eventually leading to Dietrich getting an abortion.

She claimed that Wilding was the British version of James Stewart—"He mumbles like Jimmy, and is ever so shy. But when Michael is unleashed, he becomes a tornado, his passion suddenly appearing without warning."

As Dietrich reported to Stewart, "I have to hand it to that Liz creature. Her breasts are bigger than mine, but she has short, stumpy legs. As you well know, I'm celebrated around the world for the shape of my legs. What I don't often hear about Liz is that she has hair on her arms, lots of black hair. I'm certain that centuries ago, her distant ancestors mated with the Neanderthal."

During pillow talk with Elizabeth, Wilding expressed his desire to produce a family. "I can bear your children," Elizabeth told him. "Dietrich is far too old. Besides, she's already married to some chicken farmer." She was referring to Rudolph Sieber, whom Dietrich had wed in Berlin in 1924, and had never divorced.

Actually, Elizabeth was not exactly candid with Wilding, since two doctors—one in Los Angeles, another in New York—had told her in the wake of her violent miscarriage, that it was doubtful she would ever have children again.

One night after dinner, when they were talking and drinking, Michael told her he wanted to confess his darkest secret. She apparently felt that he was going to Out himself to her as a bisexual, exposing his years-on affair with Stewart Granger and others. But it was something else.

"I suffer from epilepsy, and at times I have seizures that cloud my consciousness."

In the early 1950s, there was a great social stigma attached to epilepsy. Wilding feared that producers would not hire him if word of his disease got out.

"I will love you regardless," she promised him.

After being dumped by Wilding in favor of Elizabeth, Dietrich flew back to New York when her part of the filming of *No Highway in the Sky* was finished.

As it happened, because of business commitments, Wilcox was also in Manhattan at the time. Dietrich met with him for lunch, mainly to ask the producer questions about Wilding. "What's Taylor got that I haven't?"

Wilcox later recalled, "I was far too gallant to mention the 'Y' word." He was referring, of course, to "youth."

Not getting a satisfactory answer from Wilcox, Dietrich came up with her own. "Michael tells me he cannot live without me, and then he goes and fucks Elizabeth Taylor. It must be her bovine tits. In bed, Michael likes

breasts dangled in his face.”

Then she relayed to Wilcox that one night, she mentioned Wilding’s breast fetish to Noël Coward. “Noël responded that Michael also prefers another and very different appendage dangled in his face.”

After finishing *Ivanhoe* in early September, Elizabeth stayed in London until October 6, 1952, when both Tab Hunter and Wilding escorted her to the airport. She gave Hunter a kiss on the cheek but tongue-kissed Wilding before taking off for New York. “Goodbye, Mr. Shilly-Shally,” she told him. “Let’s forget we ever met.”

In a week, he sent her a cable. AM CATCHING THE NEXT PLANE TO HOLLYWOOD. SIGNED, MR. SHILLY-SHALLY.

In New York, Elizabeth and Monty Clift basked in their rave reviews for *A Place in the Sun*. With Elizabeth picking up the tab, they were spotted at “21” Club, Voisin, and Le Pavillon.

But Monty much preferred escorting her to seedy dives such as Gregory’s, where he’d taken her so many times before, and which was still his favorite. One drunken night at the tavern, Monty had consumed too many Nembutals and had drunk a quart of Scotch.

In the men’s toilet, Monty propositioned a drunken sailor, who slugged him viciously, breaking his nose and knocking him to the floor where he stomped on his shoulder, dislocating it. Calling an ambulance, Elizabeth hovered protectively over him and stayed at his apartment until he could look after himself.

Through the MGM office in New York, she arranged two private screenings of Michael Wilding films, since Monty had never seen him act. He sat impatiently through the double feature.

At the end of the screenings, he grabbed her arm. “Let’s get the hell out of here.” Over drinks, he warned her against marrying Wilding. “If he’s not better as a husband than he is as an actor, he’ll be rotten. His acting is very dated, a kind of romantic leading man style left over from one of the English parlor dramas the Brits made in the 1930s.”

After flying back to Hollywood, Elizabeth spent many evenings with Stewart Granger and his young wife, Jean Simmons, who was sometimes referred to as “the British Elizabeth Taylor.” The British couple, trying to make it in Hollywood, had married in Texas in 1950, with Wilding designated as Granger’s best man.

As a trio, Granger, Simmons, and Elizabeth drove to the Burbank airport to welcome Wilding to Hollywood. Elizabeth and Wilding were invited to stay in the guest room at the Granger home in the Hollywood Hills.

For a while during the winter of 1951, Granger, Simmons, Wilding, and Elizabeth lived under the same roof. “I took a child bride,” Granger said, “and now Michael plans to follow my example.”

In the nights to come, the friendly couples would be seen dining and dancing together at the Mocambo, at Chasen’s, and at Romanoff’s. At the latter, the “watering hole” for Humphrey Bogart, Bogie wet kissed both the bride (Simmons) and the bride-to-be (Elizabeth).

Even after Simmons had signed with 20th Century Fox and Elizabeth had renewed her contract at MGM, Howard Hughes still had dreams of buying out their contracts. Although he was increasingly resentful of Hughes, Granger invited him over to dinner, a provocative move.

“Hughes was met by two of the most beautiful girls in the world,” Granger wrote in his memoirs, referring to Elizabeth and to his wife. “His pale blue eyes bugged out of his head, and he literally drooled as he stood looking down at them sitting demurely side by side on a couch. He practically overbalanced himself by trying to look down at their cleavage, both of them being well-endowed in that department. I’d heard a rumor that Hughes was a tit man.”

“Which one of them would you prefer, Howard?” Granger asked.

“God damn, I can’t make up my mind,” he replied, watering at the mouth. “Well, hard cheese, old boy,” Granger said. “You’re not going to get either of them, so up yours.”

“Howard turned and looked at us,” Granger recalled. “We thought we were teasing a nut. But we were

teasing a cobra."

Columnist Hedda Hopper was outraged when she heard of Elizabeth's living arrangement, and she summoned her, along with Wilding, to her home in Beverly Hills. During her dialogue, she referred to Granger and Wilding as "two dirty old men taking advantage of those teenagers, the limey bastards."

Within her living room, Hopper spoke to Elizabeth as if Wilding were not in the room. "Do you know, my dear child, that Mr. Wilding is a homosexual and has engaged in a decades-long affair with Stewart Granger?"

Wilding sat in stunned silence, and Elizabeth made no attempt to defend her husband-to-be. He was visibly shaken, knowing that if Hopper printed such charges, his Hollywood career might be over before it had even begun.

Back in the Hollywood Hills, Wilding told Granger what had happened.

"Oh, Mikey, don't worry about what she said," Elizabeth told him. "It does-n't matter to me."

Granger challenged Elizabeth for not defending Wilding. "You silly bitch, you just sat there and didn't take up for him? Well, she'll hear from me."

He went into his study and placed a call to Hopper, calling her "a monumental bitch. How dare you accuse a friend of mine of being queer, you raddled, dried-up, frustrated old cunt!"

Obviously shaken by such a call, Hopper would stick the needle into Granger in any future column where his name came up.

The following morning at six o'clock, Bogart called Wilding "Have you read Hedda's column?"

"Hell, no," Wilding said. "I'm trying to get some sleep." But after putting down the phone, he went downstairs and retrieved the morning paper. In it, Hopper had run a picture of Wilding and Granger on a yacht during one of their shared vacations along the French Riviera, clearly suggesting that the two handsome actors "were more than just mere friends."



The English Abroad: **Stewart Granger** with his wife **Jean Simmons**

Wilding asked Granger if he'd join them in a joint libel suit against Hopper.

"Suing Hopper is like suing God," Granger told him. "remind me the next time we go out on a boat together not to hold your hand."

Granger ultimately got his revenge on Hopper by "outing" her actor son, William Hopper, who was a homosexual. Granger spread the word at Hollywood parties. William would later become a household name on television, playing Perry Mason's assistant, Paul Drake. The star of the show, Raymond Burr, playing Perry Mason, was also gay and in love—for a while at least—with Hopper's son.

Louella Parsons encountered Hopper at a party. "What makes you so sure that Wilding is a homo?" she asked.

"He's mad for Judy Garland," Hopper responded. "Have you ever met a homo who's not mad for Judy Garland?"

"Can't say that I have," Parsons said. "My objection is that Wilding is too old for Liz. As for that homo thing, all Hollywood husbands are queer at some point in their lives. Speaking of that, what is your adorable son doing tonight?"

At the same party, Elsa Maxwell was asked if she was concerned about Elizabeth marrying a potentially homosexual husband. "My dear, when you travel in international society, you learn that all men, on some rainy night or another, become cocksuckers."

A fellow Brit, David Niven, rushed to the defense of Wilding and Granger. "On that Riviera trip in the South of France, they nailed so many coquettes that the population there doubled overnight." Of course, that was gross, vulgar hyperbole. When Marlene Dietrich read his comment, she said, "Poor David is just covering up his own bisexuality, including his affair with Errol Flynn when they lived together."

In her 1962 memoir, *The Whole Truth and Nothing But*, Hopper restated her charge that Wilding and Granger were homosexual lovers. Reacting quickly, Wilding filed a libel suit, and she settled out of court for \$100,000. He also forced her to claim that she had made the charge "in a malicious and wanton fashion with complete disregard for the plaintiff's feelings."



William Hopper (aka Paul Drake in the Perry Mason series)

The irony of that legal challenge was that Hopper actually had her facts right. "I was forced to pay for telling the truth," she told friends.

Elizabeth didn't need Hopper to tell her that her future husband was bisexual. She already knew it. She had firsthand evidence when she came home early from the studio one afternoon, and heard Wilding and Granger showering together and bragging about which of them was the real top. She went back into the garden for about half an hour before entering the house again, where she found them sitting on a couch with towels wrapped around their midsections.

The next day, she'd relay the entire episode to Roddy McDowall, who had already warned her to expect such encounters if she married a bisexual with a known reputation for philandering.

MGM announced the engagement of Elizabeth to Wilding. She told the press, "It's leap year, and I leaped."

To marry Elizabeth and move to Hollywood meant that Wilding would have to break his twenty-year contract with producer Henry Wilcox. At first, the British producer was furious. He told his wife, Anna Neagle, Wilding's frequent co-star, "But why sue him? He's got nothing."

Neagle pleaded with her husband "not to stand in the way of Michael's happiness." Wilcox did warn Wilding that he would not go over in Hollywood, a prophecy that turned out to be true.

While Elizabeth was at MGM, Wilding stayed at the Granger home, spending lots of his time reading movie magazines and trying to learn more about Hollywood. Elizabeth's favorite reading material were articles about herself. On a coffee table at the Granger house rested eighteen magazines with her picture gracing the covers.

Shortly after his arrival in America, Wilding came across an item that particularly intrigued him. A reporter, David Randolph, asked: "Do you prefer Luscious Liz or Mammillary Marilyn? The race is on to see who will reign as the next sex goddess of Hollywood, following in the footsteps of Jean Harlow, Lana Turner, and Rita Hayworth."

Apparently, another star read that same item. One afternoon before Elizabeth returned home from work, Wilding picked up the receiver to hear Marilyn Monroe on the phone.

"Hello, Mikey, this is Marilyn...you know, Marilyn Monroe. I guess you read what Mr. Randolph wrote in the

paper.”

“Indeed I did, Miss Monroe.”

“Well, I wanted to let you know that a man like yourself doesn’t have to settle for just strawberry or banana ice cream at Will Wright’s ice cream parlor. You can have a scoop of banana, with a scoop of strawberry on top.”

“If I read you correctly, I think you’re telling me that I’m not forced to stick exclusively to Elizabeth, but can have Marilyn as a delectable topping.”

“You read that right, you sexy Brit!” she answered.

“It’s a cool day, as you know, in Los Angeles, it being autumn and everything. But I bet if you came over this afternoon, you could keep me warm. Elizabeth doesn’t have to know. I’m very discreet.”

“Miss Monroe, it’s an honor to talk to you, but let me get back to you on that offer,” he said. He couldn’t wait to tell Granger about the invitation he’d received.

As it happened, the prospect of a roll in the hay with Monroe excited Granger. “Go for it,” he urged Wilding. “I hear the bitch does three-ways. Call her back and ask her if I can come along.”

Granger later told friends of the offer Monroe had made to Wilding, leaving out the part about his own proposal of a three-way.

Jeanne Carmen, another blonde goddess and Monroe’s confidante, revealed the outcome of the ménage à trois. Hired for a modeling job by producers Rodgers Brackets and Stanley Mills Haggart, Carmen said, “Marilyn told me that Wilding and Granger had her in the same bed at the same time.”

The occasion was the night that Howard Hughes threw a party at the Beverly Hills Hotel, where he rented a bungalow. The party was in honor of Elizabeth and Simmons, and he did not invite Granger or Wilding. The two men were “seriously pissed off when our womenfolk wandered into the Hughes lair,” according to Granger.

The errant actors used that occasion to slip away and see Monroe. As she later told Carmen, “I knew Michael would come over, and I welcomed Stewart too. I thought they were both very handsome, although a bit old. Michael is hung better than Stewart, but neither of them would be turned down in a gay bar.”

Monroe would enter Wilding’s life on one more occasion, and this incident would be revealed in his memoirs, though he gave a very “limited hangout” in reference to what actually happened between them.

By now, it was obvious that seducing the husband of her arch rival, Elizabeth, was the most compelling of Marilyn’s motivations.



Jeanne Carmen A refreshing, outspoken witness to the naughtiness of La-La Land.

The venue for Hughes’ party was the Beverly Hills Hotel. As part of the game Hughes was playing, he did not show up himself, but sent a surrogate, Pat DiCicco. Stated bluntly, DiCicco was a male hustler selling his services to men or women. He’d been famously married to the heiress Gloria Vanderbilt before she got wise and divorced him.

DiCicco was assigned by his employer, Hughes, as Elizabeth's escort. Over glass after glass of champagne, he pitched the glories of his client—that is, Hughes—to Elizabeth. "He could give you anything in the world you want—all the jewelry, all the money," DiCicco claimed. "He could make you the biggest star in Hollywood."

"I'm already the biggest star in Hollywood, with no help from Hughes. I prefer to do it on my own."

Still committed to bribing her into marriage, Hughes had never abandoned his pursuit of Elizabeth, having learned that she was seriously strapped for cash "and on the verge of marrying a limey pauper."

With the intention of arranging his affairs in England, Wilding left Hollywood on February 17, 1952, with the understanding that Elizabeth would join him there later.

When the time came for her own transit to London, Elizabeth was startled to have DiCicco booked into the airliner's seat immediately next to hers, a ploy that had obviously been influenced by Hughes. All across the Atlantic, DiCicco pleaded with her not to marry Wilding, asserting that it was well known that he was a homosexual. "He's had an ongoing affair with Stewart Granger," Di-Cicco said. "Now get this: He even had a hot affair with Errol Flynn in England, which Howard knows will continue once he settles into Hollywood. When Wilding doesn't come home to you, you'll know where he is—getting fucked by Flynn."

After they'd landed in the U.K., while clearing customs with DiCicco, Elizabeth told him, "Tell Mr. Hughes he can dream on and present all the evidence he wants against Michael. I'm still going to marry him. If he also has affairs with Stewart and Errol, then I must compliment his good taste. They are two of the most desirable and sought after men on the planet. I'm sure there are thousands of stars in Hollywood who would jump at Mr. Hughes' offer. Tell your tomcat boss to chase after one of those pussycats."

Met by Wilding at the airport in London, Elizabeth was put into a taxicab for transport to her suite at the Berkeley Hotel. Another large taxi was rented for her luggage. En route to the hotel, Wilding kissed her passionately.

Marlene Dietrich was furious after hearing the news of Elizabeth's upcoming marriage, denouncing her young rival as "an English tart."

The forty-eight-year-old Anna Neagle had agreed to be Elizabeth's maid of honor, with her husband, Henry Wilcox, functioning as Wilding's best man. Wilcox was still angry at his star for breaking their twenty-year contract, but he generously agreed to pay for their wedding reception at Claridges.

Neagle helped Elizabeth apply the finishing touches to her wedding dress, which once again had been designed by Helen Rose. This time, it was fashioned in tones of battleship gray instead of "first wedding" white. Her "getaway garb" was a wool suit with a three-tiered organdy collar and cuffs, and she wore a pillbox hat adorned with white flowers.

From Beverly Hills, Sara and Francis Taylor cabled their regrets, claiming that they would not be able to attend. Sara wrote, "I hope the second time around for you won't be the disaster your first marriage was."

Elizabeth became Mrs. Michael Wilding on February 21, 1952, twenty days after the finalization of her divorce from Nicky Hilton. Some five thousand onlookers gathered outside Claxton Hall in London where the ten-minute ceremony took place. Hundreds of her fans, in mourning because of the recent death of King George VI, wore black armbands. Another woman named Elizabeth had already been designated as the future queen.

Elizabeth (a.k.a. Mrs. Wilding) was mobbed by crazed fans when she left the hall. One woman ripped off her pillbox hat. Efforts were made to tear off other pieces of her clothing, even locks of her hair. Bobbies literally had to hoist her up in the air to carry her to the waiting limousine that transported her, along with Wilding, Neagle, and Wilcox, to the reception at Claridges.

Once there, she told London reporters that "this is the happiest day of my life, repeating the line she'd said when she married Nicky Hilton. To a reporter from the Daily Express, she said that "My career is of little importance. Being a good wife to Michael is my ultimate goal. Most of all, I'm glad to be British once again."

That same reporter also noted that "Wilding looked weary and bored—he did not smile once."

Because of Britain's post-war currency restrictions, Wilding was able to take only sixty British pounds out of the U.K. for their honeymoon in the French Alps. That meant that it was up to Elizabeth to pay for their modest eight-day honeymoon.

A waiter told Paris-Match, "For Miss Taylor's twentieth birthday, Mr. Wilding put a little candle in a cup of crème caramel and sang ten choruses of 'Happy Birthday' to her. There was no cake, but he did order champagne."

Back from their honeymoon, Elizabeth and her new husband lived briefly in London at his maisonette at 2 Bruton Street in the exclusive district of Mayfair. In a 1951 issue of Photoplay magazine, he'd already read an article by Sara in which she proclaimed that Elizabeth was virtually helpless around the house. "What Sara didn't say is that Elizabeth didn't believe in walking her dog," Wilding said. "The mutt went anywhere he wanted to. You had to watch where you stepped."

Before his departure for Hollywood, Wilding was presented with a bill from Inland Revenue for about £40,000, an amount that converted into around \$100,000 worth of 1952 dollars. That was virtually every shilling he had. The bill represented the taxes due on the income he had earned on his previous two pictures.

He cabled Granger in Hollywood. "I'll be landing in Hollywood with about twenty dollars in my purse. I've got to be supported by a girl who was only a teenager yesterday—or else it's the soup kitchen for me."

On the morning before she was scheduled to depart for London's airport for a flight headed back to New York, Elizabeth received an envelope slipped under the door of Wilding's flat. She tore it open. It ominously read: YOU WILL NOT LEAVE LONDON ALIVE UNLESS YOU TURN OVER 50,000 POUNDS TO ME. AWAIT FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS.

Wilding immediately called Scotland Yard, which put investigators on the case.

Chain smoking and visibly shaken, Elizabeth, with Wilding, headed to the airport.

When she finally reached Hollywood, she confessed to Janet Leigh, "I felt at any moment that I would be assassinated—or else the plane would be bombed."

Scotland Yard never tracked down the author of the threat. But for Elizabeth, it was the beginning of her paying the price for fame and notoriety.

Throughout the rest of her life, she'd be stalked, blackmailed, or threatened with death.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Love Amid the Rubbish

(OF ELIZABETH'S ALMOST-FORGOTTEN FILMS)

In Hollywood, Elizabeth barged into Benny Thau's office at MGM and virtually blackmailed him. Even though she'd signed a contract for seven years, she demanded that he also sign Michael Wilding as a contract player, at least for three years, even though the studio was letting others of its contract players go. "If you don't, I'll settle in England with him—and make no more movies for MGM."

"Do I have to remind you that I have just let Clark Gable, Spencer Tracy, Greer Garson, and Mickey Rooney go—to name only a few?" Thau said.

Nevertheless, Wilding was granted a three-year contract at \$3,000 a week, plus a two-year option for \$4,000 a week if MGM decided to retain him.

Wilding told Louella Parsons that, "My greatest ambition in life involves being very, very rich, but not work too hard for the money."

When Elizabeth and her new husband spent the weekend with her parents, Sara made what she called "a horrible discovery—he's wearing a damn toupée. Not only that, he has a weak chin, but everybody can plainly see that. I wonder if we can get a plastic surgeon to give him a chin like Kirk Douglas, complete with dimple."

Once again, Richard Thorpe, to his horror, was assigned to direct Elizabeth in *The Girl Who Had Everything* (1953), even though he still nursed bitter memories from his experience with her during the shooting of *Ivanhoe* (1952).

Based on columnist Adela Rogers St. Johns' memoir of her father, *A Free Soul*, originally published in 1927, the 1931 film with the same name had brought early stardom to Clark Gable when he appeared opposite Norma Shearer and Lionel Barrymore. Barrymore had won an Oscar playing a lawyer who defends gangster Gable, only to find that his free-spirited daughter, as played by Shearer, has fallen in love with his street-savvy client.

In the 1953 remake, the film's title was changed to *The Girl Who Had Everything*. Elizabeth was assigned the Shearer role, the role of the charismatic gangster went to Fernando Lamas, and the role of the father assigned to William Powell. Powell would be playing Elizabeth's father for the second time. He'd last portrayed her daddy onscreen in *Life With Father* (1947).

In the movie, Elizabeth gives up her dull but amiable boyfriend, Vance Court (Gig Young), and falls for a rakish and dangerous gangster, Victor Ramondi (Fernando Lamas). The heartthrob from Argentina was known as "Hollywood's leading Latin Lover." In Buenos Aires he'd had a heated affair with dictator Eva Peron.

The producer of the film, Armand Deutsch, read the script and told Thau, "Don't waste a big name star like Elizabeth Taylor in this silly little melodrama. Give it to Gloria DeHaven or Janet Leigh. It's a B-picture, and we're not using Elizabeth properly."

But Thau claimed that since Elizabeth was pregnant, he had to cast her in a vehicle very quickly that could be shot in a short time. Deutsch's original judgment had been right. Critics attacked the picture, and it bombed at the box office.

On the set, Elizabeth knew not to speak too early on any given day to Thorpe, who tended to be very cranky every morning. When she first greeted him with a "good morning," he yelled at her, "What's fucking good about it? I've got to get this picture made before your belly grows too big. Couldn't you have refrained from getting deep-dicked? Did you know there's a way to prevent pregnancy? Frankly, if you want me to, I can arrange an abortion."

Sobbing, she ran to her dressing room.

Elizabeth told Dick Hanley about her first meeting with Lamas on the MGM lot. "What a knockout! I later learned he'd used the same word to describe me. He is tall, handsome, and the color of bronze. When he smiled at me, flashing those pearly whites, I swooned. He wore a sky blue blazer and a buttercup yellow silk scarf. But pink slacks! Yes, pink! A man can be beaten up for wearing pink. Perhaps that outfit is fashionable on the streets of Buenos Aires. His trousers were so tight they made everything obvious. Believe me, there was meat there for the poor."

During the shoot, the cantankerous director and his hot-tempered Latin star, Lamas, often became enraged at each other. Dick remembered visiting Elizabeth one afternoon in her dressing room. "I found Lamas wearing only his briefs, lying on her sofa in a fetal position. She was cuddling him in her arms. A fight with Thorpe had led to one of his terrible migraines. I was told that he often developed these splitting headaches when he got angry."

"Seeing them in this position, I realized for the first time that Elizabeth was more than a mere sexpot," Dick claimed. "She was a very loving and nurturing mother, the way she was with her pets. I thought she'd make a great mother when her baby was born. As a side attraction, I was impressed by the mound on display in Lamas' jockey shorts. Back before it was fashionable, he had his tailor make pants for him that were very tight in the crotch. As he once told me, 'If you've got it, flaunt it. It turns on the horny women and the gay boys.'"

In the movie, rich girl Elizabeth and her crooked lawyer father (Powell) are watching a telecast of a Capitol Hill crime commission investigating the illegal rackets of gangster Lamas.

"What's he like?" Elizabeth's character asked her screen father, who plays the gangster's lawyer. "Is he married?"

He answers that the gangster, Victor Ramondi, "is an animal." This does-n't turn off Elizabeth, but piques her sexual curiosity. The stage is set for the debut of a dangerous romance.



Two views of **Fernando Lamas** lower photo:
Foreplay with **Liz**

At one point, Lamas grabs her on screen and kisses her passionately. "You're no gentleman," she says to him. But it's obvious that she's excited by the kiss.

When Thorpe saw the rushes, he knew that to make the film go over at the box office, he needed to direct

(within reason) scenes of passionate lovemaking onscreen between Lamas and Elizabeth.

Thorpe decided to write a scene himself at night, giving his stars their scripts in the morning. For their first passionate love scene, Lamas knocked on Elizabeth's dressing room door to rehearse with her. She brazenly answered the door in her bra and panties.

As she would later relay to Dick Hanley, "Fernando practically devoured me when we were pretending to rehearse. Call it gaucho charisma. When he turns on the charm, the sexual dynamic is irresistible. What is a poor little British girl like me to do with the guy's tongue down my throat and his skilled fingers reaching into my panties? He's a sex machine. Even a strong-willed woman like Evita Peron could not hold him at bay."

Thorpe was so pleased with their love scene, he wrote three more. "Their chemistry exploded on the screen. I predicted that they would become the screen's new love team—Garbo and Gilbert, Gable and Harlow."

The movie was doubly explosive for its time in that Powell treats Elizabeth like his girlfriend instead of like his daughter.

"Lamas had a keen sense of humor," Thorpe said. "On the set, he and Liz were always joking around and whispering secrets to each other, acting like two school kids. I was very serious about bringing this movie in on time before she dumped that baby on the set."

"The way they were carrying on really pissed me off," he said. "After all, I wasn't getting in on the action. They could at least have let me watch, or perhaps film it for my later viewing pleasure."

The film was wrapped on August 4, 1952, and Elizabeth went home to await the birth of her baby.

After editing Elizabeth's scenes with Lamas, Thorpe at a private screening showed them to Thau. When the lights went on, Thau rose in fury and denounced his director. "What in fuck is wrong with you? You've made a blue movie. All these scenes have to be cut."

Thorpe was furious, but had no choice. That's why the film today is only seventy minutes long.

The third male lead in *The Girl Who Had Everything* went to Gig Young, who never achieved the major stardom he so longed for, in spite of his good looks and charm. He was known mainly for second leads and supporting roles.

Thorpe claimed that even though Young was married at the time, "He fell big time for Liz. I think he walked around the set with a perpetual erection."

"I lost out to Lamas both on the screen and in real life," Young recalled. "She flirted with me and was the ultimate prick teaser. Even so, we became friends."

When Elizabeth met Young, he had divorced his second wife, Sophie Rosenstein, in 1952, and had not remarried. In 1956, he wed Elizabeth Montgomery. "I was a bachelor-at-large and raring to go when Elizabeth walked onto the set," he recalled. "We had four 'official' dates but not a lot came from it. We were just out for fun, nothing too serious."

"I'm not going to say if we did it or not, as it's nobody's god damn business. She always had a boyfriend and a husband stashed away somewhere. She warned me about my excessive drinking, but then, she wasn't one to point fingers."

"Our relationship finally devolved into phone calls, but she was also supportive and encouraged me," Young said. "She gave me a little party when I won the Oscar."

In 1969, Young appeared in *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, starring Jane Fonda. His Academy Award was for Best Supporting Actor in that film.

[Elizabeth was horrified to learn of her co-star's death in 1978. His career was in decline because of his alcoholism. That same year, he'd married a 21-year-old German woman, Kim Schmidt. On October 19, three weeks into his marriage, the police found the newly married couple dead in their Manhattan apartment. Young had shot his wife and then shot himself in a murder/suicide. The motive for the killings has never been made clear.

Elizabeth had her own speculation. "Gig had a dark side to him, and that is one of the reasons I never got too involved with him. One night in my car—he was too drunk to drive—we were heading up the coast to Malibu with me at the wheel. He kept urging me to go faster, and I refused. At one point, he pressed down on my foot with his big left foot. The accelerator was pressed against the floor. I screamed that I was losing control of the car since I was not the world's greatest driver. I almost crashed head-on into an oncoming truck. At that speed we would have been killed instantly. At the last minute, he took his foot off mine, and I brought the car under

control. I never went out with him again.”

Elizabeth told Roddy McDowall that the last time she'd talked to Young, he complained bitterly that he'd become impotent. He cited that as the reason for his wanting to marry a girl the age Elizabeth was when he first worked with her.

“He was very despondent, and he seemed to have plunged deeper and deeper into the bottle,” Elizabeth said. “Obviously, the marriage to that girl didn't work out as he planned. He had a lot of pride. Maybe she said things to him and mocked him as a man. We'll never know.”]

Elizabeth was pregnant throughout most of the shoot, and her weight really ballooned at the very end, going from 112 pounds to 155 pounds before term. She was no longer capable, with any believable continuity, of facing the camera, and MGM put her on a limited suspension, lowering her salary back to \$2,000 a week until she could face the cameras once again after childbirth.



Gig Young, in happier times

When she was placed on suspension, Elizabeth had some choice words for Thau and Dore Schary—“Shitassed motherfucking faggot cock-suckers.” At least that is what her friend, author Truman Capote, later attributed to her.

Setting out on a house hunt, Elizabeth announced, “I need a nest in which to hatch the egg.”

Her friend, George MacLean, was a talented architect, and he designed a home in Beverly Hills especially for her. It was surrounded by a wall and had a locked gate which was electronically controlled from inside the house as a means of blocking out overeager fans.

“The architecture and landscape were perfectly integrated,” she later wrote. “Both house and garden seemed enchanted, like a scene from a fairy tale. Michael and I scraped the money together and bought the place.”

Elizabeth also got Thau to advance her \$50,000 as the down payment on her dream house. To make the full nut, she withdrew all the money set aside for her in bonds under the Jackie Coogan law for child stars. The bonds she cashed brought in \$47,000. Any money left over went for the payment of pediatric bills.

In the spring of 1952, the Wildings bought the house at 1771 Summitridge in Beverly Hills. Even though she'd been married twice, Elizabeth had enough clout to get Thau to grant her mother a contract paying \$300 a week, designating Sara as her “chaperone,” a position usually reserved for child stars.

Elizabeth and Michael moved into the house before it was fully furnished. He wanted to ship over some of his English antiques, which had been in storage in London, but she demanded that everything be modern.

In their new kitchen, she explained the new diet that would be in effect if he expected her to cook. “I can pop corn, make fudge, and cook bacon and eggs. Sometimes I burn the bacon, though. But my specialty, a never-fail dish, is sliced tomatoes and capers fried in bacon grease.”

During Elizabeth's pregnancy, Wilding decided he much preferred the life of a painter instead of that of an actor. He practiced his painting by drawing faces on her distended stomach. She'd bought a dozen maternity blouses in rainbow-hued colors, and at parties she'd lift the garment to show off, not only her belly, but

Wilding's latest artistic endeavors.

A pregnant Elizabeth and Wilding were asleep in their bedroom when they heard an urgent ringing of their doorbell. Someone had obviously circumvented their locked gated. "Who in hell is it at this hour?" a drowsy Elizabeth asked.

"I'll see," he said, before going downstairs. She heard voices in the hallway. Wilding seemed to be talking to some hysterical woman. In about ten minutes, he called up the stairs for Elizabeth: "It's Lana!," he shouted at her. "Come on down."

In the living room, Elizabeth encountered Lana Turner sitting on her sofa, nervously smoking a cigarette and belting down a glass of vodka.

A turban crowned her head, and her bruised face was not made up. On seeing Elizabeth, she burst into tears. Elizabeth sat beside her on the sofa and embraced her; "What is it, darling?"

"It's too horrible," Turner said.

At first, Elizabeth was horrified, thinking that somehow Turner had learned about her studio romance with her boyfriend, Lamas, on the set of *The Girl Who Had Everything*, and that she'd come to raise hell about it. But that was not the case.

Wilding was already well acquainted with Lamas, since he'd starred with Greer Garson and him in *The Law and the Lady* (1951). He filled Elizabeth in on what had occurred the night before, telling her what Turner had just confided to him.

Turner and her live-in lover, Lamas, had been a guest at a party thrown by Marion Davies in Santa Monica. The mistress of William Randolph Hearst was known for her fabulous parties.

When Lex Barker, the screen's Tarzan, came into the party, Turner did not suppress her immense attraction to the handsome hulk. Unknown to Turner, Elizabeth had already sampled the wares of this astonishingly attractive male, and she couldn't blame Turner for her response to his immense sex appeal.

"Apparently, Lamas went into a jealous rage when Lana here was dancing too close to Barker," Wilding said. "They had a public row. Shouting, threats, face slapping—the works."

"We fought all the way back to my house," Turner said, regaining her composure. "Once we got inside my hallway, Lamas attacked me. I fell on the floor, and he kicked me in the ribs. He pounded my face, threatening to destroy my beauty. I screamed and tried to protect my face from the blows of this hot-tempered jerk. I threatened to call the police and I ordered him out of my house... forever."

Elizabeth was well aware that Wilding was set to appear in his first MGM film, *Latin Lovers*, with Turner and Lamas.

"I can't work with the bastard now," Turner said. "I need Michael's support. I want him to take me to Benny Thau's office this morning. *Latin Lovers* is about to go before the cameras, and I refuse to do the picture with Lamas."

"Michael, get dressed, and I'll get Lana some coffee," Elizabeth said. Then she turned to Lana. "You look in bad shape. You can't face the cameras today."

Over coffee, Elizabeth told Turner that Wilding had serious reservations about his own role in *Latin Lovers*. He'd been cast as the second male lead. "Your meeting with Thau will give Michael a chance to air his own grievances."

"There's an obvious replacement for Lamas," Turner told her. "Ricardo Montalban."

"There's irony here," Elizabeth said. "The Argentine beefsteak was imported to Hollywood to replace Ricardo. But if Thau goes for it, Ricardo could indeed replace Lamas."

"Lamas told me that the difference between Latin and Anglo-Saxon men is that a Latin will give you a little more of everything—more headaches, more temper, more tenderness," Turner said, ruefully. "I got the temper and the headaches."

An hour after Wilding left to drive Turner to MGM, Lamas placed a call to Elizabeth. She reported to him what had just transpired in her living room.

"The bitch blames me for our breakup," Lamas said. "But when *Jungle Boy* came into the room, Lana threw herself at him. She danced with him, rubbing her body up against him. When I could stand it no more, I jumped up and confronted her on the dance floor. I told Barker, 'Why don't you just take her out into the bushes and

fuck her?"

"She slapped my face," Lamas said, "and I called her a fucking cunt. Back at her house, the reason I got violent was because she kicked me in the co-jones."

Elizabeth warned him that Turner was in Thau's office, trying to get him replaced by Montalban.

"That fucking spick," Lamas said. "If I get fired from that picture, I want you to promise me one thing. As soon as you dump Wilding's kid, will you insist that I be your leading man in your next movie, whatever it is?"

"I faithfully promise I'll do that," she said.

"And Liz," he said, "as soon as the baby comes, and you're ready for action South of the Border style, you know who to call."

"I'll keep that in mind," she said.

Lamas and Elizabeth never mated again, as Arlene Dahl and Esther Williams were waiting to snatch him.

When Wilding came home that afternoon from MGM, he looked downcast. "I was put on suspension," he said. Then he sat down with Elizabeth in the living room to tell her what had happened that day in Thau's office.

"Lana got her wish," he said, "but I'm on suspension. Without Pay."

"What in hell are you talking about?" she demanded.

"After Lana's problem was solved, I told Thau how disappointed I was with the shitty role he was offering me in Latin Lovers. I attacked my role, and told him it wasn't suitable for an actor of my stature. That's when he hit the ceiling."

"Mikey, you shouldn't have said that," she said.

"I know that now," he said. "He described my status as something as low as a piss ant. He told me that the only reason I was hired in the first place was because I was married to Elizabeth Taylor—and for no other reason. My paycheck won't resume until Latin Lovers is wrapped."

"You arrogant prick!" she shouted at him. "We desperately need the money, and I'm already on suspension. I practically had to get down on bended nylon and give Thau a Nancy Davis-style blow-job to get the loan for this house!"

Elizabeth became so furious that Wilding had to flee from the house, driving over to the home of Stewart Granger, where he'd first lived when he came to Hollywood. Granger was still his best friend and part-time lover, and he always turned to him during moments of crisis.

"As you know, I'm a mild-mannered man, and Elizabeth almost had me fearing for my life, especially when she started throwing things," Wilding said. "She became a wildcat, intent on devouring a pound of human flesh."

"It was our first big fight," Wilding told Granger. Although he and Elizabeth had moved out of the Granger house into their own home, he later moved back in again for a week. When Elizabeth rages, I'm no match for her."

The only way Wilding was accepted back into the house with Elizabeth was when he promised to call Thau and accept the role in Latin Lovers.

"Too late, you limey prick!" Thau shouted at him. "Yesterday, I contracted with John Lund to play the role." Then he slammed down the phone.

Elizabeth warned Wilding to take the next role he was offered by MGM after he went off suspension—"Even if you're forced to dress in drag."

Before the birth of his son, and with no film work, Wilding had plenty of time to spare when Elizabeth was away during the day at work. His bisexual friend, Robert Taylor, who had starred with Elizabeth in *Ivanhoe*, had divorced Barbara Stanwyck and was free once again to engage in indiscriminate sex, the way he'd done in the 1930s when he was hailed as "Hollywood's Pretty Boy."

Ever since they'd met in England, Robert Taylor and Michael Wilding had had a strong physical attraction for each other. In October and November of 1952, Taylor invited Wilding on two different hunting trips to Idaho. Taylor liked to hunt and Wilding didn't, but Elizabeth's husband did appreciate, however, the wilds of America's Northwest and he enjoyed exploring it with a companion as charming and handsome as Taylor.

Beside a campfire one night, Taylor confessed to Wilding that he'd proposed to Elizabeth during the filming of *Conspirator*, even though she'd been only seventeen at the time.

"I was a little drunk and I was half joking, but I shared with her a letter I'd received from a rich woman in Texas who was worth millions. She wrote that Elizabeth and I had the same coloring, that both of us had jet black hair, blue eyes, and were fabulous looking. She wanted us to have a kid together for which she would pay each of us a million dollars. At first, I thought it was a joke, but then I called the woman and talked to her for an hour. She not only had those millions—and a lot more—she was willing to post the money in bond. Along with my marriage proposal to Liz, I told her about the offer. She took it seriously, and maybe I was serious, too. At any rate, she rejected my proposal. I know that you and Liz are strapped for cash. Maybe you can talk her into selling your first born. It would certainly alleviate your financial burden."

"You know, I'm British, and we're a cynical people, cold hearted," Wilding said. "We love our dogs more than our children. Frankly, if that woman is still around, and if that offer still holds, I'd go for it. But it's hopeless. Elizabeth would file for divorce immediately. I know her too well."

Ironically, Elizabeth in her future would end up buying a baby instead of selling one.

In addition to Robert Taylor, Wilding was also well-acquainted with another of Hollywood's fading heartthrobs, Errol Flynn.

Wilding had been introduced to Flynn at two parties. But their actual friendship began at Le Touquet on the English Channel on the northern coast of France, when Wilding's boat, which he had named *Folie de Grandeur* had moored alongside Flynn's yacht, *The Medina*.

Wilding owned the boat jointly with Stewart Granger. Although Wilding hardly knew Flynn at the time, he called out to him, "Hiya, Mike, come aboard."

Wilding recalled his inaugural meeting with Flynn in his memoirs, *The Wilding Way*. "Errol invited me down below to see his all-black bathroom, a first for me, including a black bidet."

The two actors spent the rest of the day drinking champagne aboard *The Medina*. At any rate, an intimate friendship was formed between these two playboys.

Once he moved to Hollywood, Wilding was eager to resume his friendship with Flynn, and the swashbuckler seemed more than eager to hook up with him again, too.

At the time of Wilding's reunion with him, Flynn still owned his hilltop home on Mulholland Drive before his creditors took it away from him. Wilding arrived at twilight, since Elizabeth had announced her intention of spending the evening with Sara. He recalled Flynn taking him into the garden, where he could see the twinkling lights of Hollywood. "From this vantage point, I can piss down on Warners," Flynn told him.

Wilding was also invited into Flynn's private den, its walls covered with photographs of naked women. "I took each of these pictures myself," Flynn boasted.

What Wilding left out of his memoirs was that Flynn, shortly before midnight, showed him a "blue movie loop" of him making love to a very young Elizabeth.

Instead of being outraged, Wilding, as he'd later relay to Granger, was "indulgent" with Flynn, and actually got turned on by the pornographic film.

Flynn later told actor Bruce Cabot and others, "Where Michael Wilding and Elizabeth Taylor are concerned, I was like Julius Caesar—that is, a husband to every wife and a wife to every husband."

During his status as an out-of-work actor in Hollywood, Wilding had a number of other encounters with some of the top stars of Hollywood. He was seen at one point leaving Judy Garland's suite at the Beverly Hills Hotel.

"The only break in my lonely day was a lunchtime visit to Elizabeth at the studio. There, I was surrounded by famous names all in make-up doing a day's work, while I tagged along as Elizabeth's side like a tame poodle."

One of his most memorable encounters, which he relayed in a highly edited version in his memoirs, involved yet another encounter with Marilyn Monroe. He recalled that he was in the garden of his home on Summitridge painting one afternoon when he heard the doorbell ring. When he opened the door, he was startled to find Monroe standing there.

In a breathless voice, she told him that her photographer was taking publicity stills of her and wanted to use Elizabeth Taylor's home as a picturesque background.

"I need a place to change my outfits," she told him.

"Say no more," Wilding replied. "Welcome to Chez Wilding." Ushering her inside, he told her that Elizabeth was at the studio and that she could use their bedroom.

Throughout the rest of the afternoon, Marilyn was running in and out of the house, changing costumes. When the photo shoot was over, he offered her a glass of champagne.

She smiled at him, "Do you mind if I take my shoes off?"

"Take off anything you like," he told her.

Although he left his readers dangling at this point in his memoirs, apparently Monroe pulled off everything and stood before him. "Please make me feel like a pulled-together woman and not like a cracked egg. That is, my face all coming apart—you know, my eyes pointing in two directions and two noses like a Picasso painting."

From his later reports to Granger, it was determined that Wilding, "Like the staunch Englishman I am, I did my duty for Queen and Country."

In a few short years, he mourned the early deaths of his friends, Flynn and Robert Taylor, and also the demise of Monroe, asserting, "She died so tragically young."

Back in Hollywood, Monty called Elizabeth to tell her that he was making pictures again. "I want to see you, of course, but my main reason for doing so is to feel your belly. I want to know how big it is."

She agreed to meet him at his favorite dive in Malibu, Mary's, which was popular with gay couples. Cozy and intimate, it had only eight tables and was run by a friend of Monty's, Betsy Jane Elkin, recently from Georgia. She operated the place entirely by herself, including doing the cooking and waiting on tables. Sometimes Monty was behind the bar, mixing drinks for her customers.

Monty told Elizabeth that he was attracted to Betsy Jane because she managed all the chores with a wooden leg.

Within the cozy bistro, Elizabeth gorged herself, ordering two bowls of pasta (lasagna and tortellini). Monty had never seen her this fat. "I'm eating for two people," she said.

At table, with Betsy Jane providing the food and friendly service, Elizabeth and Monty talked and talked...and then talked some more. "It was one of our marathon gabfests," she later recalled.

Regarding her disastrous marriage to Nicky Hilton, he wanted to know, "How is Life With Father?" He was referring to both her 1947 film and also to her new life with Wilding.

"There are problems," she said. "He doesn't like being Mr. Elizabeth Taylor. In London, he was a big deal in films. Here, he's on suspension. Mostly he's a housewife—somebody's got to do it. You know me, the biggest slob in the world."

"When is the baby due?" he asked.

"In January," she said. "I was thinking of making you the godfather."

"Oh, Bessie Mae, I can't even look after myself, much less take care of your child, if you and Michael were killed in an accident."

It was three o'clock in the morning when Betsy Jane served their last round of drinks. Closing time was usually at midnight. "I've got to paint this little bistro of mine before I open tomorrow night, and I've got to start now."

Elizabeth later asserted that she and Monty joined in. "It was a lot of fun. We painted the walls until eight o'clock that morning. Betsy Jane and Monty got up on a ladder. Because of my condition, I painted the lower part."

When she finally got home, it was nine o'clock in the morning. Wilding was in a nervous state, fearing something had happened to her since she had not bothered to phone. When he discovered that she'd been out all night with Monty, he became enraged. "So you've been out fucking the man you're really in love with and wanted to marry."

"Like hell, I have!" she said. "You stand a better chance of fucking Monty than I do. I'm going to bed and don't wake me until two o'clock this afternoon. Then I'll want breakfast in bed."

She saw Monty on three other occasions before he had to fly to Rome for the filming of Terminal Station

(1953) for David O. Selznick. It was later retitled *Indiscretion of an American Housewife*. Selznick had cast his wife, Jennifer Jones, in the lead role of this picture directed by Vittorio de Sica.

Elizabeth later learned that Jones fell madly in love with Monty during the filming. When she discovered that he was a homosexual, she became hysterical and had to be sedated.

When Monty returned to Hollywood, Elizabeth noted that he'd lost weight, which he could not afford to do. "You can borrow some extra pounds from me," she volunteered.

On his first night back, they dined at Mary's again, admiring the new paint job. He told her that he'd signed to play one of the key roles in the filming of the James Jones bestseller, *From Here to Eternity*, set on the eve of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The other stars included Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr, with Frank Sinatra in a supporting role.

Before her dinner with Monty, Elizabeth had received an urgent phone call from "my first flame," John Derek. He told her that Harry Cohn, the head of Columbia Pictures, wanted him to play the role of the renegade boxer, Prewitt, in the film, but that the director, Fred Zinnemann, was holding out for Monty.

"Oh, John, I'd love to help you, but I have no say in casting at Columbia. Hell, I don't even have any influence over who's cast in my own pictures."

"Monty listens to you, and if you try really hard, you can get him to drop out—I know you can," Derek asserted. "Don't you see, my career is going nowhere. This is going to be a big picture. I could win an Oscar, be taken seriously as an actor. It would be a new beginning."

"The only thing I can promise is that I'll talk it over with Monty," she said.

"Elizabeth..." He hesitated, as if reluctant to say what he was going to. "You know I'm called the best looking guy in Hollywood, and I don't have to tell you I've got a big dick. It can all be yours again if you'll do this for me."

She was insulted by such an offer, but, according to Dick Hanley, Elizabeth confessed that she "covered up my feelings and promised John that I'd get back to him." Of course, she never did, and Monty kept the role in spite of Cohn's objections.

After dinner at Mary's, Elizabeth and Monty retreated to the Beverly Hills home of Oscar Levant. There, the pianist played Cole Porter tunes for them, as they sat on his sofa, holding hands and occasionally kissing. Sometimes, he'd feel her baby bump, telling her that one day he hoped to become a father himself.

She remembered the night at Levant's as "one of the most tranquil and relaxing of my life. It's what could have been between Monty and me."

Elizabeth remained out of touch with Monty, still her best friend, during his shooting of scenes for *From Here to Eternity* in Hawaii.

After the filming was over in Hawaii, director Zinnemann ordered the cast and crew back to Hollywood, where the final interiors would be shot at Columbia. For a brief time, Monty, along with Frank Sinatra and Merv Griffin, were staying at the Roosevelt Hotel. For many months, Monty had been a roommate of Griffin's.

Before seeing either Sinatra or Monty, Elizabeth was invited to lunch with Griffin at the Brown Derby. He warned her that Sinatra and Monty had been in such bad shape that it was a miracle they'd gotten through the picture at all. "Monty paid for me to fly down there," Griffin said. "I had nothing to do but be the nursemaid for those guys. They didn't just drink. Both of them poured it down their throats. It was frightening. They seemed to want to drink themselves into oblivion."

"Monty has his usual demons," Griffin told her. "And although Frank is at the nadir of his career and owes \$150,000 in back taxes, Harry Cohn at Columbia is paying him only \$8,000 for his role in the film. That hardly covers Frank's bar tab."

She told him that she was scheduled to see Monty for dinner that night.

"He's in real bad shape," Griffin said. "Sometimes, at three o'clock in the morning, he hangs dangerously out of the hotel window, tooting his bugle. The manager is threatening to kick us out."

"Frank is in even worse shape," Griffin told her. "His vocal cords have hemorrhaged, MCA [his theatrical agent] has dropped him. There are no more movie deals. And Ava is off fucking other guys."

"The other night, I woke up early in the morning and discovered Frank nude on the bathroom floor, an empty bottle of sleeping pills beside him," Griffin said. "He appeared to be dead. But we called an ambulance and got

him to the hospital on time. He told me he'd learned that Ava had flown to London to have their baby aborted."

That night at dinner, Elizabeth saw firsthand that Griffin had not exaggerated. Monty had lost weight, was chain smoking and drinking excessively, and at times, was seized by a condition where his entire body trembled nervously.

She tried to reassure him, telling him that she'd heart reports from Zinne-mann that his role in From Here to Eternity was going to win him an Oscar.

"Big fucking deal," he said. "I'll use the bare-assed statue for a doorstop."

A week later, Elizabeth received an urgent phone call from Griffin, pleading with her to come to their suite at the Roosevelt Hotel.

Once there, she found that Monty had been severely beaten. Like a nurturing mother, she held him in her arms and comforted him.

From Griffin, she learned what had happened: Since Hawaii, Sinatra and Monty had been sleeping nude in the same bed together after more than one of their drunken nights. But apparently, Monty had finally confessed to Sinatra that he was in love with him. Up to then, theirs had not been a sexual relationship, but was what in later years might be described as a "bromance."

Outside the bedroom, Griffin told Elizabeth, "I think a declaration of love from Monty was more than Frank could take. He wasn't going to go from the arms of Ava Gardner into the arms of Monty Clift. No way! Not Frank!"

He also told her, "I'm checking out of here. Frank has already packed his bags. Please look after Monty and take care of him."

That morning, Elizabeth drove Monty to her doctor, who found he had no broken bones, but was in a critical condition. Her doctor warned her, "He's got to stop drinking or he'll die."

In the days ahead, she went by every evening to nurse him back to health. One night, she arrived and found strangers living in his suite. The manager informed her that Monty had checked out that morning.

The next day she reached him at his apartment in New York. "I just had to leave Hollywood," he said. "I was smothering to death. I'm not going to appear in another movie unless it's with you."

During the closing days of 1952, Michael and Elizabeth were invited to a New Year's Eve party at the home of their recent hosts, Stewart Granger and Jean Simmons. Currently, the London-based guests living with them temporarily were Richard Burton and his wife, Sybil Williams, an actress.

In later years, Granger would claim, "Burton was a clever actor, but a shit, an absolute shit."

In contrast, when he first came to Hollywood, the bisexual Granger had been powerfully attracted to Burton, although not avoiding dalliances with Wilding as well. Elizabeth was aware of Granger's sexual interest in Burton, but she learned far more about her future husband's sexual adventures when she attended the Granger party.

As she headed for the kitchen, Burton was telling Granger and James Mason, fellow British actors, about his recent sexual fling with Marilyn Monroe. Elizabeth dallied at the entrance, wanting to hear what he was saying without making Burton aware of her presence. She would remember virtually every word and write it down in her diary, which one night in her future, she'd read to him.

"Unlike many of the guys she's slept with, I can't offer her shit," Burton claimed. "We're doing it just for fun. She's incredibly beautiful and very sexy, but she's a studio plaything at Fox. Yet she is the loneliest lady I've ever met. She's like a lost little girl wandering around a crowded room, even if surrounded by hot-to-trot blokes. She told me she loves my voice, and I told her I love her body. After coitus, I recited poetry to her, and she actually cried. I am reciting, and she kisses my pimply neck. Call it poetic love. We're still going at it. It's blinding hot passion, but I don't dare fall in love with her. I'm getting put off by hearing so much about her promiscuity. In a way, I don't want to go where so many other men have gone before me. She's really a prostitute."

"Don't you think you're being a bit harsh, old boy?" Granger asked.

"What in the fuck do you call a woman who offers sex in return for career advancement? I also went after

Miss Olivia de Havilland, while we've been filming *My Cousin Rachel*, but I don't think Miss de Havilland is succumbing to my charms. She told someone, 'Burton is a coarse-grained man with a coarse-grained charm and a talent not completely developed.' She may be right. I don't know what in hell I'm doing in front of a camera."

At that point, Elizabeth decided it would be discreet to enter the room.

Seeing her, Burton said, "Let's get Mrs. Wilding's opinion on the subject. Elizabeth, do you think Marilyn Monroe is as sexy as they say?"

Knowing that the actors were not aware that she'd eavesdropped, she snapped, "Not at all! I hear she's frigid and no man has ever given her an orgasm. Now get out of my way, gents. Who do you have to fuck around here to get a drink?"

Until midnight, Burton, as Elizabeth observed, spent the entire night dancing with Jean Simmons. He held her lasciviously close, rubbing his body up against her. A television set was blaring about the countdown to midnight, and what the world might expect from the New Year.

Elizabeth was stunned when Burton began kissing Simmons. He continued to kiss her as the old year faded and the new year began. Elizabeth was rewarded with a "hen peck" on her lips from Wilding, followed by a "deep throat" kiss from Granger.

When she broke away from Granger, she noted that he, too, was aware of how Burton was kissing his beautiful young wife, but laughed it off. As Elizabeth later said, "What could Stewart say? React with jealousy? Like hell. Burton was plowing Stewart's ass as well as Jean's. It was obvious."

She noticed Sybil standing in a corner of the room, looking on in anger at her husband as he was kissing another man's wife. Finally, when Sybil could take it no more, she walked over and slapped Burton across the face.

From that point on, the New Year revelers lapsed into a stony silence.

Pamela, the wife of James Mason, later asserted that "Sybil's slap resounded across the room like a bomb blasting off."

Sybil rushed sobbing to her bedroom, as Burton chased after her. Granger, at long last, stepped in front of his own wife and belatedly extended the tongue so recently sampled by Elizabeth.

Elizabeth tugged at Wilding's sleeve. "Let's get the hell out of here."

The next day, Elizabeth called Granger. He treated the whole event rather matter-of-factly. "Sybil became a bit bored with Jean and me. She moved out this morning. Burton left with her. They are going to be living with James and Pamela Mason. Sybil will have no problem with James going after her. But she'd better watch him with Burton. James told me that for the past three years, he's had the hots for Burton."

After an examination, Elizabeth's doctor, M.E. Anberg, showed her some alarming X-rays of her fetus. Her umbilical cord had shifted its position. "It now runs the risk of being wrapped around the baby's neck and could choke him. You must have a Caesarian."

Born by Caesarian section on January 6, 1953, Elizabeth's first baby entered the world as Michael Howard Wilding, Jr. Weighing seven pounds and three ounces, the baby shocked her doctor and the attending nurses. As it came out of the womb, it already had a thick crop of black hair, evoking the birth of Elizabeth in London in 1932.

Coincidentally, Elizabeth's first baby was delivered in the same Santa Monica hospital room where Shirley Temple had been born. Elizabeth predicted that Michael Jr. would grow up to become a child star like Temple had. The fan magazines reported that Elizabeth was "deliriously happy and madly in love."

After the birth of her boy, Benny Thau at MGM ordered that Elizabeth report to him every two weeks so he could monitor her weight. Almost exhibitionistically, she had her strip down to her bra and panties for an intimate inspection.

While on a crash diet, she lost two film roles, the first, *Young Bess* (1953), which went to Jean Simmons, who appeared opposite her husband, Stewart Granger. "Elizabeth threw a jealous fit," according to Wilding, but managed to restrain herself around Simmons.

She also lost a leading role in another movie, *All the Brothers Were Valiant* (1953). Director Richard Thorpe, who didn't want to work with Elizabeth again, assigned her part to Ann Blyth. As such, Elizabeth lost the chance to work with her friends, the film's male leads, Robert Taylor and Stewart Granger. Granger called her, "Listen, fatty, when are you going to slim down so we can make a picture together?"

She turned down *Roman Holiday* (1953), and regretted it for the rest of her life, as it made a major star out of Audrey Hepburn. A former ballet dancer who fled Nazi-occupied Holland, Hepburn would be launched into major stardom playing a princess opposite Gregory Peck in *Roman Holiday*.

Throughout the rest of her life, Elizabeth would be compared unfavorably to Hepburn, who represented style and elegance on the screen. Each actress would also vie for the title of "The World's Most Beautiful Woman."

In 1953, Elizabeth went to Benny Thau's office and virtually begged him to lobby for her to win the role of *The Barefoot Contessa* (1954), a script based loosely on the tumultuous life of Rita Hayworth. "Please, please, please, Benny," she beseeched him.

When Thau called the picture's director, Joseph L. Mankiewicz, he said, "No way. Ava Gardner has already been cast. She's fucking Joseph Schenck." He was the head of United Artists, which was financing *The Barefoot Contessa*.

Elizabeth also turned down the lead female role in *Elephant Walk* (1954), a picture scheduled for filming in Ceylon. The coveted role went eventually to Vivien Leigh instead.

Since Elizabeth was growing increasingly bored with Wilding, she often staged suppers which she would have her local delicatessen prepare for her, since she didn't know how to cook. Their guests were strictly from the A-list. Monty was invited to every gathering, as were Stewart Granger, Jean Simmons, Roddy McDowall, Dick Hanley, Spencer Tracy, Katharine Hepburn (but only sometimes), Errol Flynn, and Humphrey Bogart. On many a night, Judy Garland sang for the supper guests.

At the party, Richard Burton showed up without his wife, Sybil. He'd been on three straight nights of prodigal drinking and what he preferred to call "rampant wenching." He sat with Garland and Elizabeth, as his hand traveled up Garland's dress. She did not resist, as she was known for unzipping her dance partners on the floor and checking out the merchandise.

Burton told Elizabeth and Garland, "I'll never divorce Sybil, and she'll never divorce me, because she loves me and understands me. Not only that, she, above all, knows I'm a genius."

After Burton departed, Elizabeth said, "There goes 1952's Toast of Hollywood—a man likely to continue as the town's toast throughout 1953 as well."

Then, sarcastically, she glanced over at Wilding and said about him, "And there stands a man who in Hollywood is just toast."

"Then he's welcome to join my club," Garland said. "We can call my clan of has-beens 'the Post-Toasties Club.'"

Later that night, Elizabeth became much too drunk and denounced Wilding in front of their guests as if she were already rehearsing her role in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966). "I want a man made out of flesh and blood, not some well-mannered wax dummy from Madame Tussauds."

Dick Hanley, who still seemed to know everything going on in the film world, even in remote parts of the globe, kept her informed of the scandals whirling around the making of *Elephant Walk* in Ceylon.

Hanley told her that Vivien Leigh's mental and physical condition was deteriorating rapidly, and that feelers would be going out in February of 1953 to see if Elizabeth was willing to reclaim the role, originally intended for her.

Time magazine did not approve the casting of Elizabeth in *Elephant Walk*: "Elizabeth Taylor, though very beautiful, is too young and inexperienced an actress to fill a role designed for Vivien Leigh."

The final scenes of *Elephant Walk* were to be shot in Hollywood. From Ceylon, Leigh arrived in California, but her mental condition had deteriorated so rapidly that Paramount had to fire her.

With Leigh out of the picture, Paramount negotiated with MGM for a loan-out because of Elizabeth's physical resemblance to Leigh. Because of their similarities, many of the long distance shots of Leigh filmed in Ceylon could be retained for the final cut.

After learning that MGM had signed a contract to lend her out to Paramount for \$150,000, Elizabeth stormed

into Benny Thau's office and demanded a raise.

"You're getting ten times my full salary," she shouted at Thau.

"Tell me something I don't already know," he said sarcastically. "A contract is a contract. You signed it!"

"So you won't give me a raise, even if I come by every morning and suck you off?" she asked.

"No raise. Now get out. You're such a whore."

Bitchily commenting on Elizabeth's weight gain during the birth of her first son, Hedda Hopper wrote "The title of Elephant Walk fits Elizabeth Taylor perfectly, considering the new ballooning figure she shows off to the world."

At the moment she read that, Elizabeth was "living mainly on ice cubes and fruit juices."

As a heavily tranquilized Leigh was put on an airplane from Los Angeles headed back to London, Elizabeth began shooting interior scenes for Elephant Walk, having regained her full pay and her former figure. She resumed work on March 19, 1953.

Elizabeth was only twenty-one when she shouldered the burden of the movie role that Leigh had abandoned, and submitted to the direction of William Dieterle.

"When a reporter asked Elizabeth if she liked Leigh as an actress, Elizabeth asserted that she did. "She has an innocence bordering on decadence."

On the first day of shooting, she told Dieterle. "My character of Ruth Wiley is rather underwritten. This appears to be a rather weak fable of men and pachyderms, with me brought in for female relief from all this macho shit."

She continued with Dieterle: "I know that you just directed Rita Hayworth in Salome; you've directed Bette Davis, and even gave Charles Laughton his hunchback, but now you're faced with Elizabeth Taylor. I want to look fucking gorgeous in this piece of crap. Got that?"

The director's final summation of Elizabeth on screen—"Beautiful but dull. In private, however, she's beautiful but hardly dull. She's a regular little harridan. I wish my leading men, Mr. Finch and Mr. Andrews, had put more energy into their roles instead of satisfying Miss Taylor's insatiable lusts. Michael Wilding could never satisfy that maneater."

Actually, Laurence Olivier, Leigh's husband, was originally slated to play the role that went to Peter Finch. In the story, the owner (John Wiley, as played by Finch) of a tea plantation in Ceylon courts Elizabeth in England, then marries this "lovely English rose" and takes her back to Ceylon. The sprawling manor house (identified coyly in the script as "a bungalow") was built directly astride the pathway used for centuries by migrating elephants. On site, facing a preoccupied and indifferent husband, the character played by Elizabeth develops a passion for Dick Carver (as played by Dana Andrews), the plantation's manager.

Elizabeth referred to Elephant Walk as "the Ceylonese version of Rebecca." Dieterle asserted that Elizabeth had been "fatally miscast. Who in hell would believe that Finch would prefer to hang out with his buddies instead of going upstairs and fucking his wife...unless, of course, he preferred sex with his mates? That would be the only reasonable explanation as to why Finch would ignore the sexual needs of a wife like Taylor."

Because of complications, Elephant Walk ended up costing \$3 million, the most expensive Paramount Picture ever made up until that time.

Elizabeth slipped into Leigh's scenes with professional ease until few movie-goers could detect which actress was which, especially in long shots (nearly all of which focused on Leigh) or when the character of Ruth Wiley shows her back to the camera in certain scenes. Of course, all of Leigh's close-ups ended on the cutting room floor and had to be reshot with Elizabeth.



Brunettes menaced by elephants: **Vivien Leigh** (left) and **Elizabeth Taylor**

Upon its release, *Elephant Walk* was savaged by the critics, Leonard Maltin claiming that the “pachyderm stampede climax comes none too soon.”

Liberated (at least temporarily) from her increasingly boring husband, Elizabeth fitted in perfectly with her two hellraising co-stars in *Elephant Walk*, Peter Finch and Dana Andrews.

Both of them could close down any bar in the world. “Immediately after meeting her, we knew she was one of us,” Andrews said. “We invited her to become a charter member of our exclusive fraternity, the ‘Fuck You Club.’”

“For a member to join our club, she has to have a foul mouth—I don’t mean an occasional ‘fuck you,’ but a stream of profanity that would shock a fifty-year-old Barcelona whore,” Andrews said. “Not only that, a new member has to have the most awful table manners—I’m talking Henry VIII with all the belching and farting that that implies. From what I heard later on, we taught Elizabeth well. For the rest of her life, she became known for breaking wind at the most formal of dinners, including at the homes of those billionaires, Doris Duke and Malcolm Forbes.”

“I wish I had been old enough to star opposite you in *Laura*,” Elizabeth told Andrews. “The part would have been so much better with me and without Gene Tierney’s buck teeth. I heard you were once arrested for assault with a deadly weapon,” she continued. “Am I to become the next victim of that deadly weapon?”

The next day, she showed him an item a columnist had written about them. “As the stars of *Elephant Walk*, Dana Andrews and Elizabeth Taylor are perfectly matched. Overall, they are reliable actors, rather uninspired, who on occasion are capable of doing something impressive on the screen, but both of them are rather wooden. They’ve been accused of sleepwalking through their performances. I hope they’re both awake to get out of the pathway of those rampaging elephants at the end of the movie.”

Andrews visited her in her dressing room late one afternoon after both of them had finished their scenes for the day. “Peter told me he’s fucking you, and, as a charter member of the Fuck You Club, I should be pounding you too. But I fear I’m too drunk to get it up.”

“Oh, Dana,” she said, “you’re such a dear. Perhaps you’ll do the honors during our lunch break tomorrow?”

When Dick Hanley came over to Paramount to visit Elizabeth, she told him that she found Finch “most compelling. His blue eyes can penetrate right through you. He’s very alert, very intelligent, and has ruggedly masculine features.”

“It sounds as if Milady is in love,” Dick told her. Later, he recalled, after his introduction to Finch, “He stands so close to you, you can smell his breath.”

Born in London in 1916, Finch had a buoyant, devil-may-care kind of rugged individualism. The illegitimate son of a Scotsman, he had endured a tumbleweed childhood traveling from England to France and on to India

before settling in Australia.

Finch had been “discovered” by the Oliviers, Laurence and Vivien, during their triumphant sweep through Australia. In 1948, as part of an arrangement with the Old Vic, the Oliviers set out to bring a trio of plays to Down Under— School for Scandal, Richard III, and The Skin of Our Teeth, the latter a huge success for Tallulah Bankhead on Broadway.

Bored to some degree with each other, and jaded at this point about promiscuous adventures outside of their marriage, both actors were immensely attracted to Finch. Before long, on location in Australia, Finch launched secretive affairs with each of them.

Aged thirty-six, the bisexual Finch was “compulsively unfaithful” to his wife. “Finchey never met a hot young woman or a nice piece of boy-ass he didn’t want to fuck,” said Stewart Granger.

“I may be wrong,” said Dick Hanley in later years, “but I think Finch prepared Elizabeth for the entrance of Richard Burton into her life. Talk about hell-raisers. If Finch had stayed on in Hollywood, I believe that Elizabeth would have divorced Wilding and married Finch. He was more her kind of guy. Or, as Finch phrased it himself, ‘Elizabeth loved my sense of obstreperous camaraderie.’”

After meeting her, Finch said, “On screen, I play your caddish spouse, but off screen, I’m prepared to be your ardent lover.”

“Check with me later,” she said, heading for her dressing room. Confronted with her rapidly retreating back side, he called to her, “You’ve got a great ass on you, kid.”

She turned around and almost shocked him. “I can forget about your rear. It is what’s up front that counts in a man.”

Finch told Elizabeth that in Ceylon, Vivien Leigh had been completely out of control, drinking heavily straight out of the bottle, tearing off her clothes, and running naked through the streets until apprehended by the police. “She would toss dangerous objects at her friends and through the windows, even throw things to hit people in passing cars.”

Finch also told Elizabeth that when Leigh arrived in Hollywood, she’d thrown this big party for him, to which she even invited Clark Gable to talk about their making of Gone With the Wind. Stewart Granger, Jean Simmons, and David Niven were among the guests.

“Vivien disappeared upstairs and came down about half an hour later,” Finch said. “She held a pair of scissors in her hand like a character in some Psycho movie. She rushed down the stairs and raced toward Tamara, my wife. I managed to subdue her before she plunged those scissors into Tamara’s heart.”

Elizabeth was horrified to hear these stories, feeling sympathy for Leigh’s condition. “I pray I don’t end up in some psycho ward.”

Finch told Elizabeth that the Hollywood of 1953 was such a disappointment to him, not at all like his fantasies of “where blonde cuties would cling to my arms and sexy chorus girls in black velvet shorts and white satin blouses would seductively tap-dance around me.”

Instead, he discovered that the boom years had ended, and Hollywood was still suffering from the commie witch hunt launched by Senator Joseph Mc-Carthy. It was also battling that new horror that threatened everyone’s livelihood—television.

On many a night, she left Wilding at home with the baby while she and “Finchey” pursued one of their favorite pastimes—chewing popcorn during the screening of horror movies, followed later by “a roll in the haystack,” as Elizabeth claimed to Dick Hanley. She also claimed, “I made him forget all about Vivien Leigh...at least for a while.”

After Elephant Walk was wrapped, Paramount offered Finch a seven-year contract which he rejected. “Bloody hell, they wanted me to star with Jane Russell in The French Line. Maybe we could have done a striptease together. I could flash my dick and she could flash her big tits. Why cast me as a Spanish gigolo? Why don’t they get Fernando Lamas?”

“On the other hand, I’m not so eager to return to London,” Finch told her. “Call me an escapist. In England, I have to face the joint explosions of Larry and Vivien. As you know, both of them demand that I fuck them constantly.”

Finch would resurface in her life when she was told that he’d been cast as Julius Caesar in her upcoming 1963 film, Cleopatra.

After Elephant Walk was wrapped, the studio wanted publicity pictures. Elizabeth agreed to pose in a Jeep. The photographer wanted to depict them in a wind storm in Ceylon. A wind machine was brought in.

During the photo shoot, the giant fan blew a steel splinter into Elizabeth's eye and it became deeply lodged. She was rushed to the hospital, where delicate surgery removed the splinter. Because the surgical technique required that she respond to the instructions issued by the surgeon, she had to remain awake during the eye surgery. She later remembered the sounds of the instruments cutting into her eye, which she compared to the sound of "eating a slice of watermelon."

Released from the hospital, Elizabeth returned home to Wilding and her infant son. On the first night back, during playtime with her son, he inadvertently delivered what she later defined as "a knock-out punch." Within days, her already-injured eye became ulcerated and she was forced to re-enter the hospital to face eye surgery once again, this time as part of a procedure more dangerous than the first.

In the wake of the operation, both of her eyes were blindfolded, and she had to live in darkness for three weeks during the healing process, as neither of her eyes could tolerate light.

Of all her friends, Roddy McDowall offered the most comfort, visiting her every day to keep her abreast of what was going on in Hollywood.

At least she was spared reading a Los Angeles headline: LIZ TAYLOR GOING BLIND.

During her time in the hospital, she received some shocking news, although later she didn't appear to be all that disturbed by it. In her absence, Monty had moved into her household, "assuming my role. My housekeeper told me he slept in bed with my husband. I guess Michael was fucking Monty. It appeared that Monty was getting more of a rise out of him than I ever could."

Wilding always spoke lovingly of Clift. "I would cry on his shoulder all day, and he would feed Elizabeth soup in bed at night, light her cigarettes, refill her liquor glasses, and hear what a cold, insensitive bastard I was."

The gossip in Hollywood involved stories about how Monty, Wilding, and Elizabeth were members of a ménage à trois after she was released from the hospital. But whereas that tale might have been true to some degree in the emotional sense of the word, it was not apparently true in the sexual, or physical sense.

When she'd first met Richard Burton, she'd thought he was "too bloody much," and she would return to express that opinion many times in her future. But she was deeply touched when he had come to her hospital bed and recited passages from Shakespeare as a means of easing her long, blindfolded days.

She considered him an actor of "unquestionable charm—and that voice. Of course, he also makes good out of a routine he's got down pat—you know, the poor Welsh coalminer's son among the Hollywood hedonists."

At the end of her hospital stay, her doctor removed the bandages and pronounced her eyes in good condition. "Glory to hell," she said, "I can face the camera again. My new film is called Rhapsody (1954). My co-star will be that Welsh actor, Richard Burton. I'm sure that charming bastard will rate at least a chapter in any memoir I write."

Before the collapse of their marriage, Wilding recalled it as "the happiest time of my life, living in this kind of cloud-cuckoo-land, needing money but spending it like drunken sailors."

Louella Parsons was the first to rush into print about the dying embers of Elizabeth's marriage. She wrote: "When they go out to parties, the Wildings have eyes for everyone but each other." Hedda Hopper claimed, "The Wildings fight like cat and dog."

Humphrey Bogart, of all rogues, warned Wilding, "You're always surrounded by the most beautiful babes at one end of the room, while Liz holds court with all the most attractive males at the other. Married folk didn't ought to act that way."

To accommodate their expanding family, Elizabeth once again obtained a loan from MGM to purchase a more luxurious home designed by her friend, architect George MacLean. Selling for \$150,000, it had a dramatic sheer glass wall that opened onto a view of the valley below.

She also moved in her barnyard of three cats, two poodles, and two tame ducks, none of which was housebroken. Her chief form of décor, according to Wilding, involved the placement of magazines with her picture on the cover in every room of the house. These were supplemented with a huge stack of them beside

her toilet bowl.

Meanwhile, Michael Wilding—"in a fit of madness," Elizabeth said— turned down the role of Professor Henry Higgins in a nationwide tour of the Broadway version of *My Fair Lady*. "He earned my eternal gratitude," said Rex Harrison, who went on to make the role famous.

Wilding also turned down the role of the Pharaoh in *The Egyptian* (1954). Ironically, Marlon Brando had also rejected a role in this film. Because of financial pressures, Wilding was forced to reconsider and ended up contracting to star in *The Egyptian* in what he called "a stuffy nightshirt role," because of the pharaonic costume he was forced to wear. He dreaded the day shooting began.

Most of the time Wilding was unemployed, hanging out during the day at Barney's Beanery on Santa Monica Boulevard, a joint which attracted a lot of other out-of-work actors. Sometimes, he made some sexual conquests there in spite of the sign the owner had posted: FAGOTS (sic) KEEP OUT!

In addition to his homosexual affairs, Wilding also engaged in sexual liaisons with two famous female movie stars of the 1940s. The queen of Cinematic Camp, Maria Montez, born in the Dominican Republic, lives today on the late show as *Cobra Woman*. Her accent was thick, her acting a joke, but Wilding found her a "hot tamale in bed. I'm one of her kitsch fanciers," he confessed to Stewart Granger and Jean Simmons. "She claimed I was better in bed than her husband, Jean-Pierre Aumont, whom Vivien Leigh told me 'hit the spot as a lover,'"

Montez was not the only adulterous conquest Wilding launched with a movie star sex symbol. He also became involved in a torrid liaison with the buxom starlet Marie McDonald, who was nicknamed "The Body" because of her shapely curves.

In the years to come, McDonald enraged Elizabeth with her "brazen" public comments about her affairs with Elizabeth's husbands.

"Michael swore on a stack of Bibles that I was better in bed than Elizabeth," The Body proclaimed.

As one of Hollywood's most popular pin-up girls of World War II, Mc-Donald also admitted to having a one-night stand with Elizabeth's future husband, Mike Todd.

Another future husband of Elizabeth's, Eddie Fisher, revealed in his memoirs that he had a sexual fling with McDonald in Paris at the end of one of Bob Hope's Christmas tours to military bases.

Elizabeth made only one comment about McDonald, in 1966. "I heard she once escaped from a mental hospital in Austria. She was married to a former husband of Debbie Reynolds [a reference to Harry Karl]...She even claimed she was kidnapped by six men and repeatedly raped. Her off-screen life sounded a hell of a lot more intriguing than anything she did on the screen. Too bad she died of a drug overdose in 1965. One shouldn't speak bad of the dead...so good."

Richard Burton could not wait for Elizabeth to recover from her eye surgery. His role as a musician in *Rhapsody* was reassigned to the Italian actor, Vittorio Gassman.



Guess who's sleeping with Michael Wilding? **Marie ("The Body") McDonald**

Instead of filming *Rhapsody*, Burton starred in *The Robe*, based on the best-selling novel by Lloyd C. Douglas. *The Robe* was an episodic costume drama about a Roman centurion (Burton), who presides over Christ's crucifixion. Jean Simmons was cast in the female lead. Burton won an Oscar nomination, although his performance seems stiff and superficial today. Victor Mature was cast as his slave Demetrius. *The Robe* became the first movie ever shot in CinemaScope.

Elizabeth told Dick Hanley, "Working with Jean will make it easier for Burton to fuck her every day in her dressing room. Thank God Stewart Granger is taking care of the sexual needs of my husband since Mikey and I are now doing it only once a month, if that. I can also thank God Peter Finch came into my life. Before he left, that devil wanted it morning, noon, and night. No wonder Vivien Leigh had that nervous breakdown."

One night, when Wilding complained of having a migraine, he stayed home and tended to their baby while Elizabeth accepted a dinner invitation from Jean Simmons and Stewart Granger. Still uncertain of her eye condition, she took a taxi to the Granger's hilltop home.

She'd long admired Mature, and had been thrilled by his muscular screen presence in the 1949 *Samson and Delilah*, in which he'd co-starred with Hedy Lamarr for Cecil B. DeMille.

For years, she'd read that he was king of the boudoir, and fan magazines had covered his list of conquests that included Alice Faye, Betty Grable, June Haver, Rita Hayworth, Betty Hutton, Veronica Lake, Carole Landis, Anne Shirley, Gene Tierney, and Lana Turner.

At dinner, Elizabeth found him to be charismatic and even better looking and more dynamic than he was on screen. He amused the Grangers and Elizabeth, telling them he'd pressed the imprint of his bare buttocks into a slab of concrete and had it placed outside his dressing room as a symbol of his annoyance at not being invited to place the more conventional imprints of his hands and feet into the concrete in front of Grauman's Chinese Theater.

Elizabeth was uncertain of his marital status, remembering that in 1948, he'd wed a divorcée, Dorothy Stanford Berry, but the couple had had so many breakups and reconciliations that she had virtually lost count. As Elizabeth later relayed to Dick Hanley, "I didn't plan to marry Vic, only to fuck him."

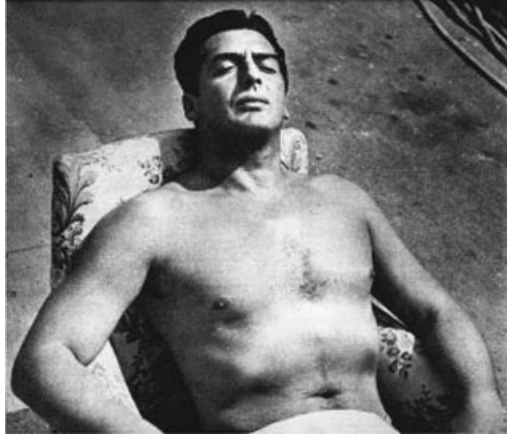
"The press likes to label you 'Luscious Liz' and me as a 'Lush Lothario,'" but that's all crap, of course," Mature said.

"Just the other day I read that you're also called the 'Technicolor Tarzan' and an 'Overripe Romeo,'" she said.

"Cool it with that 'overripe'shit,'" he said. "I'm ripe for plucking, not 'over-ripe.'"

"Plucking, how amusing," Granger said. "Rhymes with..."

Mature entertained them with stories of his early days, claiming that after he'd arrived in Hollywood he had only eleven cents left after paying his eight dollar weekly rent. "I wired Dad and asked for money. He wired back that when he had arrived in America from Austria, that was six cents more than he had—and furthermore, he couldn't speak English, and I could."



Victor Mature

"That's what's called 'tough love,'" Elizabeth said.

He told the Grangers and Elizabeth that "in spite of my three marriages, Rita Hayworth is the only girl I ever felt I truly loved. Apparently, the way to Rita's heart is to saw her in half."

He was referring to Orson Welles' magic act in which Hayworth appeared on stage with him and was "sawed in half," or so it appeared to astonished members of the audience.

"Every reporter has to write about my muscles, and I'd like to be so much more," Mature said.

"It's better to be written about than ignored," Elizabeth said.

"I've long ago come to that conclusion," he said. "But I get tired of being a male striptease. But fuck it all...I make money and have a blast and screw any woman I want. So life is good."

At the end of dinner and several more rounds of drinks, Elizabeth announced that she was heading back home. "Jean, would you call me a taxi?"

"Hell with that!" Mature said. "I'll drive you home."

After everybody kissed everybody else, she got into the car with Mature. On the way back, she warned him, "Better keep your eyes on the road, buster, instead of looking at me."

"Don't blame me because you look so fucking gorgeous men can't take their eyes off you. I want to see more. Why not stop in at my place for a drink?"

"You're on, big boy."

She spent five hours at his apartment, and later told Dick Hanley, "Not since Nicky have I had such a deep dicking. Vic is welcome to put his shoes under my bed any time in the future. What a hunk of beef. He is living proof that God did not create all men equal."

When the gay author, Gore Vidal, saw a (now famous) nude photo of Mature lying in a bunk during his World War II service in the Coast Guard, he wrote, "If the Germans had seen that picture, they would have surrendered months before 1945."

The sun was up when Elizabeth arrived back at her house. Wilding was in the kitchen preparing breakfast for himself and their baby. "Where in hell have you been?"

"I was afraid to drive at night so I slept over with Jean and Stewart," she said.

"That's odd, because I called Stewart," he said. "He told me that Victor Mature drove you home."

She stared at him. "Why don't you go fuck yourself?"

Then she stormed into their bedroom, locking the door behind her.

Elizabeth herself defined the pictures she made between 1952 and 1956 as "rubbish movies." Even so, much of the press hailed her as "the Queen of Hollywood," or at the very least, "The Queen of MGM." Grace Kelly, speaking off the record, said, "Elizabeth Taylor was not the Queen of Hollywood since 1952. I was. All of my films made more than \$5 million, and Taylor went from one disaster to another. Her movies were so bad I could not sit through them."

Elizabeth may not have been the reigning queen, but according to the Picture Post in Britain in 1954, she was at the very least, a monarch. "If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, Elizabeth Taylor is the most flattered girl in the world—apart from being the most beautiful. Not since the war, when every girl one saw was Veronica Lake, have the girls of this country striven so hard to look like Taylor."

According to Britain's Picture Post in 1954, she was the one Hollywood star that young girls, from secretaries to sales clerks, from nurses to telephone operators, wanted to look like.

For a 1954 release, almost at the same time as *Elephant Walk*, MGM hired Charles Vidor to direct Elizabeth in *Rhapsody*, where she played a rich young woman, Louise Durant, in love with two different musicians—Vittorio Gassman cast as Paul Brontë and John Ericson in the role of James Guest. Veteran actor Louis Calhern, who had seduced Marilyn Monroe on and off screen, and who had previously appeared with her in *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950), was cast as Elizabeth's father, Nicolas Durant.

Against a musical background of Tchaikowsky, Liszt, Debussy, Mendelssohn, and Rachmaninoff, Elizabeth drifts between these two handsome musicians, who seem to love music more than her in a film which by today's standards looks like a blend between a soap opera and a made-for-TV film.

When Shelley Winters learned that Elizabeth would be appearing in the movie with her husband, Vittorio Gassman, she placed a telephone call to her. "Don't fall for the son of a bitch," Winters said. "He'll charm the pants off you. When he gets what he wants, he'll leave you for some sixteen-year-old Roman wench. Both of us love pasta. You'll mourn his leaving and you'll gorge on pasta. You'll get fat and won't be able to face a camera. Listen to your mother here. I know what a maneater you are, but keep your mangy paws off Vittorio. He belongs to me."

Elizabeth knew almost nothing of her two leading men, Gassman and Ericson. Actually, she'd been looking forward to starring in the film with Burton. At first she was resentful of the two actors ultimately cast.

She found Ericson "very good looking, but rather Germanic and cold. The silly boy still seems to be in love with the girl he'd just married, Milly Coury," she said. "How very un-Hollywood."

There was some talk about how Ericson was going to "become the next big male movie star," but that dream would never be realized. His film career gradually flickered out, and he became better known on television. His peak fame came in the 1965-66 season when he co-starred as the partner of Anne Francis in the ABC detective series, *Honey West*, about a female private eye.

To Elizabeth, Gassman was a far more intriguing specimen. He was born in Genoa to a German father and a Pisan-Jewish mother. In Rome, he'd played Stanley Kowalski in Tennessee Williams' *Un tram che si chiama desiderio* (a.k.a. *A Streetcar Named Desire*).

In 1952, Gassman had married Winters, but at the time, Elizabeth met him, that short marriage was nearing its end. Gassman had a roving eye for beautiful women.

Ten years older than Elizabeth, Gassman in his twenties could have played Romeo. Tall, with black curly hair, he appeared in a perfectly tailored, beige-colored suit from Rome. Although he was intelligent looking, he had not perfected his English yet.

She had been warned by Director Vidor that Gassman didn't like anything American, especially American girls. But for a man who detested American girls, he was gracious, charming, and solicitous to Elizabeth.

He kissed her hard, saying, "Lei e una grande artiste. Ho visto Un Posto del Sole." She gathered that he was praising her performance in *A Place in the Sun*, the only movie of hers he'd ever seen. She'd never seen one of

his movies, not even the celebrated *Bitter Rice* (1950) (a.k.a. *Riso Amaro*; 1949), a film which had been condemned by the Catholic League of Decency.

The next morning, when she entered her dressing room, she found it filled with yellow roses he had sent. He had obviously learned what her favorite flower was.

Gassman had written a note (in English), perhaps with some assistance. "These roses must suffice until I can present my heart to you tonight. Shelley does not have to know. Yours forever, Vittorio."

After reading that note, Elizabeth told Vidor, "I'm in love. I crave romance. I don't want to come home any more to that that dull, boring British gentleman stashed there."

As Elizabeth would later tell Roddy McDowall, "On my first date with Vittorio, we drove to Malibu and spent the night in some tacky motel room. Let's face it: Those god damn nosy reporters would never think of looking for a world class movie star like Elizabeth Taylor in a hotbed motel."

"He's a great lover," she claimed. "During lovemaking, he yells out all sorts of things in Italian. They sound so endearing. I don't know what he's saying. For all I know, it's 'Take this, you bitch,' but it sounds like Romeo wooing Juliet."

"I laugh at his linguistic mistakes, and I'm teaching him all the dirty words in English I know," she said. "What's wrong with Shelley? Didn't she teach him the English word for fuck?"

"His nickname for me is Primavera," she said. "I already know that means Spring. He told me he wants for me to divorce Wilding and go live with him in Rome."

"He promises to teach me Italian. I can't exactly see myself starring in some great epic in Rome, but who knows?"

Gassman may have had a more accurate sense of her future than she did, except that when Cleopatra was made, he was nowhere around.

"During the filming of *Rhapsody*, "Vittorio made love to me at least twice a day—sometimes in my dressing room, sometimes in that seedy Malibu motel room which, if I remember, was painted purple," Elizabeth told Vidor. "The towels were thin and threadbare, so I bought luxurious red ones."

"I found we came from different cultures," she said. "Michael went away with Bob Taylor for the weekend, and I invited Vittorio over for dinner. He adored my son. I just assumed he liked pasta, being Italian. I had ordered lasagna from some local eatery, with a pizza on the side. I'd put the food in the refrigerator and planned to warm it up for dinner. When he saw me removing the food from the refrigerator, he went ballistic. He told me that 'electricity kills food.' He claimed that fresh produce has to be bought every day and never refrigerated. Instead of the lasagna, he cooked some spaghetti for me and flavored it with just olive oil and fresh garlic. It was divine."

Later that night, before he retired to her bedroom, he played a record he'd brought to the house. It was a Neapolitan love song titled "Scalinetta," whose name, roughly translated, meant "Little Steps Leading to Love."

"He began to discuss our upcoming marriage—presumably the marriage that would take place after some messy divorce details were handled. He said he wanted to take me to Portofino for our honeymoon."

Elizabeth shared details about her involvement with Gassman with very few of her friends, but included Roddy McDowall and Dick Hanley among those in whom she confided. She also revealed what was going on to her director, Charles Vidor, "because he would be a total fool not to see what was happening right in front of him."



Vittorio Gassman

As the shooting ended, Gassman confided to Elizabeth that he wanted to take her away to Palm Springs for the weekend. As a cover-up, Elizabeth mendaciously told Wilding that she was going to go off with Roddy and some of his gay friends.

To Roddy, she remembered that weekend as “one of the most passionate of my life. By the time Vittorio made love to me that final Monday morning, I was hopelessly, madly, crazily in love with him. For the first time in my life, I learned that a man’s armpits taste like ambrosia.”

“Oh, baby,” Roddy said. “I could have told you that a long time ago.”

During their drive back to Los Angeles, from whose airport he was scheduled to fly back to Rome, she said, “We did nothing but talk about our future. He even speculated about what our bambini would look like.”

She still had a week’s work at MGM. “I didn’t go in until Tuesday. I found a note with one yellow rose. I was from Vittorio. Someone may have helped him with his English.”

“My darling Elizabeth,

On my dying day the last memory for me before I depart this earth will be the beauty of your face in the rosy glow of a California dawn. It was surely the light that inspired Leonardo da Vinci to paint the Mona Lisa. Some things are not meant to be. But the glorious memory of you will linger on forever and ever until we meet again on some distant shore. There we will live and love together through eternity, but for the moment in this mad cesspool called earth, we must follow our separate paths until the road one day leads back to each other.

Your amante through the ages.

Vittorio”

Shelley Winters divorced Gassman in 1954, the same year *Rhapsody* was released. It is not known if Winters became aware of her husband’s adulterous affair with Elizabeth. She certainly suspected and one night confronted Elizabeth about it at a party.

Elizabeth staunchly denied it, falsely claiming that she’d fallen in love with the film’s second male lead, John Ericson. “If John’s new wife finds out, that marriage will be over before it begins.”

Winters could not complain too bitterly about Gassman’s seductions outside marriage, since she was still carrying on with three bisexual actors—Marlon Brando, Farley Granger, and Burt Lancaster.

In reviewing *Rhapsody*, a critic for The New York Herald Tribune wrote, “Elizabeth Taylor’s animation is only the animation of the doll with the strings being pulled behind the scenes. Even her evident and genuine beauty seems at times to be fake.”

In marked contrast, Bosley Crowther, in an uncharacteristically supportive review in The New York Times got carried away in his overview of *Rhapsody*: “Her wind-blown hair frames her features like an ebony aureole and her large eyes and red lips glisten warmly in close-ups on the softly lighted screen. Any gent who would go for music with this radiant—and rich—Miss Taylor at hand is not a red-blooded American.”

At long last, MGM took Michael Wilding off suspension, and he was told to report to Benny Thau's office to discuss a new film project.

Before he departed for his meeting, Elizabeth warned her husband, "Take my advice, don't commit yourself until you've seen the script. He'll talk you into some second-rate picture and make you think it's *Gone With the Wind*." This contradicted her previous advice in which she had told him to "take anything thrown at you."

At MGM, after a long wait, he was finally ushered into Thau's office. "Have I got a deal for you. Robert Taylor begged me to give him the role, but I turned the queer down. I said this part is for Michael Wilding. You'll play a blind pianist opposite Joan Crawford in a script called *Torch Song*. I predict that it will be the hit of the year."

Fired by Harry Cohn from *From Here to Eternity* because of a dispute over wardrobe, Crawford was eager to do *Torch Song* (1953), after Benny Thau sent her the script. She signed a contract and agreed to return to MGM, after a decade-long absence, in her first full-length color film. [Because of some technical issue, her hair appeared in the final print as tangerine-colored.]

In the film, Crawford played the role of Jenny Stewart, a part defined as a "witchy," self-involved Broadway diva, who clashes with her blind pianist Tye Graham (as played by Wilding).

She told Thau, "It's a good part for a woman who no longer is a spring chicken."

Wilding didn't want the role, but couldn't risk going on suspension again. As a blind pianist, he accompanies Crawford, who was cast as a hard-as-nails Broadway musical star who chews up people for lunch.

Crawford would later refer to *Torch Song* as "one of my best bad movies.:" At this stage in her career, she was forty-eight years old and hadn't danced in fourteen years, even though her body was in remarkable shape. Fearing that her breasts had sagged as she neared the half-century mark, she insisted that wardrobe fit her with a "bullet brassiere." Her singing voice, never very good even at its best, had to be dubbed by the relatively forgotten singer, India Adams, who sounded something like a pale and watered-down version of Marilyn Monroe.

The director of the movie was Charles Walters, whose previous successes with Judy Garland included both *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944), and *Easter Parade* (1948).

There had been speculation that Crawford would try to seduce Wilding, but actually it was Director Walters who went after Elizabeth's husband, although apparently he did not win the prize.

This hilariously clichéd melodrama is viewed today chiefly by camp followers, often aging gays, who watch it just for the musical number where Crawford appears on the screen in blackface à la Al Jolson. Gig Young, whom Elizabeth had dated briefly, stars as the second male lead.

Crawford sings "Two-Faced Woman" in blackface, although many of her loyal fans, embarrassed by her use of blackface, assert that she's only wearing "tan-colored make-up" as a means of transforming herself into "merely the suggestion" of an Ebony Venus.

During the 1930s, Crawford had fancied herself as "The Queen of MGM," despite the fact that her chief rival, Norma Shearer, married at the time to studio boss Irving Thalberg, also claimed that title.

On the occasion of her return to MGM, Crawford was given a royal welcome from stars past and present. As Director Walters said, "There were so many flowers, it looked like the funeral of a sitting U.S. president." Ann Blyth, who had played Crawford's daughter in *Mildred Pierce* (1945), sent beautiful orchids. Fred Astaire sent red roses. And Clark Gable, Crawford's longtime lover, presented a basket of chocolate delicacies from Rome.

Crawford refused to speak to Wilding other than a terse "Good morning," followed at the end of the day by a staccato "Good evening."

Walters could not understand the source of Crawford's enmity, since Wilding had never been anything but gracious to her. "I finally concluded that Wilding's mistake was being Mr. Elizabeth Taylor."

Wilding's first day on the set required him to kiss Crawford passionately as part of a love scene. He later told the press, "Kissing Crawford was like kissing Hitler." That same line would be used by Tony Curtis, as it applied to Marilyn Monroe during the shooting of *Some Like It Hot* (1959).

After she was thoroughly kissed, Crawford broke from him and marched over for a conference with Walters. She then retreated to her dressing room. Walters then approached Wilding, telling him that, "Miss Crawford

says the scene will have to be reshot. Your right shoulder blocked her profile.”

Crawford and Elizabeth, on occasion, would sleep with the same men, notably John F. Kennedy, Steve Cochran, Rock Hudson, and Tyrone Power. But Elizabeth did not have the slightest fear that the aging screen diva would move in on Wilding.

When Walters visited Crawford in her dressing room, she opened the door completely nude, but was unable to seduce him, as Walters was more interested in the hot male lover he kept at home.

Consequently, Crawford never seduced either Wilding or Walters, but turned her attentions instead to Gig Young, whom she found “extremely sexy.” She’d erroneously heard that Elizabeth had had a torrid affair with him, and she set out to conquer Elizabeth’s former boyfriend and not her husband. She invited Young on several occasions to her dressing room for a drink, but he kept rejecting her amorous advances. She reacted with fury, and he shot quickly upward on her “hate list.” As a means of retaliating against him, she arranged for the film’s director to cut his scenes to the minimum. “Since I didn’t produce a hard-on for her,” Young later said, “she castrated me.”

The one star who didn’t slavishly toady to Crawford on the set was Elizabeth herself, who fancied herself as the new reigning queen of MGM. Elizabeth hadn’t spoken to Crawford since that time she’d visited her home, as arranged by Clark Gable, for “fashion advice” and had rejected her sexual advances.

On four different occasions, Elizabeth visited Wilding for lunch, since she was shooting *Rhapsody* on a set located only a short distance away. Unlike the other stars paying elaborate homage to Crawford, Elizabeth ignored her. At one point, she walked right past her without speaking. Or, in Crawford’s words, “Princess Brat came swanning onto my set.”

Crawford was furious, venting her rage to Walters and demanding that he “bar this little tramp from my set.”

As a means of preserving peace, Walters talked with both Wilding and Elizabeth, pleading with her not to come onto the set of *Torch Song* again.

“If you want to have lunch with Mike, meet him in the commissary,” Walters said. “Your presence on the set is a painful reminder that the Queen of MGM has been dethroned.”

“Dietrich hates me because I stole Mike from her, and Barbara Stanwyck detests me because Bob Taylor fucked me. The only bigtime screen diva who has not feuded with me is Bette Davis. But I’m sure that dispute lies in my future.”

As regards that statement in particular, Elizabeth turned out to be a prophet.

In later years, Crawford claimed, “Miss Taylor is a spoiled, indulgent child—a blemish on public decency.”

Before its reincarnation in the mid-50s, *Beau Brummell* (1954) had previously been released as a silent film in 1924 starring John Barrymore. In the 1950s version, Stewart Granger played the fashion-conscious dandy, an adviser to an 18th-century Prince of Wales, as interpreted by Peter Ustinov. Elizabeth, in a wig and period costume, plays Lady Patricia, the female lead and Granger’s love interest. The costume epic was filmed in England during the summer of 1953.

On the set, Granger said to his co-stars, “Here comes my friend, Elizabeth Taylor. She’s voluptuous in every way—big tits, big ass, big violet eyes, and a tiny rosebud mouth ideal for sucking dick. Just look at those bosoms— WHOOOA!”

Back in Hollywood, Jean Simmons had to endure a four-month separation from Granger, who was still her husband at the time. Along with Michael Wilding, Victor Mature, Gene Tierney, and Peter Ustinov, she, too, had been cast in *The Egyptian* (1954), by director Michael Curtiz.

In the same year, Ustinov appeared in both *Beau Brummell* and *The Egyptian*.

Elizabeth asked Dick Hanley to visit the Los Angeles set of *The Egyptian* and relay all the gossip back to her during her involvement with *Beau Brummell* in England. Like a dutiful servant, he obeyed her. “Here’s the latest. Mature is fucking Gene Tierney—lucky gal. I heard that Stewart Granger is banging you in England, so it’s only fair that Jean is screwing your ever-so-stiff-and-formal husband, Michael Wilding. Don’t you just love Hollywood?”

On the set of *Beau Brummell*, both Elizabeth and Granger detested their German director, Curtis Bernhardt. Elizabeth showed her contempt by yawning in his face whenever he gave her direction. Granger almost attacked him one day when he kept poking him with the stick he always carried around. After one poke too many, Granger, in front of Elizabeth, grabbed the stick from the director's hand and broke it in two.

The Granger/Taylor affair ended almost before it began. In England, Granger came down with intestinal flu, an infection which led to colitis. Elizabeth accompanied him to a hospital for "colonic irrigations," which were so messy, and so horrible, that they destroyed Granger forever as a dashing and romantic ideal in her life.

Months later, in Hollywood, Granger, perhaps during pillow talk, confessed to Wilding, his long-time lover, that he'd been intimate with Elizabeth during the London filming of *Beau Brummell*.

When Wilding asked Elizabeth about this, she said, "He fucks you. Why not me? Besides, darling, it is no secret. I always fall a little in love with my leading men, and I expect I always will. So live with it!"

What had really destroyed the last vestiges of romantic feeling Elizabeth had for Granger centered around events associated with the filming of *Green Fire* (1954).

During the making of *Beau Brummell*, Granger had received an advance screenplay of *Green Fire*, some South America-based hokum about love and conflict between an emerald prospector (Granger) and a coffee-plantation owner (Grace Kelly). As Elizabeth later discussed with Wilding, "All Stewart did was talk about his upcoming love scenes with that stuck-up bitch, Grace Kelly. He's heard the rumors—and they're true, I'm sure—about how she fucks all her leading men. He was worried to death about halitosis. He was afraid that his nervousness about kissing her would cause an upset stomach which would lead to his having bad breath."

During Granger's location shooting for *Green Fire* in South America, Elizabeth invited Jean Simmons to come over to her house for dinner. "Are you afraid to have Grace Kelly alone in the jungles with your Stewart?"

"Not really," Simmons replied. "As you know, I'm playing one of Napoléon's mistresses in *Desirée*. Instead of Stewart, Marlon Brando is doing the honors."

In his memoirs, Granger admitted that "Jean liked Brando a lot, but I found him fairly insufferable."

Granger later wrote, "Grace had one phobia—her behind. For me, it was the most delicious thing imaginable, but it did stick out a bit, and she was very self-conscious about it. Our last scene was played in a torrential downpour and when the final kiss came, we were both soaking wet, which accentuated that fabulous behind. To save her embarrassment, I covered it with both hands. If you look closely at the kiss, you'll see Grace give a start as those two eager hands take hold."

When shooting was finished on *Beau Brummell*, MGM generously financed six weeks of travel on the Continent for Elizabeth and Michael. There was talk that this second honeymoon might save their marriage, but the couple often got into epic battle in their hotel suites.

Almost immediately after Elizabeth completed filming on *Beau Brummell*, and the European holiday that followed it, she was rushed into the filming of *The Last Time I Saw Paris* (1954), her fourth film in less than a year. It was based on a short story by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Babylon Revisited*. In addition to Van Johnson, her co-stars included Walter Pidgeon, Donna Reed, and Eva Gabor.

The crew noted that on the set, Elizabeth fought virtually every day with the film's director, Richard Brooks. When he called her "a bloody cunt," she told him "to go stick a dildo up your dingleberry-coated asshole, you dirty son of a bitch. You should have been smothered at birth."

Elizabeth had been excited when she received the script. "I'm to play Zelda and Monty is going to be F. Scott Fitzgerald."

But when Monty read the script, he rejected it. Soonafter, Michael Wilding, then in the final throes of his marriage to Elizabeth, made it clear that he'd accept the role if it was offered to him. Brooks, however, at the last minute, made a bad casting decision and offered the role to Van Johnson, with whom Elizabeth had previously worked on that disaster entitled *The Big Hangover* (1950).

Although Wilding had wanted to appear opposite his wife, he rejected the chance to star opposite Grace Kelly in *The Swan*. Whereas his best friend, Granger, had been eager to appear with Kelly, Wilding had never been

that impressed with her. The Swan had been filmed as a silent in 1925 and as a talkie in 1930, when it was retitled *One Romantic Night*. In this fluffy melodramatic comedy, Louis Jourdan was cast as Kelly's suitor, but she's promised to a prince. Wilding was to play the stuffy prince, but the role eventually went to another English actor, Alec Guinness.

The Last Time I Saw Paris marked the acting debut of Eva Gabor, who told Elizabeth that, "We are distantly related. After all, Zsa Zsa married your former father-in-law, Conrad Hilton."

Wilding wanted to go to the premiere of *The Last Time I Saw Paris*, but Elizabeth rejected his offer, attending the event with Monty as her escort instead.

"My greatest fantasy," she told Stewart Granger, "was for Monty to have Michael's dick transplanted onto him—and for him to be straight."

On three different occasions, Monty brought Rock Hudson to Elizabeth's house for dinner. "I'm madly in love with him," Monty told Elizabeth. "He's the top. I'm the bottom. Unlike me, he's got this monster cock and knows how to use it. I can't get enough of him. Jane Wyman's after him, too."

Dick Hanley, years later, recalled being invited to dinner one night at the home of Stewart Granger. "Jean Simmons, of course, was the hostess. Guests included Monty, who was there with Rock Hudson. Michael brought Elizabeth, but those two former lovebirds sang to each other no more. Victor Mature, who had seduced both Elizabeth and Jean, showed up solo. Richard Burton arrived with the glamorous Lana Turner as his date. Each of them had signed to star in a film entitled *The Rains of Ranchipur* (1955), a remake of the 1939 *The Rains Came*, which had starred Myrna Loy and Tyrone Power in equivalent roles."

"What a strange evening for my beloved Elizabeth," Dick said. "She was there with her present husband, Michael, and her future husband, Burton. Not only that, but she was there with her lover, Mature, and Monty, if he could be called a lover, and also a future lover, Rock. And she'd also fucked Stewart, the host. It must have been a lot of fun having all of them together."



Elizabeth Taylor with her onscreen beau, **Stewart Granger**

In the summer of 1954, Elizabeth and Wilding moved into another, larger home, at 1375 Beverly Estate Drive, high above Benedict Canyon Drive in Beverly Hills. It was a high-tech house, built of steel and adobe. Elizabeth immediately took to swimming nude in the pool, even if she had guests. She told Dick, "Most of my male guests have already fucked me, so what the hell?"

Joan Bennett, who had played her screen mother in *Father of the Bride* and *Father's Little Dividend*, did not have her phone number and just showed up at Elizabeth's door one day. Wilding opened it and went to tell Elizabeth of her arrival. Lounging beside her pool, Elizabeth said to Wilding, "Tell Joan to go fuck herself."

Bennett had always befriended Elizabeth, and the two actresses had gotten along together for both "The Bride" and "The Dividend" pictures. But Elizabeth later told Wilding, "Who in hell does she think she is? Showing up on my doorstep without an invitation. Bennett has to realize I'm a star now and that I deserve some respect."

Four dogs, including two poodles, along with five cats and two ducks, roamed through the house. None of them was housebroken. Her dog, "Gee Gee," was allowed to lick her newborn child, a policy that horrified Sara. Elizabeth told her that "a dog's saliva is the purest thing in the world, a true disinfectant."

By the time of Elizabeth's second pregnancy, she and Wilding were hardly speaking. He slept on a large lavender-colored divan in the living room, and she occupied the master bedroom by herself or whatever animal wandered in. She later admitted that, "This was one of the most miserable times of my life— I was dead old at twenty-four. It was just smog and no sunshine."

With the debut of her second pregnancy, Elizabeth in her own words was "living hand to mouth." Instead of undergoing another cut in salary as before, she agreed that MGM could extend her contract by an extra year, a decision she'd later regret.

"The best way I know to celebrate my twenty-third birthday is to give birth."

Between films, Elizabeth gave birth to her second child, again by Caesarean. On the day he was born, February 17, 1955, she named him Christopher Edward Wilding. Edward was the first name of Monty.

Jules Goldstone told her that having her two sons had cost her a million dollars because of the MGM suspensions the births had necessitated. "My boys are worth it," she shot back.

Even though she'd just given birth, she told Janet Leigh, "My marriage is over. Mike and I are now brother and sister."

Monty was at the Wilding home nearly every night. He nicknamed her older son "Britches," and seemed to dote on him so much that rumors spread that the second baby was actually Monty's child.

Right after the birth, an invitation arrived from the Academy Awards officials, asking her to appear at the March, 1955 ceremonies at the RKO Pantages Theater in Los Angeles to present the Oscar for Best Documentary.

Still overweight, she immediately went on a diet of fresh fruit juices and ice cubes "to get back to my fighting weight."

Reviewed by the international press, her appearance was stunning. There were gasps from the audience when she came out onto the stage wearing a white fur stole over a gown of white silk, organza, and satin, with stiletto high heels, a bouffant hairdo, and a fortune in diamonds around her neck and dangling from her ears.

Backstage, she said, "Tell all my fucking critics that Elizabeth Taylor is back and ready for a long reign as the Queen of Hollywood."

At two o'clock in the morning, an urgent phone call was placed to the home of Roddy McDowall. He was in bed that night with an unidentified partner, perhaps Tab Hunter, or perhaps another of agent Henry Willson's "pretty boys."

"What in hell's going on?" Roddy asked her. "Are you okay?"

"I feel great!" she said. "I want you to be the first to know. I've been royally fucked."

"I didn't know Prince Philip was in Hollywood," he said.

"Cut the shit!" she said. "I've been fucked by a handsome Irishman from Dublin. For the past three hours, he's deep-dicked me twice. God knows he'll want it again before dawn breaks over Malibu."

"Who is this divine creature, and does he make house calls?" Roddy asked.

"His name is Kevin McClory," she said. "It rhymes with glory, and is he ever glorious. Great body, great everything."

"Never heard of him," he said.

"He's a production assistant to that loud-mouthed jerk, Mike Todd," she said. "Sooner than later, I'll be writing my name as Elizabeth Taylor Hilton Wilding McClory."

"How did you meet him?" he asked.

"Shirley MacLaine introduced me," she said.

"God, I hope that Kevin hasn't invaded her too."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Giants

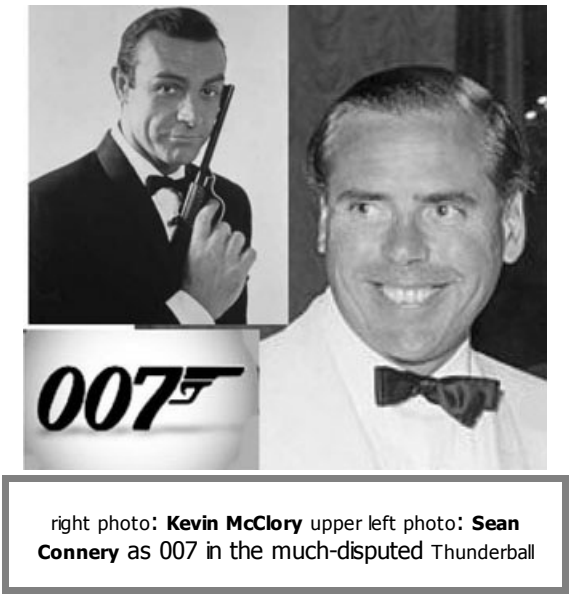
To Elizabeth, the new man in her life, Kevin McClory, was a dashing figure. He'd descended from two of her favorite authors, those literary sisters, Emily and Charlotte Brontë. Both of his parents had been actors in Dublin.

He told her tragic stories of his service in the British Merchant Navy during World War II. At one point, his ship was torpedoed in the North Atlantic. Most of the crew drowned, but he drifted for more than 700 miles in a lifeboat in freezing conditions before he was picked up off the coast of Ireland with four other survivors.

He became friends with famous writers and directors, including John Huston, who defined him as "a man's man like Bogie." Huston hired him to work on *The African Queen* (1951), with Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn.

McClory was also a close friend of writer Ian Fleming, and he was one of the first to realize the cinematic potential of his James Bond character. "Your secret agent would be ideal in a dynamite series of movies," he told Fleming.

Long after the ending of his affair with Elizabeth, McClory would become famously associated with the James Bond character. He became a player in a series of legal battles asserting that Fleming had plagiarized his script, *Thunderball*. Eventually, after prolonged wrangling in and out of courts, McClory prevailed and was cut into the profits generated by the film, *Thunderball* (1965) and in its remake entitled *Never Say Never Again* (1983).



In later years, McClory spoke several times to journalists about his affair with Elizabeth. "I did not break up her marriage," he asserted. "When I fell in love with Elizabeth, she had long ago fallen out of love with Wilding. It was all over except for the divorce. I was crazy for her, and she was in love with me—and we planned to get married after she divorced Wilding. Of course, I warned her that I was a man of modest means and could not give her the trappings of a wealthy film producer."

"It doesn't matter," she told him. "I'd live in a log cabin with no jewelry, scrub your floors, and cook Irish stew for you every night and serve it with cold beer if you'd make me your wife."

"Do you really mean that, my darling girl?" he asked her.

"I mean it as much as a man does when he tells a woman he'll put in only the first two or three inches," she said.

"Kevin has brought me more joy and happiness than I've known in years," Elizabeth confessed to Dick Hanley, "still and always" one of her best friends.

But Dick was in a despondent mood. After eleven years of devoted service to Louis B. Mayer, he asked if he could take his first vacation, volunteering to do so without pay.

"You are most deserving of a long vacation," Mayer said. "A very long vacation. Don't bother coming back to MGM. You're fired!"

Dick revealed this news about his job loss to Elizabeth at a dinner with Mc-Clory. "I never loved Kevin more," Elizabeth said, "than when he showed me what a take-charge kind of man he was." Within two days, he had secured a job for Dick with his own boss, Mike Todd.

All of them were working on Todd's upcoming blockbuster, *Around the World in 80 Days* (1956). "Todd wanted me to do a cameo in his big movie, but MGM said no," Elizabeth said.

After the first week of working with Todd, Dick began learning secrets, the way he had at MGM when he'd been employed by Mayer.

"What's the biggest scandal you've learned so far?" Elizabeth asked him.

She knew nothing of Mike Todd's background. Dick told her Todd had a fondness for big-breasted women and that he defined himself as a self-made man. The son of a Polish émigré rabbi, he had hawked newspapers on the streets of Brooklyn and shined the shoes of Wall Street brokers before breaking into show business as a gag writer.

"Mike's having an affair with Marlene Dietrich but shacked up with Evelyn Keyes full time. Not only that, he sees Marilyn Monroe now and then, ever since he got her to ride that pink elephant at some big event at Madison Square Garden."

"Busy man," was Elizabeth's only comment, since at that time, she didn't have the slightest interest in pursuing a relationship with Todd, viewing him as both brash and vulgar.

"Mike's best friend is Eddie Fisher," Dick said. "They spend a lot of intimate time together. I don't know if this is true or not, but the whole staff, including your boyfriend Kevin, believes that Todd on occasion pounds Eddie's ass."

"C'mon," she said. "This is Hollywood. That isn't so hard to believe. Fisher has told the press on many occasions that he's not gay, even when nobody asks him. I think he brags too much about all the beautiful women he fucks."

"Maybe he doth protest too much," Dick said. "I'll make a pass at him and will let you know if he accepts. Right now, he shares Dietrich with Mike. I also knew John Garfield. He told me that one night at Grossinger's resort in the Catskills, Eddie followed him around like a lovesick puppy. Garfield told me he gave him a mercy fuck."

"There must be more—tell me more," Elizabeth said. "You're making Fisher sound more intriguing than ever."

"Well, he's fucking Pier Angeli, who is supposed to be in love with Kirk Douglas, Jimmy Dean, and Vic Damone," he said. "On occasion, Fisher also fucks Judy Garland."



Two views of **Joan Blondell**
top photo: with her then-
husband, **Mike Todd**

"Tell me something I don't already know," she said. "Judy tells me everything. She can recite the exact measurements of most of the stars at MGM."

"Well, there's another thing," Dick said. "Eddie and Mike like three-ways with beautiful gals, and Todd once fucked Mae West when they did that show, Catherine Was Great together. He also used to fuck the stripper, Gypsy Rose Lee."

"You're making this guy a Don Juan," she said. "I never thought of him that way before. All you and Kevin do is talk about your boss. Forget about Judy, Mae West, and Gypsy. Tell me some shit that even Confidential won't print."

"Okay, but you asked for it. On occasion, Todd even pounds one of your best friends, dear sweet and demure Jean Simmons."

"The way Stewart Granger cheats on her, he deserves to be married to a fellow whore," she said.

"Are Stewart and your husband Michael still an item?" Dick asked.

"Until death do them part," she answered.

"Mike Todd has a really violent streak," Dick said. "Even worse than Nicky Hilton, who beat the shit out of you. In a way, Mike murdered his first wife. He lied about his age and got married when he was fifteen to a student, Bertha Freshman. One night they got into a violent argument, and he grabbed a kitchen knife and slashed her hand, practically cutting it off from her arm. She was rushed into surgery at some New York hospital and died on the operating table."

"How ghastly!"

"At the time, Mike was having an affair with Joan Blondell, whom he was stealing from her husband at the time, Dick Powell," Dick said. "He got Joan to lie to the police, and she claimed that he was with her all night during the butcher knife incident. Mike bribed someone and the autopsy report then asserted that the Freshman girl died of a heart attack."

"There's more," Dick told Elizabeth. "With the Freshman girl dead, Mike married Blondell after she got a divorce from Powell. It was a stormy, very violent marriage. During the first months of their marriage, he spent

all her money, and she'd made a million films and found herself without a penny. They were staying at the Waldorf-Astoria in Manhattan in a room fifteen floors above street level. The argument became so violent, he ripped off her clothes. At one point, he grabbed her and dangled her body out the window, holding onto her by her ankles. She nearly died of fright, but ended up with just a broken arm— at least not dead like Freshman."

"Remind me not to take Todd as a husband," Elizabeth said.

"That will never happen," he said. "The other day, Mike told Kevin and me that after Blondell, he'll never marry an actress again. 'To live with a star, you gotta worry about her fucking hair,' he said. 'You gotta worry about when her bosom starts to drop. And when that first wrinkle comes, you get all her bills from a headshrinker.'"

After spending a long night with McClory before departing for Texas, Elizabeth promised him faithfully that she'd rush back into his arms as soon as the exterior scenes for *Giant* were completed.

In the meantime, Mike Todd "has me hysterically running around the world trying to complete *Around the World in 80 Days* with insufficient funds," he told her. "I'll probably get arrested for bad debts in Thailand, or some such place."

He was delighted, however, that Todd was going to list him as one of the film's three producers—Todd himself, of course, William Cameron Menzies, and McClory.

As a parting gesture, McClory told her, "Mike is using 112 locations in 13 countries. The whole thing is going to cost at least six million."

"My god, I should have done that cameo in it—or taken Shirley MacLaine's role. This film is going to be bigger than *Gone With the Wind*."

Long before Edna Ferber's generational saga, *Giant* (1956), went into production, Jennifer Jones lobbied George Stevens, after he'd been designated as the film's director, for the juicy female lead, a character named Leslie. More than a decade before, she'd won an Oscar for *The Song of Bernadette*, and she promised the director that in the part of Leslie Benedict, she would win one again.

But Stevens had his mind set on Audrey Hepburn. Sometime around July of 1954, he visited the petite actress in New York, where she was appearing on Broadway in *Ondine*. Almost from the beginning, Hepburn and Stevens disagreed over the interpretation of *Giant*'s character of Leslie, and soon, Hepburn was no longer in the running.

Then, beginning in January of 1955, Stevens zeroed in on Eva Marie Saint, only to learn that she was pregnant with a baby due in April.

Stevens then began to focus on Grace Kelly as a candidate for the role. A potential conflict arose, however, with MGM, which had slated her for some other film. Complicating the issue further was Prince Rainier of Monaco, who had other plans for Kelly.

Then a colleague of Stevens, producer Henry Ginsberg, recommended Marlene Dietrich for the role. "Are you out of your mind?" Stevens asked. "She could play the grandmother part, but for any of the younger parts, she's too old, too Teutonic."

During several tense weeks, Elizabeth knew that the role she coveted, that of Leslie in *Giant*, was almost beyond her reach. George Stevens, who had directed her so brilliantly in *A Place in the Sun*, "seemed to want every other actress in Hollywood, but considered me chopped liver, I guess," Elizabeth told Wilding. "But I want that part, and I'm going to go for it. Imagine, I go from being a beautiful young bride to a grandmother. Oscar, you've got Elizabeth Taylor's name written on your ass."

When it became clear that Grace Kelly would not be available, Elizabeth jumped with joy and headed for Benny Thau's office to beg him to have MGM lend her services to Warner Brothers.

There was still one problem. MGM didn't want to lend her to Warner Brothers. "I had to go on a sitdown

strike...well, almost," she said. "Dare I say blackmail in certain quarters? No, don't print that...it wasn't exactly blackmail."

Then, she engaged in a big brawl with Thau. "I think he wanted me to play Lassie's mother—or some such shit—in a sequel." She finally won out, "but my bruises were black. I got no extra money. MGM took it all for the loan-out."

Finally, convinced that Elizabeth was the right actress for the part, Warner Brothers offered \$250,000 for Elizabeth's services, although she was making only \$100,000 a year from MGM at the time.

During his selection of candidates for the male lead, the character of Bick Benedict, Stevens was bombarded with phone calls from William Holden, Gary Cooper, and Clark Gable. At least a dozen other Hollywood males also made their voices heard.

Lying on different massage boards at their gym, John Wayne told Forrest Tucker, "I'm gonna play Bick Benedict."

"Like hell you are," Tucker responded, lying nude on his board. "The role calls for a big dick." Then he ripped the towel off Wayne. "As you can plainly see, my Moby Dick is six times the size of yours."

Sterling Hayden said: "Forrest Tucker is too drunk to play the part. I'm the right size to play Benedict...in all departments."

Robert Mitchum said: "I've practically got the role of Bick Benedict sewn up! Stevens has always had a hard-on for me. I can just see billboards across America: ROBERT MITCHUM AND ELIZABETH TAYLOR STARRING IN GIANT WITH JAMES DEAN."

Late one afternoon, a call came in from Ross Hunter, the producer of *Magnificent Obsession*, starring Rock Hudson and Jane Wyman. "I want you to consider Rock for this part. He's going to become the biggest macho male star since Gable."

Universal, however, didn't want to lend Hudson, rushing him instead into another soapy tearjerker with Wyman, *All That Heaven Allows*. But when it became clear that Hudson could fulfill his obligations to both films, he persuaded Warners to let him star in *Giant*. "I had to let a lot of guys at Universal suck my cock to get the role of Bick," he later told Elizabeth.

Before deciding on Hudson, Stevens had more or less made up his mind that the role of Bick Benedict should go to William Holden. Hudson later recalled that on the day the announcement was made that he would be the male star of *Giant*, he entered the studio sauna nude, only to discover an equally nude Holden sitting on a slab of marble.

Hudson would describe the incident's irony to Elizabeth: "Here I was, the new star of Hollywood, confronting an aging star with my better body, a bigger dick, and a more awesome presence. I felt embarrassed for Holden."

After Elizabeth won the role of Leslie, Stevens called her to announce that he was thinking of casting Richard Burton as the second male lead, the role of Jett Rink, the hell-raising wildcatter, who is secretly in love with Bick Benedict's wife, Leslie, as played by Elizabeth.

"I know Burton," she said. "He's a good actor and for him to play a hell raiser would certainly be type casting. But wouldn't there be a problem with Burton's voice? He's Welsh, you know. Maybe you could get Howard Hughes—he's Texan, you know—to dub his lines?"

After rejecting Burton for the role, Stevens offered it to Alan Ladd, who was almost suicidally despondent at the time, and drinking heavily. He feared facing the camera, and was undergoing a lot of personal hell, including fear of a blackmail attempt from one of his hustler lovers, who was threatening to tell all to *Confidential* unless he surrendered \$10,000 in cash.

Finally, after sitting mesmerized through Elia Kazan's then-recent release, *East of Eden* (1955), Stevens offered the role to that film's star, James Dean. Stevens then hurriedly but thoughtfully cast *Giant*'s supporting roles, with choice parts going to Mercedes McCambridge, Chill Wills, Nick Adams, Carroll Baker, Jane Withers, Dennis Hopper, Rod Taylor, Earl Holliman, and Sal Mineo. Mineo told his gay friends, "With Hudson and Dean in the cast, I expect to get my ass pounded A LOT."

Then, Warners convened a press conference to present the stars of *Giant* to the world. Elizabeth met Dean for the first time. For his appearance, he wore a pair of "shit kicker" jeans, a threadbare red flannel shirt, tattered

boots, and a cowboy hat he claimed had belonged to Gary Cooper. He hid his eyes behind a pair of dark sunglasses, and a cigarette dangled out of the corner of his mouth.

When he was introduced, Dean was deliberately rude to Elizabeth. Stevens had indiscreetly relayed to Dean that, "Elizabeth doesn't want you in our film. Up until the last minute, she pushed Monty Clift for the role. But those guys who insure films at Warners refused to insure Monty because of all his drinking and his drugs."

Right before flying to the film's location in Marfa, Texas, a drought-stricken whistle-stop of 3,600 inhabitants in the high desert of West Texas, where daytime temperatures sometimes rose to 120° F, Dean had been featured in a black-and-white TV commercial promoting safe driving. In the clip with him was Gig Young, who'd had a very brief fling with Elizabeth. At the end of the commercial, Dean says, "Drive safely because the life you save may be my own."

The filming of *Giant* had been delayed because of Elizabeth's pregnancy, which gave Dean the chance to shoot *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), and gave Hudson the chance to complete his film with Jane Wyman.

In *Giant*, Elizabeth was cast as a young woman (Leslie) from Maryland's blue grass country, who marries a wealthy Texan, Bick Benedict (Rock Hudson) and becomes the mistress of his Reata Ranch. Dean was cast as a surly ranch hand who inherits what appears to be worthless desert. However, he discovers oil in a footprint left by Leslie on his property. He drills for oil and hits his first gusher. In the years before World War II, Jett (Dean) starts an oil-drilling company that makes him enormously wealthy.

During the course of *Giant*'s approximately 200 minutes, it moves through the rise and failing fortunes of Texans, with side detours into moral dissipation, racism, miscegenation, the oppression of women, oil well conflicts, and the changing social scenario of Texas itself. The movie's subplot involves the war between the longtime Texas aristocracy and the nouveau riche wildcatters whose oil well have "come in big." Budgeted at \$2 million, *Giant* would end up costing \$5 million, an almost-unheard-of price at the time.

For Elizabeth, after suffering through all those "rubbish" movies at MGM, *Giant* became a milestone in her life. Other than being saddled with a husband she didn't want, her biggest problem involved having to postpone her flourishing romance with Kevin McClory.

Elizabeth recalled, "In Texas, Rock and I hit it off right away. The heat, humidity, and dust in Marfa were so thoroughly oppressive we had to bolster our spirits any way we could. So we stayed out drinking all night and luckily were young enough and resilient enough to go straight to the set in the morning with fresh complexions and with no bags under our eyes. During our toots, we concocted the best drink I've ever tasted—a chocolate martini made with vodka, Hershey's syrup, and Kahlua. How we survived, I'll never know."

"Rock and Elizabeth were like kids again," claimed Stevens. "They indulged in a kind of baby talk, and they liked to play pranks on each other, tossing water at each other from our rapidly dwindling supply."

She told Dick Hanley, "Rock has become my second best friend—no one will replace Monty as Number One."

Because of the severe housing shortage in such a small town, Elizabeth was the only member of the cast and crew assigned to a private house of her own. Local residents moved into tents so they could rent rooms in their houses to the actors, staff, and crew who had descended on their town for the filming. Hudson and Dean were assigned a shared room with twin beds in a small house whose adjoining single room was occupied by the character actor, Chill Wills.

"With Dean and Hudson in the room adjoining mine, they were like two pigs rolling in shit for the first few nights," Wills later claimed. "The walls were shaking, and I heard the sound of creaky bedsprings until two or three in the morning. Then the fights set in. By then, I knew the honeymoon was over for these two queer boys."

Dean complained to Elizabeth, "Every night, Rock is trying to queer me and make me his bitch. My ass is sore. I'm moving out of that house."

When Hudson got to know Elizabeth more intimately, he confessed to her, "I want sex, real man-on-man sex, but I don't go in for this kinky stuff. Dean wants to get into that claw-footed, old timey bathtub we have, and then he begs me to piss on him. He also likes me to burn his ass with my cigarette butt—shit like that. I'm not into all this sicko crap."

In Texas, Hudson and Elizabeth discovered nachos, devouring them along with a massive consumption of alcohol. "Then they staged belch-and-fart contests," Dennis Hooper said.

On the set of *Giant*, Elizabeth had to battle her weight problem. All those chocolate martinis she consumed with Hudson were obviously fattening. But Stevens complained that she compounded the problem with her midnight snacks, which consisted of homemade vanilla ice cream drenched in fudge and peanut butter, preceded by a series of mayonnaise sandwiches, "which I just adore."

For about ten nights, Hudson seduced Elizabeth. Actually, she was the aggressor. She'd later tell Roddy McDowall something he already knew. "Rock is really endowed, and I mean really. As a lover, he's very efficient and eager to get on with it. For me, it's over before it begins. We've decided to be great friends, not lovers. No woman will ever succeed in igniting his enthusiasm in bed, and of that, I'm certain."

Dean ended up claiming that Hudson acted "like a lump of wood," and Hudson called Dean "that little scruff." On other occasions, when he was particularly angry at Dean, he referred to him as a "dick-crazed schizoid."

Dean was very blunt around Stevens. "Before I met Rock, I've had my cock sucked by four of the biggest names in Hollywood. After meeting Rock, I can now make that five big names."

One hot afternoon between set-ups, Dean confided one of his sexual fantasies to Stevens: "In World War II, I heard women wore a lipstick called Victory Red, or some shit like that. My greatest sexual turn-on would be to have three women paint their mouths with this lipstick and give me a blow-job—Elizabeth Taylor, Tallulah Bankhead, and Edith Piaf."



Giants killing time with one another in the high deserts of West Texas **Rock Hudson** with **Elizabeth Taylor**

"George always had to have a patsy to pick on throughout every one of his films," Elizabeth claimed. "On *Giant*, it was both Jimmy and me. Actually, Rock and I speculated that George secretly had the hots for Jimmy. Whenever he thought Jimmy wasn't looking, he was always eying him like a lovesick schoolgirl. One scalding hot afternoon, when Jimmy didn't show up for work, George told Rock and me, 'I should punish the little bastard and make him suck my dick.'"

"George and I staged some epic battles under that hot sun," Elizabeth said. "Our biggest fight was when he wanted me to wear those thick brogue shoes and a long grandma-in-the-wilderness skirt, plus a man's battered old cowboy hat. I attacked him for trying to force this ludicrous getup on me. I told him, 'What are you trying to do? Make me look like a lesbian in drag? I'm Elizabeth Taylor, in case you forgot it.'"

At first, Dean and Carroll Baker sat together whispering conspiratorially. "Our main diversion was making fun of Rock and Elizabeth," Baker later said. "We were cruel and cutting."

During the first two weeks, Elizabeth and Hudson spent every night together. Dean was frequently seen bonding with Baker, whom he'd known from the Actors Studio in New York.



Carroll Baker

Hudson constantly complained to Elizabeth about Stevens. "He gives Dean all the close-ups, and I'm left out in the cold," Hudson claimed.

Elizabeth and Hudson feared that Dean was stealing the picture. Both actors set out to woo Baker into their cabal. In that, they succeeded, and subsequently, Dean stopped speaking to her, feeling betrayed.



Elizabeth (a penitent Madonna worshipping at a crucifixion?) with **James Dean** in *Giant*

"Dean got the ultimate revenge," Baker said. "He succeeded in stealing Elizabeth from Rock and me. The dirty rat wanted Elizabeth for himself, and I went into a state of mourning. Elizabeth went off every evening with Jimmy, ignoring Rock and me. The tables had turned."

During the final three weeks of the shoot, Elizabeth temporarily deserted both Hudson and Baker. Her friendship with Hudson would be recharged after Dean's untimely death.

The film's cast and crew were shown the daily rushes in an battered old movie theater that had closed down with the coming of television. Most of the participants preferred to sit on the theater's ground floor, but Elizabeth and Dean usually retreated to the balcony where they were alone. Elizabeth brought popcorn from her house to share with Dean.

"They were like two lovebirds," Wills said. "I never could figure out these switch-hitters. One night they're taking it up the ass, and on another night, they're pounding pussy. You figure."

Throughout the shooting of *Giant*, Elizabeth was plagued with various illnesses, some of which required

hospitalization. The first of her health emergencies began in July of 1955, when she developed a severe sore throat and could not deliver her lines. That was almost immediately followed by a bladder infection and thrombophlebitis, a blood clot in a vein of her left leg. She blamed its flare-up on Stevens for “making me wear those tight breeches.”

Dr. John Davis examined her and asserted that she suffered from “a congenital anomaly of the spine.” To alleviate the pain in her lower back caused by a dysfunctional sciatic nerve, she took heavy doses of Novocaine.

One scene in *Giant* called for Elizabeth “to do a lot of jumping and twisting on a bed.” Her always-sensitive back exploded in pain again, as she suffered a ruptured intervertebral disc. She was shot with Novocaine and Hydrocortisone and also given Demerol and Meticorten. “I was a god damn walking pharmacy,” she claimed.

Stevens didn’t believe in any of her illnesses, calling them “psychosomatic.” On August 12, she returned to the set on crutches.

Stevens called Dean’s first shot with Elizabeth on June 3, 1955, “a day that will live in infamy in the annals of cinema history.” It was filmed on an open set at the Worth Evans Ranch, which Stevens had temporarily rented. It was the site of the famous scene where Dean was depicted with a rifle hoisted over his shoulders—he called it “my crucifixion pose.”

Time and time again, he flubbed his lines. Watching the proceedings, Dennis Hopper said, “That was one nervous queen. He was fucking up big time with another queen (i.e., Elizabeth) of Hollywood.”

In front of at least 250 onlookers, Dean ruined take after take by freezing up. A total of sixteen shots failed. Suddenly, he broke from the set and walked over to a wire fence in front of the assembled population of Marfa, some of whom had skipped school to attend this first ceremonial film shoot. As everyone looked on, Dean unzipped his jeans and hauled out his penis. Hopper claimed it looked about four inches soft. Shock waves were heard from the crowd as Dean took what he called “a horse piss.”

He later told Hopper, “I knew if I could piss in front of some two thousand (sic) people, I could do anything. I’m a Method actor.” He returned to the set and did the scene perfectly in one take. Leaving the set, he turned to Elizabeth, “I’m cool, man. It’s cool.”

Elizabeth later told Dick Hanley, “Jimmy and I in Texas were at first very suspicious of each other. We circled each other like two animals of prey. To him, I was just another Hollywood star, all bosom and no brains. To me, he was a would-be intellectual New York Method actor. We were not prepared to dig each other at all.”

“But after a while, we found we were just two human beings, and we became intimate friends that involved tender, loving sex in the beginning, none of that kinky shit that Rock talked about. But, as in the case with Rock, we decided that we could hold each other, protect each other from the cold winds, but as friends, not as lovers.”

Evoking Rock’s relationship with Elizabeth, Dean engaged in playful games with her. “Two kids on the playground,” Stevens called their intimacy.

However, during moments of manic giddiness, Dean had a tendency to go too far. One day, he grabbed Elizabeth, picked her up off her feet, and turned her upside down so that her skirt fell over her head, exposing her “unmentionable” regions to photographers.

As she later told Stevens, “Fortunately, unlike Marilyn Monroe on most occasions, I wore my panties that day, or else my twat would be hanging on every bathroom wall in every man’s toilet in America.”

To Elizabeth, Dean always remained a mystery, but she came to love him. “Sometimes, Jimmy and I would sit up until three in the morning, talking, and he would tell me about his past life, his conflicts, and some of his loves and tragedies. And the next day it was almost as if he didn’t want to recognize me, or to remember that he had revealed so much of himself the night before. And so he would pass me and ignore me, or just give me a cursory nod of the head. And then it took him a day or two to become my friend again. I found all that hard to understand.”

He told Elizabeth, “I would have been shot down by some yellow boy in Korea, but I escaped the draft—blame my flat feet, bad eyesight, and butt-fucking.”

Shortly before his death, Dean was said to have confided his most painful secrets to Elizabeth, sordid details of his life he shared with no other. One of those secrets was revealed after Elizabeth’s death in 2011 by writer

Keven Ses-sums in The Daily Beast. Elizabeth had granted Sessums an interview in 1997.

"I'm going to tell you something, but it's off the record until I die," she told Sessums. "When Jimmy was eleven, he began to be molested by his minister. I think that haunted him the rest of his life. In fact, I know it did."

Dean biographers have long suspected there was a sexual relationship with the Rev. James DeWeerd, a Wesleyan pastor in Fairmount, Indiana, who had a penchant for young boys.

The secret that Elizabeth never shared, perhaps because it would portray Dean in a harsh light, was that as he aged, he became a child molester himself.

When Hudson learned that Elizabeth was having an affair with Dean, he jokingly asked her, "Did he piss on you, or did you piss on him?"

"Let's just call it a tinkle-winkle," she said.

For sex, after his break with Hudson, Dean turned to local cowboys who worked on the film. The cowboys Dean befriended taught him rope tricks and invited him to shoot rabbits with them, followed by some male-on-male bonding. He confided to Elizabeth, "Not all Texas men have big dicks."

Dean had told Stevens, "Sal Mineo has the look of the angels" and would be perfect to play Angel Obregon II, the son of poor Mexican immigrants. The director had agreed with Dean's assessment of Mineo's talent and cast him in a small but key role in Giant.

Mineo had no scenes with Dean in Giant. They became lovers on the set of Rebel Without a Cause (1955). Mineo even bought a rebuilt Mercury like the car Dean had driven in Rebel.

Mineo later said, "I didn't really become friends with Elizabeth until Roddy McDowall and I appeared together in The Greatest Story Ever Told (1965), a big-screen retelling of the epic of Jesus, from his birth through a cinematic reworking of the Resurrection. It was directed by George Stevens, who'd directed me in Giant. Then I became close to Elizabeth. Roddy told me many stories about her. He'd even taken nude photographs of her. He also told me that Richard Burton in Rome during the making of Cleopatra was fucking him before he discovered that banging Elizabeth was more fun."

Stevens had offered Elizabeth a cameo role playing Mary Magdalene in The Greatest Story Ever Told. "Wasn't she that whore who seduced Christ? Hell, I'd be laughed off the screen. Get someone else to play your whore. I read you've cast John Wayne as a Roman centurion who oversees the crucifixion of Christ. George, are you on something?"



Sal Mineo

On the set of Giant in Texas, a studio underling rushed Elizabeth the latest edition of Confidential magazine, which ran the headline: WHEN LIZ TAYLOR'S AWAY, MIKE WILL PLAY. It detailed the night Michael Wilding picked up two female strippers at a club in Hollywood and brought them back to the home he shared with

Elizabeth in Beverly Hills. In the scandal's aftermath, Elizabeth told Stevens, "Whether it's true or not, a woman can't let an indiscretion break up a marriage."

Of course, considering her affairs, she was in no position to chastise Wilding.

Flying to Texas with their two sons to check up on Elizabeth, Wilding was greeted with a blaring headline—**MICHAEL WORRIED ABOUT LIZ AND ROCK.**

When Wilding with his two sons arrived in Marfa, he went to find Elizabeth, perhaps to remind her she was a wife and mother. Not finding her, he was told that she was last seen driving off with a young man.

"Where in hell do you drive to in this one-horse town?" he asked.

Instead of Elizabeth and Hudson, Wilding encountered Dean. "I have to be very frank with you," Dean told Wilding. "I've fallen in love with your wife. She's going to divorce you—and marry me. But, remember, you had your chance. My turn now."

He was so shocked that he told Stewart Granger back in Hollywood, "I could only conclude that Dean was poking me in the ribs. He could not have been serious. Elizabeth will no more marry Dean than I'll take the Queen Mother for my next bride."

On his first night in Marfa, Wilding was allowed to stay at Elizabeth's rented home, but she didn't return that night.

Nick Adams, Dean's longtime lover, had arrived in Marfa, and Stevens spread the rumor that Dean had fixed Elizabeth up with Adams. "He's living proof that big things come in small packages," Dean told Elizabeth.

Knowing that Wilding would be alone that evening for dinner, Dean brought over some West Texas chili and cold beer.

Over the chili, Wilding pointedly asked Dean, "Your plans to marry Elizabeth shocked me. I was told you were strictly homo."



A rebellious three-way: **Taylor, Hudson, and Dean**
in *Giant*

"I don't want to go through life with one hand tied behind my back," Dean replied. "Depending on how much rain falls on any given night, I can go either way—male or female. What does it really matter, come to think of it? Sometimes I reward people who do favors for me with sex. I recently flew to Key West to fuck Tennessee Williams. I virtually made him sign a blood oath that he would lobby to get me to play the male lead in all the future adaptations of his plays."

"Smart career move, dear boy," Wilding told him.

At the end of their chili supper, Dean said, "Elizabeth is likely to be engaged for the rest of the evening. In that case, would you like to go back to my place and fuck me instead?"

"A tempting offer, but I'm the babysitter tonight," Wilding said. "Give me a rain check."

Wilding claimed that he was still in love with Elizabeth, "but I found the daily tremors of living with such a volcanic creature more and more difficult. After my failure to make it as a star in Hollywood, I felt like James Mason in that role of a has-been in *A Star Is Born* with Judy Garland."

Elizabeth and Wilding quarreled every day they were in Marfa, and he soon flew from El Paso back to Los Angeles, taking their two sons with him.

"I knew it was over at that time," he said. "All that remained was bringing down the final curtain."

Back in Hollywood, Elizabeth continued her friendship with Dean, and also “recharged the batteries in my love for Rock, who was going through a troubling time and needed me.”

As influenced by his gay agent, Henry Willson, Hudson agreed to marry Phyllis Gates, his lesbian secretary. Willson feared exposure of Hudson’s homosexuality in an upcoming article in Confidential magazine.

During his disastrous marriage to Gates, Elizabeth and Wilding often entertained them at dinner. Gates recalled that Hudson spent most of those evening talking to Elizabeth, while she tried to amuse and entertain Wilding. She claimed that at one dinner in her kitchen, Wilding whispered in her ear, “You know, Phyllis, I wish I had met somebody like you. You’re the person I should have married.” He emphasized that by giving her a pat on the ass.



Sham intimacy within a sham marriage **Phyllis Gates with Rock Hudson**

Gates later wrote a sham memoir entitled My Husband, Rock Hudson. In it, she describes scenes of Hudson’s “passionate” love making. But Hudson reportedly told Elizabeth one night that the marriage had never been consummated.

“When I returned to Hollywood, Michael and I visited Jimmy at least three times at his little house in San Fernando Valley, and he came to see us,” Elizabeth said. “He seemed engulfed in loneliness. The first time he invited us for dinner, he heated up two cans of beans—and that was that. We sat and talked and listened to his music. A few nights later, he came over to our house. He loved our Siamese cats. I knew he wanted something that belonged to me, and I gave him one of the cats. He loved that cat from the very beginning and named it Marcus.”

On another night, Dean invited Elizabeth for a ride in the pride of his life, a new Porsche Spyder nicknamed “Little Bastard,” that had cost him \$5,000, the most money he’d ever spent on anything in his life.

He took her for a spin through Beverly Hills and rode up and down Sunset Boulevard past The Strip. He turned left onto Hollywood Boulevard, passing Grauman’s Chinese Theater. When they passed the theater with its cement casts of the hands and feet of the stars, Dean told her he was considering having a cast of his erect cock made in the cement instead.

The next day, Dean dropped in at Elizabeth’s home to tell her goodbye, claiming that he was driving his Porsche, accompanied with a friend, to the road race at Salinas. The date was September 30, 1955.

“Whatever you do, Jimmy, be safe—just be safe,” she cautioned him.

At Warner Brothers in Burbank, Stevens had invited some of his stars, including Elizabeth, Hudson, and Baker, to watch the rushes for Giant. At one point, there was an urgent ringing of the telephone. Stevens got up to answer it. Then the cast heard him say, “No, my god. When? Are you sure?”

As Baker remembered it, “The picture froze. The lights shot up. We turned and looked at George. The phone dangled in his hand. He was white and motionless. Death was present in that room. ‘There’s been a car crash,’

he said. 'Jimmy Dean has been killed.'"

An hour later, Elizabeth learned the painful details.

At 5:45pm, Dean and his passenger, Rulf Wütherich, a German immigrant who knew members of the Porsche family, were speeding Dean's Porsche Spyder during their approach to an intersection of Highways 41 and 466, one mile east of Cholame in San Luis Obispo County.

Some reports claimed that Dean was going 120 miles an hour when he saw a black-and-white Ford sedan making a leisurely left turn onto the highway. It was too late for him to stop to avoid a collision with Donald Turnupseed, a student at California Polytechnic.

The student escaped with a broken nose. Dean's passenger, Wütherich, was thrown clean out of the car. He suffered a broken jaw and other injuries, but, unlike Dean, he survived.

In contrast, Dean's head was almost severed from his body. He was DOA at Paso Robles War Memorial Hospital. The doctor who signed his death certificate had called Warner Brothers in Burbank.

In the aftermath of Dean's death, Wilding sat up until dawn with Elizabeth, "who sobbed the night away." Not respecting her grief, Stevens demanded that she show up for work the next day to shoot a final scene.

"That sod!" she shouted at Wilding. "The heartless sod!"

Although she could barely manage it, Elizabeth showed up as instructed on the set. She was still given to crying fits, but she stumbled through the scene as best she could, with a lot of help from her make-up artist. At the end of the day, she turned to Stevens. "This is the last time I'll ever work for a god damn ghoul like you!"

The next day she collapsed, complaining of abdominal pains. An ambulance was rushed to the set and, with dome lights flashing, took her to the hospital. She stubbornly remained there for two weeks, delaying some retakes and holding up production, which faced mounting costs because of her absence.

Before his death, during the filming of Dean's final scenes, he had mumbled and in some cases had been virtually incoherent. Stevens called back Nick Adams, Dean's former lover, who could do a perfect imitation of his voice, for dubbing the sound track, where appropriate, of Dean's voice.

One night at three o'clock in the morning, when Elizabeth returned home, she received an urgent phone call from Monty Clift, who was in Los Angeles at the time. He sounded drunk and drugged. Through his slurred words, she understood him to say, "With Jimmy gone, I see no reason to go on living."

His words shocked her. At that point she was unaware that Monty had had such a strong bond with Dean.

"Monty! Monty!" she shouted at him. "Live for me. Live for your Bessie Mae. Have you taken sleeping pills? I'll be right over."

When she arrived at Monty's apartment, she discovered that he had not taken pills or cut his wrists. But he was drugged and had thrown up on his red satin sheets. She spent the night with him, often cuddling him in her arms like a protective mother, even though he was twelve years older than she was.

Late the following morning, he confessed to her something he'd never told her before. "Like so many others, I was in love with Jimmy."

Leaving George Stevens with almost a million feet of film to edit into an appropriate running time for a movie, Elizabeth flew to Europe and on to Morocco. Michael Wilding had been cast as the second male lead in Zarak (1956), an action-adventure film co-starring Victor Mature (the Afghan outlaw who saves the life of a British officer at the cost of his own) and the Swedish bomb-shell, the big-busted Anita Ekberg.

There was speculation as to why Elizabeth went to Morocco. Ostensibly, it was viewed as perhaps a last-ditch attempt to save her marriage. Dick Hanley took a more cynical view. "The marriage at this point could not be saved. If she wanted to save anything, it was to save Victor Mature from the clutches of Anita Ekberg. At that time in her life, Elizabeth had a deep crush on Vic. But then who wouldn't go for him?"

Before her departure for Morocco, Elizabeth had visited MGM to discuss her next assignment. There, she ran into the 1940s swimming star Esther Williams, who had taught her how to swim when she was fourteen years old. Williams said, "I don't know if Victor Mature is having an affair with that Ekberg woman or not. But I've known Victor. Sex with him is like a force of nature."

Elizabeth later relayed that quote to Dick Hanley: "Telling me that is like preaching to the choir. What Esther doesn't know, presumably, is that I have also sampled the love-making techniques of Fernando Lamas. The very mention of his name seems to send a thrill through her." (As it happened, Williams later married Fernando Lamas).

From the day of her arrival in Morocco, Elizabeth quarreled with Wilding. She also detested the country, calling it "a horrible, filthy, and smelly place with sewage running through the streets." She was followed by street boys wherever she went, and later compared her experience there with "all those young boys pursuing Sebastian in Suddenly, Last Summer" (1959).



Victor Mature with **Anita Ekberg** in
Zarak

But what was happening in room 106 with Elizabeth Taylor was hotter than what was happening on screen.

In a society where women wore veils and covered their bodies, Elizabeth shocked locals by wearing tight sweaters, revealing her large breasts, and short skirts without stockings. She purchased silk caftans but never wore them. "You look like some god damn bitch in heat," Wilding told her.

"If I have the name, why not play the game?" she shot back at him.

The Wildings occupied suite 106 in the Dersa Hotel, some forty miles from the seedy French and Spanish-colonial Mediterranean port of Tétouan. One afternoon, Wilding came home two hours early and found Mature in bed with Elizabeth.

Elizabeth emerged from her involvement with all that beefcake to yell at her husband, "Get the hell out of my room. I'm getting fucked by a real man."

That night, Wilding moved into a separate room two doors down, and Mature occupied Elizabeth's suite.

After Zarak was wrapped, Elizabeth flew back to Los Angeles, and Wilding headed for London, where he stayed with Stewart Granger, who was filming interior scenes for Bhowani Junction (1956), and having an affair with Ava Gardner.

Wilding told him about Elizabeth's affair with Mature.

"I know Mature," Granger recalled. "He is a big, craven lump of lard with a dick that is like a sledgehammer, or so I've heard."

Since Mature, too, was in London at the time, Granger sought him out and asked him to apologize to Wilding. "Mature was a massive fellow but a chick-en shit at heart," Granger said. "He agreed to apologize. I told him if he'd fucked Jean Simmons, I would have broken his fucking jaw."

One night, Wilding came home and told Granger how Mature had apologized. "The most extraordinary part of it was that while he was apologizing, he sort of bent his knees."

Granger picked up on that immediately. "Okay, Michael, he apologized by giving you a blow-job—that's okay. In addition to being the greatest stud in Hollywood, Mature is also a cocksucker. Everyone in the business

knows that."

"I didn't," Wilding said, "but I do now."

When Wilding returned to Hollywood, he discovered that Elizabeth had taken up with Frank Sinatra.

News about the Taylor/Mature affair broke in Confidential magazine under the heading of WHEN MIKE WILDING CAUGHT LIZ TAYLOR AND VIC MATURE IN ROOM 106. The exposé ran in July of 1956.

Instead of what Elizabeth actually said to Wilding, Confidential, in print, asserted its version of what she told him: "Remember how silly you looked at 6am, dancing around with those stripteasers you'd brought home to our house wearing nothing but a G-string on your head? Well, snookums, you look just as silly now. So close the door before mama catches cold."

"Like those crazed bobbysoxers of the 1940s, Elizabeth had this thing for Frank Sinatra," claimed Roddy McDowall. "Like Marilyn Monroe, she played his records all the time in her dressing room and at home—and was wild about him. She once told me, 'I wanted Frank to take my virginity, but, alas, Peter Lawford beat him to it.' It took a little time, but Elizabeth finally got her man, Frankie. But like all our fantasies, it didn't exactly work out the way she'd dreamed."

Nearly all of Elizabeth's biographers seemed unaware of her affair with Sinatra, which occurred during the final months of her marriage to Wilding. It began after Elizabeth returned from Texas and resumed when she returned from Morocco, where Wilding was filming Zarak. While he remained in Morocco (and later during his time in England), Sinatra and Elizabeth were seeing each other virtually every night.

The source of details about the Taylor/Sinatra affair was Peter Lawford, after he was "banished" from the Rat Pack. Ironically, Lawford was the subject of a biography called The Man Who Kept the Secrets by James Spada. Over the years, the keeper of the secrets spilled many of them.

It was Lawford who first told Sinatra that Elizabeth's marriage to Wilding was all but over except for the divorce. "They sleep in different rooms and go for days without speaking to each other," Lawford claimed. "You always said you wanted her. Here's your chance to move in."

Before Wilding went to Morocco, Elizabeth accepted an invitation to visit Sinatra in Palm Springs. Her husband had gone off to San Francisco with Stewart Granger for the weekend. At first, she seemed reluctant to accept Sinatra's invitation, but he was very persuasive. He told her he'd send a limousine to Beverly Hills to pick her up and drive her to the desert.

Arriving in Palm Springs, she was greeted at the door by Sinatra, who wore an orange (his favorite color) shirt and white shorts.

"As you know, I'm sure, I just adore Monty Clift," she told him. "You guys were terrific in that Eternity picture. But he warned me not to fall in love with you, because he is already in love with you himself."

"Monty's loss will be your gain," he told her, kissing her on the lips.

Later, Lawford pressed Sinatra for details of the torrid weekend. He would in time learn a lot more from Sinatra, but for the moment, the singer merely said, "I taught her how to drink Jack Daniels."

Lawford learned that Elizabeth and Sinatra had sex "more than once." A lot of the time was spent with him listening to complaints about her loveless marriage to Wilding. During his recitations about his own tales of woe, he told her about how much in love with Ava Gardner he'd been—"and still am." But he added a postscript: "She's a woman not to be trusted. If you took Ava on a honeymoon, you'd surely catch her at some point going into the bushes with one of the busboys."

Elizabeth admitted that Wilding had been a father figure to her, and, as such, he was doomed to outlive his usefulness when she matured. "I escaped to find peace and tranquility with Michael, which was better than getting the shit beat out of me every night by Nicky Hilton."

The British actor confessed, "In the beginning, I tried to guide her and influence her, but after a few months, when I opened my mouth, she told me to shut up. In contrast, Marlene Dietrich listened to me for hours, or at least pretended to."

As her marriage to Wilding entered its death throes, Elizabeth secretly dated Sinatra with Lawford serving as

"the beard." One night, a waiter at a dive in San Fernando Valley must have tipped off a photographer from a newspaper. The photographer arrived at a restaurant where Elizabeth was dining with both Lawford and Sinatra. The manager alerted Sinatra, who exited through the kitchen. Lawford left through the front door, telling the photographer, "Dining alone tonight."

When Elizabeth got serious about her affair with Sinatra, he more or less deflected it, since it was obvious that she wanted to marry him after she divorced Wilding.

Both of them were lounging nude by his pool at Palm Springs one Sunday afternoon when she asked him, "What is your philosophy of life?"

"You gotta love living. Dying's a pain in the ass."

As the days went by, Elizabeth grew more and more dependent on Sinatra, although he was not really in love with her. He'd told Lawford, "I've had Ava, the most desirable woman in the world. But I lost her. Right now, I'm screwing the second most desirable woman on the planet, Elizabeth Taylor. Not bad for a skinny little kid from Hoboken."

One night, she arrived at his home in Beverly Hills without an invitation, showing up unannounced on his doorstep. Fortunately, he was alone that evening, as he'd been dating other women during the course of his affair with Elizabeth.

Alarmed by her physical appearance, he invited her in, demanding to know what had happened. Resting on the sofa in his living room, she revealed that she'd told Wilding, "I'm in love with Frank Sinatra and I want a divorce. He's not a violent person, but he slapped my face. I fell back over a coffee table, and my back is in agony."

"The son of a bitch," Sinatra muttered. "I could get him for that. In the meantime, I'm going to get help for you."

He called his doctor, who got her admitted to the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital for five days. She lingered there under an assumed name.

When Wilding showed up at Sinatra's house, demanding to know where his wife was, Sinatra slugged him.

Wilding wasn't the only one to experience Sinatra's notorious temper. Three weeks after Elizabeth's release from the hospital, he was dining with her at one of his favorite restaurants in Palm Springs. The manager knew to keep fans away from Sinatra's table, because he was aware of how much the singer hated autograph seekers.

However, on that night, the manager failed to alert a new waiter. It was the star-struck waiter who asked both Elizabeth and Sinatra for their respective autographs. But whereas Sinatra refused, Elizabeth graciously complied. She turned to Sinatra, "I'll sign for both of us." Then, in large letters so that he could read what she'd written, she wrote "ELIZABETH SINATRA."

That was too much for him to take. Right in the middle of the dinner, he told her, "We're going back to the house."

"I want to finish my meal," she protested.

"Then take a god damn taxi home," he shouted at her, barging out of the restaurant.

In a drunken state, she arrived about an hour and a half later at his desert villa. A servant let her in. "Where is that Italian bastard?" she shouted.

"He told me to tell you he's driving back to Los Angeles tonight," the servant said. "You can stay on and use the house if you wish to."

She left the following morning. Back in Beverly Hills, her calls to Sinatra went unanswered. When she phoned Lawford, he told her, "Frank flew to New York."

She wanted Sinatra to abandon all other romantic entanglements and marry her, but he adamantly refused.

In desperation, she called Lawford and told him the bad news. "I'm pregnant. A doctor just informed me of this lovely tidbit. Maybe Frank will come to his senses. Having a kid out of wedlock doesn't go over big in Hollywood."

When he heard the news, Sinatra bluntly told her, "I'm not going to marry you. We'll have to see that that kid in the oven doesn't become fully baked."

Elizabeth had told Wilding that during her last bout in the hospital, she'd instructed her doctor "to do

whatever is necessary, but see that I don't get pregnant again." Obviously whatever surgical procedure she'd hinted at had never happened.

He arranged for the abortion. Details are lacking, and Lawford was not forthcoming with what happened next. It is believed that Sinatra's close friend, gangster Mickey Cohen, played a role. Somehow, Cohen could pull off these things.

One night at a Hollywood party, Elizabeth encountered Ava Gardner, and those two beautiful actresses, after a couple of drinks, became confidential with one another. Elizabeth admitted to Ava that Sinatra had insisted that she abort their child, even though Elizabeth had wanted to have his baby.

"I'm an old hand at aborting Frank's babies," Ava told her.

In the aftermath of the abortion, Elizabeth was very bitter toward Sinatra and wanted nothing to do with him. But in time, she forgave him and resumed her friendship with him.

During her first marriage to Burton, Sinatra's manservant remembered serving drinks to Sinatra, Burton, and Elizabeth, each star lying nude by the pool at his villa in Palm Springs. "I just assumed Mr. Sinatra and Miss Taylor had let bygones be bygones."

When Kevin McClory returned from his international travels for Mike Todd and for tasks associated with the release of *Around the World in 80 Days*, Elizabeth was waiting for him. Apparently, he had not learned of her affair with Frank Sinatra.

He was, however, almost certainly aware of her adulterous affair with Victor Mature, because *Confidential*, in one of its more accurate articles, had published insider details, obviously from some anonymous source who was privy to very "confidential" tidbits of their sexfest.

"Love had nothing to do with my fling with Vic," Elizabeth told Janet Leigh. "It was about his dick. Every woman in Hollywood should sample it— and many of them do."

Wilding was left with the care and feeding of their sons, as Elizabeth spent her romantic Saturday and Sunday nights with McClory in her Malibu beach house. Often the "two lovebirds," as Shirley MacLaine defined them, had dinners with the red-haired actress and her husband, Steve Parker, who eventually became a film producer in Japan.

In later years, MacLaine told Elizabeth the secret of a happy marriage. "I live in America, Steve lives in Japan, a perfect arrangement." She also confessed, "I have one vice—fucking, even if it means with three different men in one day."



Ava Gardner with Frank Sinatra

Ava to Elizabeth Taylor:
"I'm an old hand at aborting
Frank's babies"

McClory later asserted, "Elizabeth was a very difficult person not to love. At that time, I was having a real struggle visualizing myself getting married to a star like Elizabeth with my meager finances."

"One night, we dined with Shirley and Steve, who had a boxer, a marvelous animal. We got back to the house and the dog had been sick and messed all over the floor. Without any hesitation, Elizabeth, who was wearing a lovely frock, got down and scrubbed up the mess. Right then and there I said, 'This is the woman for me.' I knew then she was the girl I was going to marry."

One evening, Elizabeth was dining at Chasen's with McClory when a call came in at around nine o'clock from MGM's Benny Thau, who was working late. He'd tracked her down. "Please come to my office tomorrow at ten o'clock," he told her. "You'll love what I have to tell you."

The following morning, Thau greeted her warmly. "My darling," he said. "We at MGM know you're going to be our next big star. Okay, there were some rotten pictures, but beginning with your next film, you're going to become big, I mean big, right up there with Marilyn Monroe, Susan Hayward, and Jane Wyman, each of whom is box office. Do you know when you're a star? When I was in Japan, I noticed that the face of Susan Hayward was imprinted on the package of every condom. Now that's bigtime."

"What is this delicious surprise for me?" she asked. "You're going to re-make Little Women... yet again?" She didn't disguise the sarcasm in her voice.

"We're going to film the Yankee version of Gone With the Wind. It's going to be the picture of the decade. It's called Raintree County, and as its star, you're going to win an Oscar, the first of many, I'm sure. And we're casting Montgomery Clift as your co-star."

While Around the World in 80 Days was being edited, Mike Todd called Kevin McClory into his office. McClory later recalled the conversation:

TODD: "Everyone knows who you're dating, and I don't think it's right."
McCLORY: "What do you mean?"
TODD: "You know what I mean. Elizabeth Taylor, that's who."
McCLORY: "Her marriage to Wilding is on the rocks. We are in love with each other and plan to marry as soon as her divorce comes through. I will work for you around the clock, but my private life, Mike, is my own personal business."
TODD: "What you're doing is a sin."

In the wake of that conversation, McClory thought about Todd. "Hello Kettle, meet Pot."

Three days later, as he continued editing his film, Todd told McClory, "You know, I'd like to meet the Wildings. I might use them to publicize our film. We could all go out on that big boat I've rented, The Hyding." It was a 117-foot yacht.

"If that would please you, I'm sure they'd be delighted," McClory said, planning to extend the invitation that night for a trip to begin on June 29, 1956.

Todd had a mixed motive. He'd long wanted to meet Elizabeth, but he also planned to film a Japanese training vessel in the Santa Barbara harbor for use in his movie.

With McClory and Dick Hanley, Todd's new secretary, as fellow passengers aboard the yacht, Wilding and Elizabeth came aboard, but immediately separated once on deck.

All eyes focused on Elizabeth in her tight-fitting flamingo pink pants that outlined her crotch and her violet-

cashmere sweater that accentuated the color of her eyes. She delivered her familiar refrain: "Who do you have to fuck to get a drink around here?"

Mike Todd came to the rescue with a chilled bottle of champagne. "Not since Cleopatra set her gilded foot onto her barge has such a dazzling queen taken to the sea."

"Flattery will get you anything," she said. "And I'm not bullshitting."

Todd ordered one of his handsome waiters to keep Elizabeth's ruby-colored champagne glass full throughout the rest of the trip.

Evelyn Keyes, "Scarlett O'Hara's Younger Sister" from *Gone With the Wind*, more or less volunteered as Elizabeth's "chaperone" for the duration of the cruise.

She'd been previously married to directors Charles Vidor and John Huston. Although not married, Keyes and Todd had been living together like man and wife for the previous three years.

Keyes was "preening proud" of an engagement ring Todd had presented to her the night before. It was a 29.4 carat diamond engagement sparkler for which he'd paid almost \$100,000, a stunning price back then for a piece of jewelry.



Three views of **Evelyn Keyes** Upper right: as Scarlett O'Hara's little sister in *Gone With the Wind*

"I just know that any day now, he's going to propose to me," Keyes told Elizabeth. "I've got to be careful I don't lose it. It's too big for my finger, and Mike is going to take it back and get it resized."

The next time Keyes saw that diamond sparkler was months later on the finger of Elizabeth Taylor when she was married to Todd. Elizabeth often cited that ring as the beginning of her love affair with very large and very expensive diamonds.

[In 2002, Elizabeth would write a book entitled *My Love Affair With Jewelry* in which she stated: "I don't believe I own the pieces. I believe I am their custodian, here to enjoy them, to give them the best treatment in the world, to watch after their safety, and to love them.]"

Keyes later claimed that Todd paid scant attention to Elizabeth during their two-day yachting trip aboard *The Hyding*. "I did not suspect a thing. Elizabeth and I amused each other with stories about our experiences in Tinseltown, and we talked about previous boyfriends. She asked me what it was like to fuck Kirk Douglas, David Niven, Dick Powell, and Anthony Quinn, and I gave her all the details. 'Since Niven is aboard, you might want to sample it for yourself.' I suggested to her."

"She was showing a lot of bosom, and I told her that I'd often wondered what would have happened to me if I had needed a size 38 bra instead of a modest 34," Keyes said.

"Let's face it," Elizabeth said. "We live in a tit culture."

She amused Keyes with stories about her struggles with Louis B. Mayer, and Keyes told her about working for

Harry Cohn at Columbia. "He shoved his hand between my legs and rubbed my vagina," Keyes claimed. "He said, 'Save some of that for me, 'cause I'm gonna marry you.'"



upper photo: **David Niven** as Phineas Fogg in
Around the World in 80 Days

lower photo: a detail from the illustrations
associated with that film. Some critics say that
the artwork was more consistently charming
than the movie itself.

"It never crossed my mind that Mike was checking out Elizabeth," Keyes later said. "She was everything he professed to dislike, the epitome of a movie star in dress, attitude, and demands. She never stopped drinking champagne from the moment she came aboard, and Mike didn't like women who drank. And she had a husband aboard."

Technically, the yachting party was in honor of Niven, who had interpreted the role of the eponymous hero, Phineas Fogg, in *Around the World in 80 Days*. Niven had been the former roommate and lover of Errol Flynn, and he was obviously aware of Flynn's fling with the then-underage Elizabeth.

Although bisexual, Niven was mostly known for his affairs with the A-list stars of Hollywood, an impressive range that had included Grace Kelly ("my finest lay"), Ava Gardner, Paulette Goddard, Hedy Lamarr, Carole Lombard, Norma Shearer, Loretta Young, Mae West, Ann Sheridan, Ginger Rogers, Ida Lupino, Deborah Kerr, Rita Hayworth, and Merle Oberon. Both Flynn and Niven had been bedtime companions of tobacco heiress Doris Duke. Before she became Todd's current mistress, Keyes and Niven had been lovers. She had high praise for his "beer can penis."

Niven told Flynn, "I always meant to get around to Elizabeth Taylor, but the poor girl so far has been denied the pleasure."

Todd wasn't the only one concealing his attraction for Elizabeth. Since Wilding had been invited, McClory did not pay as much attention to Elizabeth as he wanted to, and he was denied the privilege of sleeping with her.

After their first night at sea, she told McClory, "Mr. Wilding slept with me, but didn't get to enjoy the honeypot. I'm saving that for you, baby."

In spite of what she promised, McClory, months later, said, "Do you remember that old song 'Tennessee Waltz,' a big hit? Well, like the woman singing that song, I lost Elizabeth, my little darling, the night we sailed on The Hyding. The prize went to Mike Todd."

After their trip at sea, Wilding drove Elizabeth back to their crow's nest home. He'd later tell Stewart Granger, "I think three men are after Elizabeth— at least one of them is...perhaps all of them. David Niven, Kevin McClory, and, a remote shot, Mike Todd."

Driving up the treacherous road to their home, Wilding asked her, "What do you think of Mike Todd?"

"A real high roller," she said. "He reminds me of that Damon Runyon character in Guys and Dolls, Sky Masterson. A bit too pushy, a bit too vulgar, and a bit too brash. He should go over big in Hollywood."

In the weeks ahead, Todd decided to throw a spectacular A-list party at his rented Beverly Hills mansion. The occasion was in honor of the newscaster, Edward R. Murrow, who had narrated the introduction of Around the World in 80 Days. Todd admired Murrow for having stood up against Senator Joseph McCarthy during his "witch hunt" for communists in the movie colony.

Tanked up on champagne, Elizabeth was escorted by Todd to meet the celebrated news anchor. After a few polite interchanges, she provocatively said to him, "Tallulah Bankhead spreads the word at every party that you're the best lay in New York."

Not missing a beat, he shot back, "Why don't you climb the mountain and find out for yourself? Tallulah's is not a reliable news source. Like all true Southern women, she likes to embellish to make a good story even better."

At one point at the party, Elizabeth encountered the "bitchy-and-oh-so-terribly-witty" Noël Coward, who had completed a cameo for Todd's Around the World in 80 Days. "My dear," he said. "Wonderful to see you again. I noticed that your latest boyfriend, Kevin McClory, has a stutter. To mock him, Todd refers to him as 'Klevin.' How do you find him?"

"I find him very campy," she said, using a word that had not yet come into general usage.

"Talk about camp, darling," he said, "you're gazing upon the master. I spoke to Kevin or Klevin about you. He told me he found you 'totally pornographic.'"

"It pays to advertise," she said.

"Perhaps we'll star together in a picture," Coward said.

"That, dear Noël, I'd bet my left tit will never happen."

She was wrong. In a 1967 release for Universal, Elizabeth, along with Coward and Richard Burton, co-starred in Boom!. It was based on a Tennessee Williams play, The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, which Tallulah Bankhead had appeared in on Broadway with Elizabeth's former escort, Tab Hunter. It had been hailed as Broadway's "odd couple casting of the century."

Another guest of honor at the Todd gala, David Niven, followed Elizabeth out on the moonlit terrace, perhaps planning to make good on his stated attempt to seduce her. He openly flirted with her, but she seemed distracted. At one point, although usually the perfect gentleman, he took her delicate hand and placed it firmly on his ample crotch. "That is what is in store for you."

"I've had bigger," she snapped, sarcastically. Retrieving her hand, she headed across the terrace and back into the party, where Todd suddenly appeared with a fresh glass of champagne for her.

She later said, "It was fun being with Mike Todd. I was attracted to him, but not overly. I loved hearing him talk about Todd-AO. When I saw Oklahoma!, I thought it was the best big screen system ever devised, when he showed it to me."

As the party wound down, Elizabeth decided to find Wilding to take her home, but saw him talking in a secluded corner to Marlene Dietrich and Edith Piaf. She'd heard from Dick Hanley that Dietrich and "The Little Sparrow" in her simple black dress from Chanel were having a lesbian fling. Within the hour, Piaf would sing a dozen love songs in French before the august assemblage of Hollywood flesh.

Unknown to Elizabeth at the time, Wilding had resumed his affair with Dietrich, who had also shacked up with Todd during her appearance in Around the World in 80 Days.

Dietrich had told her daughter, Maria Riva, "Michael is a new man now that he's dumping that awful girl who made his life so miserable for so long. Now, we have to get his children away from the little harlot."

Riva would recall visits of Wilding to her mother. "They broke the springs in a double bed," she claimed.

The following Sunday afternoon, Todd once again invited Wilding and Elizabeth, this time for a swim party at his Beverly Hills mansion. Included in the guest list of about thirty were Eddie Fisher and Debbie Reynolds, hailed as America's Sweethearts. Locked in a loveless marriage, the Fishers were anything but.

Rumors were rampant that Fisher was actually in love with Todd and that Reynolds was a closeted lesbian, which she has vehemently and frequently denied.

Todd and Elizabeth spent most of the afternoon lying on one pink and one chartreuse air mattress, floating only a few inches apart on the surface of the pool.

Standing with his wife, Fisher kept his eyes focused on them. He told Reynolds, "Elizabeth has skinny legs. I could never go for a dame like that!"

She later said, "When your husband says that about a woman, she's the one to watch out for."

Two days later, Elizabeth received a phone call from Todd, asking her to visit him at his office that morning at MGM, where he'd rented space in the Irving Thalberg Building.

She drove to MGM, thinking that he might want to star her in his next picture after the release of *Around the World in 80 Days*, and after she finished shooting *Raintree County* with Monty.

As she relayed in one of her memoirs, "I was sitting in his outer office with my feet up on a table, drinking a Coke, and he rushed in and picked me up by my arm. Without a word, he practically dragged me out of the office and down a corridor. He shoved me into an elevator, still not speaking, just marching along breaking my arm. He took me into this deserted office. He sort of plunked me down on a couch and pulled a chair up to me. He started in on this spiel that lasted about a half hour without a break."

"He told me he loved me and that there was no question about that. 'We're going to be married,' he said. I looked at him the same way I imagine a rabbit looks at a mongoose. All kinds of things went through my mind. I thought he was stark, raving mad. I had to get away from this lunatic."

"Then he joined me on the sofa and took me in his arms. He tongue kissed me for at least five minutes. When he broke away for air, he told me very forcefully, 'From now on, I'm the only man you're gonna fuck!'"

GIANT REASONS TO HATE ROCK HUDSON & ELIZABETH TAYLOR



Rock Hudson



La Liz



Actors who wanted the role of Bick Benedict



Image-wise, any of these guys might have been a studly Texas rancher: *left to right, above:* **William Holden, Gary Cooper, Clark Gable, Sterling Hayden, Forrest Tucker, and Robert Mitchum**

Actresses who wanted the role of Leslie Benedict



But could any of these actresses convincingly play a West Texas rancher's wife? *left to right* **Grace Kelly, Audrey Hepburn, Jennifer Jones, Marlene Dietrich**

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Around the World with MIKE TODD

With Mike Todd threatening to wed her, the still-married Elizabeth began work at MGM on *Raintree County* in April of 1956, one of the most troubled and painful years of her life.

Before filming, she had to undergo a series of intricate costume fittings to dress like a rich Southern belle in the months leading up to the election of President Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War.

MGM hired a dialect coach, Marguerite Littman, to teach her the finer points of Southern dialect. In that endeavor, Littman did not succeed. Elizabeth's Southern speech was attacked by many critics, "as the worst in the history of cinema."

Both Elizabeth and Monty agreed that "the script stinks," but each of them, needing the money, decided to give it their best.

When friends called, Elizabeth told them, "I filled in for Vivien Leigh, Miss Scarlett herself, in *Elephant Walk*, and now I've got another fiddle-dee-dee character to play—a completely bonkers Scarlett O'Hara type. I'm deranged. I've got to commit suicide in a murky swamp in penance for carrying the 'infection' of Negro blood—or some shit like that. I haven't gotten that far into the script yet."

The Civil War saga was based on Ross Lockridge's epic 1,100-page novel, *Raintree County*, with filming set to begin with a budget of \$5 million from MGM, the most money ever spent up to that time on any movie shot entirely in the U.S.

The novelist was a thirty-three year old English teacher from Bloomington, Indiana. He wrote his first and last novel, and sold it to MGM for \$150,000, but its production would be delayed for years. He never lived to see it on the screen—"just as well," said Elizabeth—as he committed suicide in March of 1948. The reclusive novelist could not deal with the pressures of fame, or so it was said. There may have been other, more private, reasons.

When Monty was cast as the lead, he was at the peak of his stardom and had a say in the choice of directors. Right from the beginning, that became a problem for MGM, as the actor turned down each of their original choices to helm this massive production.

Monty rejected Richard Brooks, who had scored a triumph with *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) starring Glenn Ford. Brooks had previously directed Elizabeth in *The Last Time I Saw Paris*. Monty also rejected William Wyler, fresh from helming Gary Cooper in *Friendly Persuasion* (1956). Monty agreed, however, to accept the controversial Edward Dmytryk as the project's director.

One of the most famous directors of Hollywood, Canadian-born Dmytryk was known for directing films such as *Back to Bataan* (1945), starring super patriot John Wayne, whom J. Edgar Hoover always maintained "took it up the ass" when he was known as Marion Morrison in the 1920s.

At the time he got sucked into the Red Menace vortex, Dmytryk had directed *Crossfire* (1947), starring three actors named Robert—Mitchum, Ryan, and Young. This film noir involved a victim of anti-Semitism and was handled with taste and intelligence. The novel on which it was based cast the victim as a homosexual, but that was viewed as too hot to handle for post-war American audiences. Dmytryk made the victim a Jew instead.

Summoned to appear before HUAC in 1947, he refused to testify and was sent to prison. After a few months, he felt he was going insane while "caged like a wild animal." On April 25, 1951, he asked to appear a second time before HUAC. This time, "the canary sang" [his words].

Under oath, Dmytryk admitted to a brief membership in the Communist Party in 1945 and named twenty-six former members of left-wing groups. He ratted on Adrian Scott, Albert Maltz, and John Howard Lawson, fellow members of the Hollywood Ten. He testified that all of them had pressured him to include communist propaganda in his films.

Regrettably, his testimony damaged pending court cases where these men were trying to exonerate themselves. In a revealing 1996 book, *Odd Man Out: A Memoir of the Hollywood Ten*, Dmytryk recounted his horrible ordeal.

Unlike the others, his directorial career wasn't wrecked. He would go on to helm one of Humphrey Bogart's greatest films, *The Caine Mutiny* (1954). He would also direct Bette Davis, Marlon Brando, Montgomery Clift, Sean Connery, Clark Gable, Spencer Tracy, Richard Burton, Richard Widmark, Henry Fonda, and Barbara Stanwyck, typecast as a lesbian, in *Walk on the Wild Side* (1962).

Although he had nothing to do with determining salaries, Dmytryk had to listen to numerous complaints from Elizabeth about the money she was drawing. "It's unfair," she said to him. "I'm getting \$125,000 to make this god damn fucker, and Monty is drawing \$300,000."

"Hang in there, kid," Dmytryk told her, "I predict that one day, with your star power, you'll get \$500,000 per picture."

Throughout the entire film, Monty rehearsed with Elizabeth in his role as John Wickliff Shawnessy and her part as Susanna Drake. Using Lockridge's novel as a guide, he constantly tried to rewrite Millard Kaufman's screenplay.

Dore Schary had assembled an impressive supporting cast, including Eva Marie Saint (playing Elizabeth's rival in love), Lee Marvin, Rod Taylor, and Nigel Patrick. Others in the cast included Agnes Moorehead, who had long been rumored to be the lesbian lover of Debbie Reynolds. Elizabeth provocatively asked her if that rumor were true. Even though Elizabeth was a big star and Moorehead only a supporting player, the older actress slapped her face. "Maybe I deserved that," Elizabeth said to Monty.

She spent some time with another member of the cast, Tom Drake, talking about their early days at MGM when both of them were in love with Peter Lawford.

Before signing for *Raintree County*, Monty had shown very poor judgment in turning down other scripts. He'd rejected *High Noon* (1952), which became one of Gary Cooper's biggest successes, and he even turned down *East of Eden* (1955), which virtually immortalized James Dean.

His public behavior had also become increasingly erratic. In 1955, he attended the premiere of *Guys and Dolls*, starring "those sworn enemies," Marlon Brando and Frank Sinatra, both of whom had made love to Elizabeth. He had no comment on the performance of Sinatra, whom he'd befriended on the set of *From Here to Eternity* and had lived with temporarily. But in the middle of the screening of *Guys and Dolls*, Monty had stood up. In his loudest voice, he'd screamed that *Guys and Dolls* was "vomit-able—this god damn picture stinks!"

Outside in the lobby, he punched his fist into a glass cabinet containing pictures of the stars and severely lacerated his arm. While waiting for an ambulance, he urinated on the street in front of passers-by.

Even before filming of *Raintree County* began, Monty had increasingly been displaying erratic behavior. His doctor said that one day, he discovered "every pill known to mankind," in the actor's medicine cabinet.

For a birthday gift, Elizabeth had presented Monty with a green alligator vanity case, and he carried it at his side wherever he went. It was reported to contain more pills than Bayer had aspirins.

On MGM's lot during the filming of *Raintree County*, Elizabeth still had a British husband at home, whom she had yet to divorce; a boyfriend (Kevin McClory) on a leash; and a new man in her life, Mike Todd.

"But in spite of that array," the director Dmytryk said, "she still had a roving eye for male flesh. Many of the more innocent members of the crew thought she was having an affair with Monty Clift, who followed her around like a lovelorn dog. Perhaps he was in love with her, but I doubt if they ever made it in the haystack. He did tell me one day, 'It's no good trying to hide my feelings. I can't get over it—Elizabeth is the only woman I have ever met who turns me on. She feels like the other half of me.' He did say that, but I'd bet two inches off my dick that she wasn't getting anything from Monty but embraces."

She was also seen on several occasions dining with Tom Drake in the MGM commissary. "They make a handsome couple," Dmytryk said, "but they talk about their boyfriends over club sandwiches."

On her second day on the set, Dmytryk introduced her to actor Lee Marvin, a former Marine born in New York.

He had a lean and mean appearance, as well as a commandingly deep voice and a menacing aura. In film noir, he'd entered the pantheon of screen sadists when he tossed hot coffee into Gloria Grahame's face in the 1953 film *The Big Heat*.

"No one liked him on the set," Dmytryk said. "He was rude and drunk most of the time. He and Marlon Brando had actually attacked each other when they appeared together in *The Wild One* in 1953. I feared Marvin would make trouble on the set."

When introduced to Elizabeth, Marvin said, "I'm a rip-snorter."

"Perhaps one night you can show me the difference between a rip-snorter and a hellraiser," she said.

"I'm your man."

Within two days, Elizabeth came up to Marvin and said, "I hope you don't consider me forward, but I'd like to go to bed with you."



Down and dirty: **Lee Marvin**

"Marvin didn't consider her forward at all," Dmytryk claimed "When he got drunk and needed to fuck, he'd chase a jackrabbit into the hills. I couldn't believe it. Against all odds, Marvin and Elizabeth became an item for a few nights."

Drake, however, had trouble believing that Elizabeth would be attracted to Marvin. One afternoon in the MGM commissary, he asked Marvin if the rumors were true about intimacies between Elizabeth and him.

"The beautiful bitch likes it dirty and deep, which rules you out, gay boy," Marvin shot back.

According to Dmytryk, "I had no idea how the mating game would play out after I shipped this motley crew to the Deep South. But when the interior shots were completed on the MGM lot in Los Angeles, it was time to fly cast and crew to Kentucky for exterior shots. Then tragedy struck."

It was a hot afternoon on May 12, 1956, when Elizabeth decided privately to throw her last dinner party—take-out food only—as the wife of Michael Wilding. He had been lying on the sofa all afternoon complaining of lower back pain. "Listen," she said, "in this marriage, I'm the one who gets the back pains."

She proceeded with the organization of the dinner party she'd scheduled for that evening, unaware that it would become one of the most notorious in the history of Hollywood. Wanting to know her director better, she invited Edward Dmytryk and his wife Jean. "J. Edgar Hoover will probably have us arrested as commies for hanging out with the Dmytryks," she told Wilding.

She also decided to invite Rock Hudson, hoping to renew their friendship after she'd more or less deserted him on the set of *Giant* to hang out instead with James Dean. "Of course, we'll have to ask that lesbian Henry Willson forced him to marry—what's the name of the bitch? Oh, yes...Phyllis Gates."

Mostly she wanted to invite Monty, and she had a special reason for doing so. At a party she'd met this handsome gay priest, Father George Long, who told her he'd more or less fallen in love with Monty after watching him play a priest in the 1953 film, *I Confess*. She called Monty, urging him to come. "You've got to meet this priest. He's one hunk. He thinks you're gorgeous, and his favorite word is 'fuck'"

Monty turned her down. MGM had hired a chauffeur for him for the duration of his involvement with Raintree County. At MGM, Dore Schary had told Benny Thau, "I don't want Monty to become another Jimmy Dean-style auto casualty, so we'd better get a full-time driver for our druggie star."

On the evening of Elizabeth's dinner party, however, Monty had already released the driver from his duties that night, since he had planned to retire early to bed.

Elizabeth begged and begged for Monty to make an appearance at her party, but Monty would not relent. At four o'clock, she called yet another time, beseeching him to attend. Again, he pleaded that he was too tired, claiming that the road to her house was too dangerous for him to drive at night.

At five o'clock, she called a third time, and still he was determined not to come. He also told her he'd taken sleeping pills, which would make it hazardous to be on any road.

But tenaciously, she asked Wilding to call Monty at around six, and it was through him that Elizabeth finally wangled Monty's agreement to come.

"I can't stay long," he warned.

To entice Monty, Wilding had told him that Elizabeth had invited his best friend, Kevin McCarthy, who was currently filming *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956). Monty had ridiculed him for appearing in this sci-fi horror flick, little knowing that it would become a film classic still being shown during the 21st century.

At the party, Monty sipped "piss-warm, pussy pink rosé" and heard Elizabeth talk about how beautiful both of them looked in the early rushes she'd seen by Robert Surtees, the cinematographer of *Raintree County*.

That gay priest did not show up at the party, so Monty turned his amorous attention instead to one of his all-time favorite lovers, Rock Hudson, who had little passion for him. "Monty doesn't give me much to work with," Hudson had previously confided to Elizabeth.

After Monty went into the bathroom and took some downers, he emerged more hostile to Hudson. The macho star was filming the 1956 *Written on the Wind* with Lauren Bacall, Robert Stack, and Dorothy Malone.

Elizabeth knew that Hudson was having an affair with the very handsome Stack. "But I beat you to him," Elizabeth chided Hudson.

Monty may have been jealous of Stack, and at the party, he told Hudson he was "seriously pissed off at him," but he never said why.

Then, announcing that he was "dead tired," Monty was the first to leave. McCarthy followed him out the door, having stated to the party guests that he had an early morning plane to catch. Outside the Wilding home, Monty asked Kevin if he'd lead the way down the "murderous cork-twisted road" that eventually funneled into Sunset Boulevard.

"If you don't go ahead and drive in front of me off this god damn mountain, I'll be driving in circles all night," Monty claimed. McCarthy agreed, but warned him not to follow "too closely on my tail."

McCarthy recalled that fateful night. "I looked in my rearview mirror, and I saw Monty's car approaching too close to my vehicle. I thought he was playing chicken with me. I put my foot on the gas and went faster when his own car seemed almost on top of me. We both made the first turn, but the next one was treacherous. We were careening, swerving, and screeching. There were no streetlights. I saw his car lights weave from one side of the road to the other. Then I heard this terrible crash. A cloud of dust appeared in my rear-view mirror."

Braking and then parking off to the side, McCarthy got out of his car and rushed to the scene of the accident. Monty's Chevrolet was now "an accordion-pleated mess." He peered into the dark car whose motor was still running. Reaching through a broken window, he managed to turn off the ignition, but he didn't see Monty. Unknown to McCarthy, Monty had fallen into a fetus-like position under the wheel.

McCarthy suspected that his body had been thrown from the car, but he didn't see him anywhere on the nearby grounds. The car had collided into a telephone pole jutting upward from the edge of the cliff and, in the dark, seemed to hang precariously above the ravine. McCarthy was afraid that it might burst into flames.

He desperately needed to get to a phone, but he had noticed on the way down that all the neighboring houses were under construction. He raced up the hill, panting for breath. Passing through the garden gate and into the Wilding home, he pounded on the door, screaming for Elizabeth.

It was Wilding who answered the urgent pounding, and at first he seemed to think that McCarthy was playing some terrible sick joke. "Go home, Kevin!" he said. "The party's over."

"My god," McCarthy shouted into the living room, loud enough for the remaining guests to hear. "Come at once. Monty's dead!"

A screech came from within the house. It was Elizabeth.

Her screams of agony pierced the night air as her household, except for Wilding and his painful back, raced to the site of the accident. Hudson had been urged by McCarthy to bring a flashlight.

"My only thought was that Monty was somewhere in that car, perhaps on the floorboard," Elizabeth later recalled. "When we got there, we found the doors jammed shut. Rock shone his flashlight into the front seat. Monty was there and moving. His head looked like it has been smashed into the steering wheel. The windshield was broken, the dashboard smashed. He was bleeding profusely—so much so that it looked like his face had been halved."



At the scene of **Montgomery Clift's** car accident

"There are various printed stories about how I broke into the car," she said. "In all honesty, I don't remember. I know that I came through the rear because I vaguely remember crawling over the front seat to get to him. How I did it remains a mystery to me to this day. Everyone at the scene was so involved he told contradictory stories. Rock was the strongest of the lot, and he eventually got the smashed-in front door open."

"I know I had on this pink scarf," she said. "I remember ripping it off and using it to try to help stop the flow of blood. I wore this white dress. It turned scarlet. All my previous revulsion about blood left me. I held his head and he sort of came to. He became almost lucid. Of course, he was suffering from shock. A tooth was hanging on his lip by a few shreds of flesh, and he asked me to pull it off because it was cutting his tongue."

"Suddenly, he was gasping for breath. He motioned that one—maybe more—of his teeth had broken away and had lodged in his throat. I reached in with my hand and removed two teeth so he could breathe. It was perhaps the most ghastly night of my life—yes, the most ghastly."

"The damn ambulance got lost and was about an hour late," she recalled. "But his doctor arrived. Monty, with virtually no head, actually formally introduced us."

Before the ambulance got there, photographers and reporters descended on the scene. Elizabeth yelled at Hudson and McCarthy to form a shield to protect Monty's face from their view. At one point she placed her scarf over his face so they could not photograph "that bloody pulp."

She yelled at the photographers, "You sons of bitches, take one picture of him, and I'll kick you in the nuts. I'll have you barred from every studio in Hollywood, you fucking leeches."

"Finally, that asshole of an ambulance arrived," she said. "Monty could have been dead, the van went via Idaho to get to us."

In back of the ambulance, Monty had passed out. She sat close by his side, holding his hand and telling him how much she loved him. "By that point, his face had swollen until it was almost the size of his shoulders," she said. "That beautiful face of his looked like a giant red soccer ball."

"I wanted to die, and Monty almost did. Guilt overcame me. I knew if I had not insisted he come to my house, he'd be asleep in his own bed right that very moment. That night would haunt me. For years, I'd have

nightmares. I'd ruined the life of my best friend...perhaps for always."

When news that Elizabeth had insisted that an exhausted Monty make a tortuous drive up and down a mountain, she came in for a lot of press criticism. "The Girl Who Had Everything wants it her way—or the highway," charged one reporter.

The stongest criticism leveled against her came from Monty's other two close women friends, the notorious Libby Holman and Mira Rostova, his acting coach.

Rostova attacked Elizabeth to Paul Newman, who was a leading contender for the male lead in Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

"It's all the fault of that beautiful witch," Rostova charged. "Monty had repeatedly told her that he was too tired to drive up that dangerous mountain. He never likes to drive at night, and he knew that the access road was treacherous. He should have gone to bed instead. She preferred him to risk his life for her—and for what? Another one of her stupid little parties."

After Elizabeth was allowed at last to see Monty, she said, "In his hospital room at Cedars of Lebanon, it was all I could do not to let out a scream. His head was as big as the biggest pumpkin at Hallowe'en—and far more grotesque. His jaws were wired. He would have to have a series of operations to reconstruct his once beautiful face and teeth. He had a broken nose and a cracked upper cheekbone. There was a gaping split in his upper lip and cuts and bruises all over his face. He was in traction for whiplash injuries."

One Saturday afternoon, Elizabeth arrived to find Libby Holman sitting by his bedside. A fight erupted between these two jealous women. The Broadway Diva denounced Elizabeth, calling her "sensual and silly...a god damn heifer in heat."

"Screw off!" Elizabeth shouted back at Holman. As she was storming out the door, Elizabeth called back to Monty, "I'll return when you've gotten rid of this dyke murderess."

Later that afternoon, Elizabeth became even more furious at Holman when she learned that the fabulously wealthy singer had been smuggling martinis in to Monty, who had to sip them through a straw. His doctors had warned him that drinking alcohol might sabotage plans for the plastic surgery needed to reconstruct a new face on him.

When Holman left, Elizabeth returned to Monty's room. His hand reached out for her. "Oh, Bessie Mae, don't be mad at Libby. I need all the friends I can get right now."

"I want you to live," she said. "That is my only concern."

"Bessie Mae, my Bessie Mae. At one time you and I were hailed as the most beautiful man and woman on the planet. Now you'll have to carry that beauty banner yourself."

Before every hospital visit, Elizabeth stopped at the Farmers Market in Los Angeles to purchase mushy foods such as guacamole and overripe bananas. She could spoon feed him, even though it caused him pain to swallow.

"I nearly cried seeing him struggle just to get some baby food in him," she recalled. "I begged him not to return to work on Raintree County. Rock Hudson told me he'd like to take over the role, but I didn't tell Monty that. Paul Newman also seemed willing to take over, the way he'd taken over for Jimmy Dean in two movies."

"I've got to go back to work for you, Bessie Mae," Monty said. "I owe it to you, damaged face or not."

"You owe me nothing," she said. "It is I who will forever be in your debt. At times, I've thought about divorcing Michael just to marry you and take care of you for the rest of my life."

Monty's recovery and reconstruction work went much faster than anyone, including his doctors, had predicted. She was with him when he was released from the hospital. He was driven to his dingy little rented house on Dawn Ride Road. "At least it has a pool," she said.

She called on him every afternoon, finding him drinking heavily, against doctors' orders, and taking morphine-based painkillers.

She once told Wilding, "I can't stand to look him squarely in the face. I do, of course. But I don't find Monty there anymore. His once lustrous eyes are now dead like a fish on ice at the Farmers Market."

"I know my beauty will never be restored," he told her one hot afternoon. "From now on, if I ever work again, I'll be cast in horror movies."

Once or twice, he took his fingers and ran them up and down her face. "Do you remember when I once was as young and beautiful as you are today?" he asked her, expecting no answer.

Both Dore Schary from MGM, accompanied by the Raintree director, Dmytryk, made weekly visits to check on Monty and his face. Finally, after a nine-week delay in production, Schary announced that he thought Monty was ready to face the camera again. But both Schary and Dmytryk knew that the early close-ups of Monty's face would not match those in his post-accident scenes.

As author Ellis Amburn wrote, "When he recovered, he was scarcely recognizable as Montgomery Clift, appearing pinched and withered. The famous gullwing eyebrows were now shaggy thickets, the left side of his face was almost paralyzed, the once heroic jawline was soft and mushy. His eyes looked dead, no doubt due to pain, bewilderment, and massive doses of barbiturates."

Dmytryk, after a few tests at the studio, decided that Monty should be filmed whenever possible from the right side of his face. "The left side of his face was immobile and not capable of conveying any emotion. One half of what was once the screen's most expressive face had died."

Dmytryk called Elizabeth and told her to prepare to leave for location shooting in the Deep South, beginning in Danville, Kentucky.

"I loathe going down there with all those bigots," she told him. "Poor Monty and I will be treated like freaks."

In July, with her luggage packed, Elizabeth walked out of her home after kissing her sons goodbye. Her only words to Michael Wilding were not of love, but of instructions in child care.

She had not broken with Kevin McClory, her secret lover, but fortunately, he was out of town working for Mike Todd. If any close friend asked, she said, "Kevin and I are madly in love." By now, all of Hollywood, and most of her fans, knew that her marriage to Wilding was heading for the divorce court.

No sooner had she arrived in Danville, Kentucky, to resume her role as the deranged Susanna Drake, than there was a knock on her door. A teenage boy appeared with a telegram from Mike Todd.

"I LOVE YOU," it read.

Within the hour, the manager of the hotel arrived with a bonded and insured present from Todd. It was an emerald bracelet from Cartier. He'd already ordered exotic flowers for her suite. That night he called her, talking for nearly four hours, vowing eternal love and outlining how exciting their life would be together.

The next day, Elizabeth moved into a house that had been rented for her in Danville. Nearby, Monty was moved into an equivalent rented house.

Reporters rushed to Kentucky to follow her after MGM issued a press release on July 19, 1956:

"Much careful thought has been given to the step we are taking. It is being done so that we will have an opportunity to thoroughly work out our personal situation. We are in complete accord in making this amicable decision."

Although not stating exactly what this "amicable decision" was, it was an obvious notice that Elizabeth was planning to file for a divorce from Wilding. MGM publicity agents failed miserably at spelling out the details.

She telephoned Wilding that night, claiming, "I still love you—don't think I don't. You are the father of our children. But as Sinatra told me, when a relationship has lost its ring-a-ding-ding, it's time to move on."

Hearing that McClory was back in Los Angeles, Elizabeth telephoned him that same night.

"I was absolutely astonished at the way she broke off our romance," Mc-Clory recalled years later. "One day, she told me I was the love of her life, and the next night she's telling me that Mike Todd has taken over and is going to marry her. The Princess was his? How in a matter of days could she fall out of love with me and in love with him? It didn't make any sense at all. I guess I didn't know her at all, even though I'd repeatedly made love to her. I was in a doubly awful position because Todd was also my boss."

The following week, Elizabeth's lawyers contacted Wilding, informing him that she was filing for divorce on

the ground of incompatibility. He was to be granted reasonable access to their two sons, and she would waive all rights to alimony except \$250 a month in child support. That was a relief to Wilding, since he had less than two hundred dollars in the bank at the time.

When Dmytryk heard of the divorce, he spoke privately to the cast and crew. "It's hard to have much sympathy for Wilding. He was married to Elizabeth but still maintained his steady love affair with Stewart Granger. Monty told me that Wilding fucked him on many an occasion. He was also screwing everybody from Marie McDonald to Marlene Dietrich with a little 'in like Flynn' on the side." Of course, he was referring to Wilding's close pal, Errol Flynn.

When Granger heard the news of the impending divorce, he said, "In essence, Miss Lizzie cut off my mate's balls. Call her the nutcracker."

Wilding and McClory were not the only people who had to be dumped.

Todd had sent his mistress, Evelyn Keyes, on a trip to South America, scheduling stopovers for her en route in London and Paris. Ostensibly, the purpose of her trip was to find screens large enough to show *Around the World in 80 Days* in Todd-AO.

She was staying in Elizabeth's former haunt, the Lancaster Hotel in Paris, when she received what she later labeled as "the call." It was from Todd. "I have to tell you, I've fallen in love with Elizabeth."

"Elizabeth who?" she asked, thinking he was joking.

It was no joke. Finally, he convinced her that he was not going to marry her, but would wed Elizabeth as soon as her divorce came through.

"When I hung up," she recalled, "I realized I had been taken by this beautiful bitch. Mike had delivered the knockout punch. Marlene Dietrich and Marilyn Monroe had been passing fancies of his. I feared Elizabeth would stick around for a while."

Later, Todd contacted Keyes, hoping to keep her as a mistress on the side after his marriage to Elizabeth. "He was furious when I moved to Paris and married Artie Shaw in 1957," Keyes said. The band leader had been previously married to both Lana Turner and Ava Gardner.

In 1959, Keyes encountered her rival, Elizabeth, at a Hollywood party after Todd had died. "Maybe it was a good thing that he dumped me," Keyes told her. "The advantage of his dumping me was that I would no longer have to smell the stench of his cigar. I would no longer be kept awake all night while he and his buddies played gin rummy. Unlike you, I might not have gotten the flu and would have taken that final flight with him. In that case, I would no longer be inhabiting this earth. So, in essence, by running off with my boyfriend, you may have inadvertently saved my life."

Years later, a more bitter Keyes emerged when a reporter asked her, "Who do you think was the love of Elizabeth Taylor's life—Richard Burton or Mike Todd?"

"Neither of the above," said Keyes. "The love of her life is Elizabeth Taylor."

Late every Friday afternoon, a chartered plane landed in Danville, Kentucky, to fly Elizabeth to New York, where she stayed in the Park Avenue penthouse of Todd. He told his friends, "Lemme tell ya, any minute that little dame spends out of bed is totally wasted."

Every day on the set back in Danville, batches of yellow roses arrived. Todd called her at least five times every day, and, at night, would often talk for hours, much to the delight of the Danville phone operators who listened in. They later spread stories to their neighbors and often to the press. "It was sex over the phone," one of the local operators said. "I didn't know a man and a woman did such perverted things to each other. It was totally disgusting. Mr. Todd and Miss Taylor had better get right with Jesus—or else they'll burn in hell's fire."

In a neighboring house, Monty's emotional state seemed to grow worse every day. On two different occasions, Danville police arrested him for indecent exposure, as he was picked up walking nude from his house to Elizabeth's.

On most nights, she would take him inside her house and would try to sober him up in the shower. Later, she'd towel him dry and put him to bed, hoping that sleep would come to this troubled soul.

On some nights, and infrequently, she was too intoxicated herself to deal with him. When that happened, he

would stand outside the house, pounding on her door, evoking the final scene in his hit movie, *The Heiress*, with Olivia de Havilland.

Everybody thought Monty and Elizabeth were having this torrid affair," said Dmytryk. "I didn't think so. Like I really cared. All I wanted was to pull off MGM's first film in Panavision and not bankrupt the studio with their antics, accidents, and drunkenness. Any day, I expected Elizabeth to have some health emergency."

"My fears came true," the director said. "In the oppressive summer heat of Kentucky, and all that humidity, and in those heavily corseted costumes she had to wear, my star collapsed."

A doctor was rushed to Elizabeth's side when she fainted on the set, suffering from hyperventilation [faster than normal, or labored, breathing] complicated by tachycardia [a heart rate whose speed exceeds the parameters of "normal."] For a week, she lay in a hospital bed in Danville, having been tranquilized with sodium amytal. Todd flew to her side and stayed with her every day until she was released and could resume filming.

When Elizabeth vacated her rented house to move to other premises, the landlord threatened MGM with a lawsuit. An MGM employee, Steve Miller, inspected the premises of what he called "the world's biggest slob. Bacon grease covered the kitchen walls. Her make-up was all over the bedroom sheets. She even ruined the draperies. Windows were broken. The springs in the sofa were also broken. Doors were missing knobs. Her two toilets overflowed. Liquor bottles were everywhere; the rugs were filthy, the crystal and china in bits and pieces."



Sex, insanity, and romance in the Deep South:
In this scene from *Rain-tree County*, **Elizabeth Taylor** emulates Vivien Leigh in *Gone With the Wind*--except that here, unlike any scene in *GWTW*, the belle's hoop skirts are translucent.

On her next location in Natchez, Mississippi, hundreds of locals, including a large armada of black farm workers, turned out to witness Elizabeth's arrival. Although she had been scheduled for scenes against an evocative background of antebellum ruins, it soon became obvious that that schedule would have to be revised.

Nervous and upset over her confused life, she had had too much to drink on the plane. Three men carried her down the runway and into a waiting limousine, where she was driven to her hotel suite and put to bed to sleep it off.

On her first night in Natchez, Monty visited her. Throughout the day and early evening, he'd taken too many barbiturates, tranquilizers, and amphetamines. After finishing off three bottles of champagne, she fell asleep on her bed. He had collapsed onto the floor beside her.

Before dawn, she discovered that he'd fallen into a coma with a cigarette between his fingers. Both fingers were burned to the bone, and he had to be rushed to the emergency room of the local hospital.

She somehow managed to get through the next few weeks, with the help of Todd's loving support. Finally, she called him to come for her, "The god damn film is over, and it's taken ten years off my life. It's been a nightmare."

Months later, in Los Angeles, Elizabeth sat in a darkened projection room holding Monty's damaged hand as they watched the final cut of *Raintree County*.

As Monty's biographer, Patricia Bosworth noted, "There were many spliced-together sequences which used both his old and new face; thus one sees close-ups of him before his car crash where the camera has caught his erotic promise, his sense of energy and risk; then in the very next shot he'll be on the screen in his postcrash face—in the same costume, same position, but looking zombie like."

After the showing, Monty denounced the film as a "colossal bore—a soap opera with elephantiasis." Over dinner that night, he asserted, "I'm horrific, wooden, frozen. In my beard I look like Jesus Christ in a Union cap."

He also criticized Elizabeth's performance, telling her, "Bessie Mae, in those mad scenes, you went over the top." Most film critics agreed with Monty's assessment, one reporter labeling her voice as "whining and screeching."

"She was more obnoxious than insane," wrote another critic. "She dies in that swamp none too soon."

Despite the bad press, Elizabeth was nominated for an Academy Award as the Best Actress of the year. She faced formidable competition from Deborah Kerr in *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison*; from Anna Magnani in *Wild in the Wind*, and from her longtime rival, Lana Turner in *Peyton Place*. The Oscar went to a twenty-three-year-old Georgia-born blonde, Joanne Woodward, for her portrayal of the psychotic heroine in *The Three Faces of Eve*.



A cult tragedienne with a hangover: **Elizabeth Taylor** with **Montgomery Clift** in *Raintree County*

"I knew I wouldn't win," Elizabeth said. "The Academy thought Woodward was better at being crazy than I was."

As she moved deeper and deeper into Todd's orbit, Elizabeth and Monty began to drift apart. Before flying

back to New York, Monty told her, "I have two objects in mind. The first is never to step in front of a movie camera again. The second is to try and find what has so far eluded me—a reason to live. What reason do you have to live, Bessie Mae?"

"To marry Mike Todd," she said. "My life with a dead fish Brit is over."

"Sharks can be a lot of fun," he warned her. "But, as you know, they can also be deadly."

After a Labor Day weekend spent in Atlantic City during September of 1956, Elizabeth arrived in New York flashing a twenty-carat diamond ring. "I'm engaged to Mike Todd," she announced to the press.

Then she stunned MGM and half the world by suggesting that she was going to retire. "I may never work again," she said. "I want to be a woman to Mike Todd's man. A home, a husband, a real family mean more to me. I'm far more interested in being Mrs. Mike Todd than in being an actress. I'm trading a real life instead of a life of play-acting at make-believe."

Sara was horrified that Elizabeth might retire, knowing she'd lose her weekly check from MGM. Francis Taylor had closed his art gallery and gone into early retirement, hoping to live off his wife and Elizabeth.

At first, Sara approved of Todd, thinking he was a rich Italian. She was horrified when she learned he was a Jew named Avrom Hirsch Goldbogen.

Elizabeth told Todd, "My mother is the most prejudiced woman in the universe."

When Todd was invited for his first dinner with Elizabeth's parents, Sara became even more outraged. Todd put his hand inside Elizabeth's dress and said, "Boy these little Jewish girls sure have big tits."

At other dinner parties, Todd referred to Elizabeth as "my little Jewish broad, Lizzie Schwartzkopf," which translates from the German and Yiddish as "Blackhead."

Even though Todd was older than Wilding, he referred to the British actor as "that boring elderly husband Liz is married to. I doubt if she can get a rise out of him."

The cute, sweet actress Diana Lynn, who often dated homosexuals who needed a girl for the night to escort to a premiere, observed Elizabeth one night at one of Todd's parties. "She had this almost iridescent sensuality. Her eyes, lips, and breasts gleamed. She was so damn sexy and flirtatious. I stood by and watched her work the room. She made every man want to unzip his fly and stick it into her."

Back in Los Angeles, on September 26, 1956, Elizabeth, along with director George Stevens and Rock Hudson, pressed their hands and footprints into freshly poured cement in the forecourt of Grauman's Chinese Theater.

The premiere of *Giant* was announced for this same theater on October 7. Before arriving, Todd and Elizabeth had drinks with Debbie Reynolds and Eddie Fisher. Todd looked across the table at Elizabeth as the first bottle of champagne was served. "As soon as this premiere is over tonight, I'm gonna fuck you."

Todd escorted Elizabeth to the Los Angeles premiere, with Rock Hudson arriving with his new wife, Phyllis Gates. They were followed by Clark Gable escorting Joan Crawford and Tab Hunter with Natalie Wood on his arm.

In late October, Todd and Elizabeth flew to New York for the respective premieres of both *Giant* and *Around the World in 80 Days*.

By the time of the New York premiere of *Giant*, a weird cult had formed around the image of the late James Dean. Thousands of his fanatical fans believed that he had not died, but that he was going to make an appearance at the New York premiere of a movie that had helped make him famous.

Before that premiere, George Stevens hosted a reception for the film's cast. The director warned that there might be a problem associated with security at the premiere. The New York Police Department had assigned extra men to the premises, and wooden barriers had been erected to restrain the throngs. Fears involved the possibility of a riot because of the hysteria engulfing the fans, mostly those who had come to worship the memory of James Dean.

Hudson was among the first to arrive. The identity of his date for the evening—Tallulah Bankhead—came as a surprise. She had gone to bed with him the night before. Hudson called such seductions of older female stars "mercy fucks."

She told a reporter from NBC, "I'm here tonight, darling, because of this divine young man, Rock Hudson, who is a giant in every conceivable way."

For the premiere at New York City's Roxy Theater, Todd had presented Elizabeth with a pair of ten-thousand-dollar diamond earrings. The crowd outside the theater grew and grew until it stretched for several blocks. As Elizabeth and Todd emerged from their long black limousine, a roar went up as fans pushed against the police barricades.

Carroll Baker and her husband, director Jack Garfein—a Holocaust survivor for whom she had converted to Judaism—walked directly behind Elizabeth and Todd. As Baker remembered it, "The fanatic Dean cult were nearest the red-carpet aisle leading into the entrance. Those closest to us were thrashing against the barriers, letting out menacing, eerie cries; they had red, distorted, lunatic-like faces. The sight of them filled me with revulsion a moment before the premonition of danger gripped me."

In front of them, Todd, too, was aware of the danger, and he was shoving photographers and reporters aside to make a pathway to safety for Elizabeth. It was as if he was trying to create a tunnel for her to escape.

Baker then described the pandemonium that followed. "There was an explosion of human bodies across the barricades and a stampede of howling maniacs trampling each other and rushing the actors."

Photographers were knocked down along with their cameras. Some of the fans even knocked over police officers, whose caps often went flying through the air. Jane Withers was nearly trampled to death.

The fans tore at Elizabeth, grabbing her hair and trying to rip off pieces of her gown. Todd yelled at them, "Stand back."

A screech went up. "My earring," shouted Elizabeth. "I've lost one of my earrings."

"Forget the god damn earrings." Todd shouted at her. "I'll buy you another pair."

The manager of the Roxy appeared, and ushered Elizabeth and Todd into his office, where he offered them a brandy to steady their nerves. Bankhead had retreated to the women's room, and Hudson joined Elizabeth. His shirt was in shreds, and his jacket had disappeared, along with his wallet.

Giant became the highest grossing film in the history of Warners until the 1978 release of Superman.

When the Academy Award nominations were announced, Elizabeth's name was not on the list. Her fellow actors—Rock Hudson, James Dean, and Mercedes McCambridge—were nominated, although only George Stevens as Best Director carried home an Oscar.

Giant earned Dean his second and last Oscar nomination, but, of course, he never lived to see the film's release.

Right before 80 Days opened at the Rivoli Theater in New York, Todd shocked Elizabeth by telling her that he was flat broke. "I've spent every penny I have and I'm deep in debt."

To pay the rent at the theater, Eddie Fisher presented him with a certified check for \$25,000. The premiere would go forth as scheduled.

The Los Angeles Times Corporation heard about Todd's financial dilemma and offered him \$25 million for the outright purchase of 80 Days. Elizabeth urged him not to take it. Within months, the picture had earned more than \$30 million on a \$6 million investment.

The October, 1956 premiere of 80 Days was a sensation, the movie garnering a standing ovation. The New York Daily News called it, "Titanic, titillating, and thrilling."

The next day, pictures of Elizabeth with Todd ran on frontpages around the world.

Todd's film, like Giant, was a worldwide smash. After the ovation for 80 Days in New York, Todd grabbed Elizabeth. "Lizzie, baby, we're the King and Queen of the World."

Since Todd and Elizabeth were virtually living as man and wife, there remained the issue of her divorce from Michael Wilding.

On November 14, 1956, Elizabeth's lawyers filed papers in California asking for a divorce. The charge was extreme mental cruelty. He would have to pay no alimony and would get fifty percent of the proceeds from the sale of their home, which was worth around \$200,000 on the market at that time.

"For Elizabeth, getting involved with Mike Todd, my boss, also meant getting into Eddie Fisher's crotch," Dick Hanley recalled. "The two men were glued at the hip. Unknown to the public then, or even now, was that Fisher had been sexually involved with Elizabeth even before she married Mike Todd."

"Wilding had first-hand evidence of this affair, and I think Debbie Reynolds at some point came to suspect it," Dick claimed. "Actually, I always viewed the Todd/Taylor/Fisher liaison as a *ménage à trois*. And I was never certain who on any given day was fucking whom."

At two o'clock one morning, Todd and his gin rummy cronies planned to play until dawn, as stakes were the highest ever for this beer-swigging, cigar-smoking lot.

Elizabeth grew bored, and Todd ordered Fisher to drop out of the game and take her back home, where Wilding was still occupying the guest room.

"They talked until around four o'clock in the morning," Wilding later told Stewart Granger and Jean Simmons. "I heard them. Finally, I went to sleep. At around eleven o'clock the following morning, a call came in from Benny Thau. He said it was urgent that he speak to Elizabeth. When I knocked on the door of the master bedroom, Eddie answered it. His face was covered with shaving cream, but nothing else covered him."

Embarrassed, Wilding called to Elizabeth, "It's Thau on the phone. Some emergency at MGM."

"Okay," shouted Elizabeth. "Tell the fucker I'm coming. First, I've got to take a piss. And shut the god damn door."

When Fisher brought Elizabeth back to Todd's Beverly Hills mansion for a late luncheon the next day, Todd said, "I hope you two lovebirds had a good time."

The singer later said that after lunch, Todd practically dragged Elizabeth off to his upstairs bedroom. "If you want to get fucked, let a real man do it," he told her in front of Fisher.

Before Elizabeth's marriage to Todd, there were other intimate sightings of Elizabeth with Fisher. A waiter at the Beverly Hills Hotel later said he delivered a room service dinner to them late one night in a suite that Fisher had booked.

"Fisher was in the nude in the living room listening to his own records, and I could see Taylor in the bed since the door was open," the waiter claimed.

That day, Fisher had had a domestic quarrel with Debbie Reynolds and had temporarily moved out.

After her dalliances with Victor Mature and Eddie Fisher, Wilding could take no more humiliation. After Fisher left his home with Elizabeth, Wilding packed his luggage and moved out, leaving his two sons in the care of their nanny.

He moved into the guestroom at the home of Joseph Cotten. The two actors had bonded during their filming of Alfred Hitchcock's *Under Capricorn* (1949) with Ingrid Bergman.

He had completed his last film for MGM. Entitled *The Scarlet Coat* (1955), it was a tedious and unconvincing historical drama set against a backdrop of the American Revolutionary War. In it, Wilding played a stiff and formal British military officer.

The "rebel" in the film was the handsome bisexual actor, Cornel Wilde, a sort of poor man's Errol Flynn, who was always revealing his body-beautiful chest. Wilde had had a fling with Laurence Olivier when he'd toured America playing Tybalt, Juliet's hot-tempered cousin and the rival to Romeo as portrayed by Olivier. Known for his portrayals of swashbucklers, Wilde piqued Wilding's sexual interest. The crew seemed well aware of their mutual "dressing room seduction," and word on the set was "Wilde is wild about Wilding." Their brief fling barely survived the completion of the picture, however.



Cornel Wilde "Wilde is wild about Wilding"

In the midst of their divorce proceedings, Wilding moved into a modest two-room apartment on Sunset Boulevard, claiming "that a bottle of vodka is my only companion."

Another blow came when he was summoned to Benny Thau's office at MGM. This time, he was not offered another picture. "Let's face it, Wilding," Thau told him. "You're no longer Mr. Elizabeth Taylor. Your contract is up. You're out the door. Now leave. I've got more important business to attend to, like what to do with Debbie Reynolds."

Despondent, almost suicidal, Wilding was rescued by Hollywood agent Jerry Hogan, who brought him into his business organization as a partner. Wilding was miscast in his job as an agent, but Elizabeth graciously agreed to become his client for a while, and she'd later bring him in on some film contracts signed by Richard Burton.

Eventually, Wilding returned to his native England, which he'd left as a big star to marry Elizabeth. "My return was bleak," he said. "Although I had left Hollywood as a black-listed actor, I returned to England as a forgotten one."

In time, Wilding would marry the British socialite Susan Nell, but that marriage failed. Perhaps he found his true and compatible mate the final time around, when he wed the very talented, elegant, and almost aristocratic actress, Margaret Leighton. She encouraged his desire to be a painter. He married her in 1963 and was at her side and still married to her when she died in 1976.

Having grown up in the British theater, which was peopled by homosexuals or bisexuals, Leighton was very understanding of the same-sex impulse in men. Wilding did not conceal from her the fact that he on occasion patronized "rent boys" in London's Soho district.

Leighton's primary embarrassment came when a gay underground rag published an interview with a teenaged hustler who stated, "Michael Wilding swore on a stack of Bibles that he preferred fucking my bum to mounting that overworked, abused, and tired-out twat of that has-been actress, Elizabeth Taylor, who is fat as a sow right before slaughter time."

After those hectic premieres, Todd made an ill-fated decision to take Elizabeth on a vacation. Both of them flew to Nassau in The Bahamas, where the British press baron, Lord Beaverbrook, invited them on a yachting trip.



Margaret Leighton

Before she embarked, Elizabeth told a Bahamian reporter, "This is the happiest day of my life," a line she would often repeat. But her happiness would have the life span of a sickly butterfly.

During the initial stage of the cruise, she'd been drinking heavily, downing champagne beginning at ten o'clock in the morning.

She decided to go below deck and sleep it off. As she was going down the yacht's steps, the boat lurched. "I fell six steps on my fat ass," she'd later recall. She was overcome with excruciating pain and screamed for help.

Todd carried her into a stateroom and placed her on the bed. She was at this point sobbing in pain.

He didn't trust any of the local hospitals, and he chartered a plane in Fort Lauderdale that flew them on to New York. Elizabeth had to be carried on and off the plane. She was checked into the Harkness Pavilion of the Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital.

After a series of tests, Dr. John Lattimer, one of New York's leading orthopedic surgeons, told Todd that his wife-to-be would require a delicate operation. Several of her spinal disks had been crushed. Her left leg was numb and had started to atrophy. There was grave danger of paralysis and, possibly, amputation.

During a four-hour operation on December 8, 1956, the doctor had to remove dead bone right down to the spinal cord's nerve center. He then surgically removed bone from her hip and pelvis, out of which he fashioned "little match-sticks" that he assembled into a cluster that later calcified into a unified whole. After two months of recovery, this mass of bone fragments had fused into a six-inch "hybrid" component within her spinal column, allowing her to walk again.

The pain was so great that at times that she would pass out. She required care around the clock. Friends such as Monty came to visit, and she expressed one of her greatest fears: "I'm going to spend the rest of my life in a wheel-chair."

Todd treated every event in his life as a publicity circus. Renting the room immediately adjacent to hers in the hospital, he issued hourly press briefings.

The doctor also told Todd that Elizabeth was pregnant. That bit of news— that Todd's twenty-four-year-old bride-to-be was expecting a child out of wedlock—did not get inserted into any of Todd's briefings to the press.

To Monty, to whom she still confided her most personal secrets, she admitted, "I don't know. I think it is Mike's child..."

"Mike Wilding's?"

"No, Mike Todd's. But maybe Eddie Fisher, maybe even Victor Mature. If he grows up to be Samson, we'll know it's Vic's kid."

Horried at the prospect of bad publicity over a child arriving too early, Todd, through his lawyers, arranged for Elizabeth's quickie Mexican divorce, which Wilding agreed to.

To expedite the divorce, Wilding was flown to Mexico. As he told Todd, "I'm a pauper." Todd offered him \$200,000 for his cooperation. "As you know, my baby is growing every day in Elizabeth, and you are aware of

how provincial the Americans are about such things.”

To further entice cooperation from Wilding, Elizabeth offered him all the proceeds from the sale of the Benedict Canyon house—and not a fifty-fifty split.

In a touch of irony, the first buyer who came to inspect the Taylor/Wilding home was Ingrid Bergman. Her Hollywood career had been temporarily put “into the deep freeze” after she had a baby fathered by Roberto Rossellini during the course of her marriage to the Swedish doctor Petter Lindstrom. Bergman was not impressed with the unhappy abode and rejected the idea of buying the house. “It is not suitable,” she said, before rushing out the door.

Leaving her hospital bed within the Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital’s Harkness Pavilion on January 21, 1957, Elizabeth flew with Todd to Mexico City. Both of them dined with Wilding that night. As Elizabeth recalled, “He could not have been more gracious. After all, money talks.”

To their deep regret, the local judge refused their divorce petitions at first. Todd met privately with him and threatened to kill “the god damn fucking wet-back son of a bitch.” The judge finally agreed to the divorce. Dick Hanley said, “Pesos, a lot of pesos, exchanged hands.”

In Mexico City, the divorce came through. Todd announced to the world that he would marry Elizabeth on February 2, 1957 in the Mexican village of Puerto Marquez, near Acapulco.

Joseph Cotten called Wilding and told him about the upcoming marriage which he had heard about on the TV news. Wilding asked Cotten, “Don’t you think Elizabeth might have had the consideration to wait until the funeral meats grew cold?”

For the wedding, Todd must have imagined that he was producing another epic like *Around the World in 80 Days*. He ordered one hundred bushels of white orchids flown in, along with 15,000 yellow gladioli. He stocked fifty cases of champagne, and for the wedding feast, imported barrels of baby lobsters, cracked crabs, and tureens of Iranian caviar.

Jazz musicians were imported from New York, and local mariachi bands were booked, for which bandstands had to be constructed.

Local chefs were hired to prepare an array of Mexican specialties such as roast chicken in chocolate sauce. Each of the wedding guests was given a sports shirt to wear: Female guests received versions sporting the initials E.T.T., male guests received versions with the initials M.T.

Kerosene torches were installed to light the night. Hundreds of coconuts were cut in half, later to be filled with champagne.

Since Elizabeth was Protestant, no rabbi they knew at the time would perform a religious ceremony. Todd therefore prevailed upon the mayor of Acapulco, Mario Lepotoguí, to officiate at a civil service.

Eddie Fisher flew in as the ceremony’s Best Man, and his increasingly estranged wife, Debbie Reynolds, was designated as Elizabeth’s Matron of Honor.

Once again, Elizabeth’s favorite designer, Helen Rose, was hauled in to design a stunning wedding gown fashioned from hydrangea blue chiffon. “This is getting to be a habit with me,” Rose said.

Sara and Francis Taylor flew in, as did Elizabeth’s brother, Howard, and his wife, Mara. Michael Todd, Jr, the son Todd had produced with his first wife, Bertha Freshman, also went to Mexico with his wife, Sarah.

The bridegroom presented Elizabeth with an \$80,000 diamond bracelet as a wedding present. For entertainment, Todd already had as his best friend one of the most popular singers in America, Fisher himself, who gave his vocal rendition of the “Mexican Wedding Song.”

“Elizabeth had downed two bottles of champagne and was drunk,” Dick Hanley said. “She didn’t walk down the aisle, she had to be carried down. After they were pronounced man and wife, she had to be hauled out of the wedding ceremony by two beefy security guards. That baby she was carrying probably was going to be an alcoholic before it was born.”

Rose later recalled the reception. “Here was this crippled and pregnant lady feasting on roast suckling pig and baby lobsters and all those tamales and enchiladas. She drank champagne until midnight when she came down with stomach cramps, which she blamed on the cracked crabs.”

The next morning at around eleven, Fisher was called to their bridal suite, where he found Todd and Elizabeth drinking more champagne. Each of them, with Elizabeth looking especially voluptuous, was lying nude atop pink sheets.

Reynolds later recalled, "Eddie loved it, and I knew he did even though I wasn't invited. It made him part of the marriage. It was what he wanted that he didn't have with me."

Fisher later reported that Elizabeth and Todd fought every day for weeks on end. "The gal's been looking for trouble all her life, but everyone was too timid to fight back," Todd said. "They kept her on a milktoast diet. With me, I fed her red meat. When she flies into a tantrum, I fly into a bigger one. We fight because we love it. When she's mad, she looks so beautiful, I take her in my arms and smother her with kisses. Naturally, that leads to other things."

Fisher later said, "I think Elizabeth likes to be hit. I know that sounds crazy. But she and Mike had a violent relationship. Call it foreplay."

One reporter came to interview Todd in Los Angeles, and found him sitting around the swimming pool naked. Halfway through the interview, Elizabeth opened the second-floor window and called down to Todd. "Get your ass back in this bedroom," she shouted at him. "I want you to fuck me this minute!"

Elizabeth later wrote, "What sweet craziness it was to be married to Mike Todd. He translated the impossible life I had been living on the screen to reality. He had a great gift of showmanship and a great heart as well. On the surface, he seemed to be rough, tough, and gruff, but it was an act. He was gentle and honest, with a deeply ingrained integrity that belied his flamboyant exterior. Every woman should have a Mike Todd in her life."

What she didn't know when she said that was that it would be a short marriage, lasting only eighteen months.

"Each of them burned the candle at both ends, and it was destined to flicker out," said Dick. "Such intensity, such fire, could not last forever."

For a year, Elizabeth did not appear on the screen in the wake of her hit movie, *Giant*. Her new role was that of a globe-trotting bride, who was secretly pregnant and ensnared within the orbit of a cigar-chomping entrepreneur, that extravagant showman, Mike Todd.

Even though she wasn't making movies, Todd turned her into a media event unlike anything she'd experienced before. Wherever they went in the world— America, Europe, Asia, Australia—he alerted the paparazzi and newspaper reporters. It was a rare day when Mr. and Mrs. Mike Todd didn't appear on the frontpages of newspapers somewhere in the world.

"Elizabeth was turned into a media circus," said Dick Hanley, Todd's new secretary. "For the next twelve years, even beyond, she would be the most written about female personality on the planet, challenged only by Jackie Kennedy when she moved into the White House. Elizabeth and Jackie vied for who would grace magazine covers, and Elizabeth didn't endear herself to the First Lady when she kept telling friends, 'I got to Jack long before Jackie ever got her mangy paws into him.'"

Everything Elizabeth said or did, however trivial, was deemed worthy of a headline. When there was no story about her, some journalist made one up. She appeared on the covers of enough magazines to fill a warehouse.

What had been originally conceived as an extended honeymoon evolved into a world tour to promote *Around the World in 80 Days* in cities as diverse as Rome, London, Paris, Tokyo, and Moscow.

Biographer Brenda Maddox wrote about Elizabeth's new media persona. "Todd changed Taylor from a dull movie beauty into an international celebrity whose sybaritic life and loves became a running news story, and into the archetypical star goddess who takes her public with her to the very brink of death. He woke Taylor up sexually, professionally, and financially."

With their honeymoon in Mexico behind them, Todd didn't like that he and Elizabeth would have to depend on commercial airliners to get around the country.

Before leaving Los Angeles, Todd purchased a private Lockheed Lodestar, an aircraft he christened *The Lucky Liz*. The Lodestar was the same type of aircraft that another of Elizabeth's suitors, Howard Hughes, had used to fly around the world in 1939.

In an extravagant gesture, Todd spent \$25,000 on the airplane's bedroom, boasting that "it is the only plane in the world with a double bed. Yet he was very penny-pinching when he was confronted with safety features,

spending only \$2,000 for an overhaul of the antiquated anti-icing system, which would prove to be a fatal mistake.

As a private joke to reporters, he said, "I plan to begin the penetration the moment we're airborne over California, reaching my climax at Idlewild in New York. As The Lucky Liz hits the runway for that final bump, bump, it will help me reach the ultimate depth."

Of course, although many reporters laughed at the innuendos, no newspaper at the time would print such a remark.

En route to New York in The Lucky Liz, the Todds landed in Chicago in February of 1957, where he presented Elizabeth with another wedding present, "His and Her theaters—yes, her own movie house, which would become a good source of revenue for her in the years ahead.

Then it was on to New York. Once there, they were seen in all the top restaurants, such as "21," and in many of the chic nightclubs. The couple was also spotted in jewelry stores along Fifth Avenue. "A girl can never own too many rubies, diamonds, and emeralds," Elizabeth told the press.

After the whirlwind activities of New York, Elizabeth and Todd landed in Palm Springs. Her longtime friend, Marion Davies, had given the Todds the use of her desert villa for a month. On several occasions, Frank Sinatra entertained the battling couple. "You remind me of the fights Ava and I used to have," the singer said.

Todd invited best friend Eddie Fisher and his increasingly alienated wife, Debbie Reynolds, to visit them in Palm Springs. Fisher was used to witnessing physical violence between Elizabeth and her new husband. But one Saturday night, Reynolds was shocked at what she saw: "Mike knocked her to the floor, really clobbered her. I mean, he really hit her. She screamed but rose to her feet and walloped him right back. He dragged her by the hair as she screamed at him and kicked him. He succeeded in dragging her across the room. I went running after him, jumping on his back to help her. The two of them were slapping each other. My heart was pounding. The next thing I knew, they were wrestling on the floor, kissing and making up. Suddenly, I'm like the cop on the beat in a wife-beating case where the cop gets it. They both got mad at me for interfering. Elizabeth telling me, 'Debbie, you're such a little Girl Scout. Grow up!'"

Leaving their desert lair, Mike and Elizabeth returned to Hollywood for the 1957 Oscar presentations. "I'm a royal princess," she announced to reporters, wearing a \$25,000 diamond tiara he'd pressed to her.

That night, she was preening proud when Todd walked off with an Oscar for Best Picture for his *Around the World in 80 Days*. Her husband's picture was in a neck-to-neck contest with *Giant*, her own star picture from Warner Brothers. But against her own career interests, she was rooting for *80 Days*. Ironically it would be Todd's picture that would bring her millions to spend—and lots and lots of jewelry.

Her discarded beau, Kevin McClory, was at the presentation. He went backstage to congratulate Todd and Elizabeth. She turned her back on him, no doubt having heard the vulgar remarks he'd been making about their former love affair.

McClory had spoken indiscreetly about their boudoir antics, even telling reporters, who could not print his comments, but were voyeuristically interested nonetheless.

"Elizabeth is great between the sheets," McClory asserted to reporter James Bacon. "She knows how to manipulate a male penis unlike any bitch I've ever known. She has the world's most skilled fingers and, wow, that succulent mouth of hers. She's wonderful in bed. She'll do anything, fulfill any fantasy. Some acts she'll perform you can't get a hardened whore to do."

After clearing up business matters in Los Angeles, and making arrangements for her children, Elizabeth flew with Todd to New York. Once there, she boarded the *Queen Elizabeth* with him and headed for Europe.

As they disembarked at Cherbourg in France, and swathed in champagne-colored mink, she met with reporters. Awaiting her at the pier was a \$100,000 Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud for touring France. Todd had already familiarized himself with the names and locations of many of the country's five-star resorts and restaurants for stopovers en route to the French Riviera. The car would later be shipped to Los Angeles.

He'd taken a three-month lease on Lady Kenmare's super deluxe Villa Fiorentina, paying \$20,000 a month. The villa was positioned in a panoramic spot on the Côte d'Azur in one of its most chic and expensive towns, St.-Jean-Cap-Ferrat. Decades later, at the end of the 20th Century, billionaire Bill Gates would purchase the villa for \$100 million.

Ironically, the first guest Todd invited was Elizabeth's divorced husband, Michael Wilding. There seemed to be

no jealousy between her former and present husbands—in fact, Elizabeth and Wilding had comfortably settled into their brother-and-sister relationship and bonded together as parents of two growing sons.

Todd liked to invite guests, and he went for the big names, inviting three world-famous actors with links to Grace Kelly who, as Princess of Monaco, lived nearby.

David Niven arrived first. His friendship with Grace had survived their torrid love affair. His visit was followed by the arrival of Gary Cooper. He told Todd, “Grace looks like she’s a cold dish with a man until you get her pants down, and then she explodes.”

Finally, yet a third love from Grace Kelly’s past arrived, William Holden, upon whom Elizabeth had once had a crush. He told both Todd and Elizabeth that Grace had planned to marry him until she learned that he’d had a vasectomy.

Eddie Fisher and Debbie Reynolds flew in on May 7, 1957 for the European premiere of *Around the World in 80 Days* at the Cannes Film Festival.

Arriving at the premiere, Todd bounded from the limousine but Elizabeth, in his opinion, was moving too slowly. In front of all the reporters and paparazzi, he yelled at her, “Come on, fatty, move that pachyderm ass of yours.”

She immediately raised a finger to give him the “fuck you” sign.

In Cannes, he rented the Winter Casino on La Croisette, with all its Edwardian-era elegance. There, he staged a sumptuous banquet for a thousand international journalists from all continents of the world. The supper guests devoured “tons” of Beluga caviar, smoked sturgeon, and a sea of Riviera lobsters. A Cannes reporter called it “glitz and gluttony.” While all of this was going on, a mammoth hot air balloon floated over Cannes to evoke his movie.

In Cannes, the world learned that Elizabeth was pregnant. At some point, she seemed to tire of the premiere and retreated to the bar of the Carlton Hotel to drink by herself. British journalist Leonard Mosley encountered her there. She made an astonishing statement: “I’m only twenty-five years old and already tired of life.”

The next night, Todd rented a limousine to drive him over to the casino at Monte Carlo, where he’d also been invited to have drinks with Grace Kelly at the palace. “I guess he plans to fuck her Royal Highness, and doesn’t want me along,” Elizabeth told Dick Hanley, who was accompanying Todd on the excursion. Fisher had also been invited to the palace, but because he had agreed to sing three songs in the casino, he couldn’t go.

Before Dick departed with Todd, Elizabeth handed him a sealed envelope to give to Todd when he reached Monte Carlo. When Todd opened the note two hours later, he passed it to Dick to read:

“Dear Mike,

Stay as long as you want in Grace’s boudoir, and don’t worry about me. I have Eddie here to fuck me tonight.

Love,

Your devoted wife

Elizabeth Taylor Hilton Wilding Todd????????”

Within a few days, Elizabeth had snapped out of her depression. She told *Paris-Match* “With Mike Todd, I feel we could one day own the world. He will make all of my dreams come true.” She declined to answer exactly what those dreams were.

After Cannes, Todd and Elizabeth, with Dick, drove to Paris in the Silver Rolls. The producer had booked them into the Presidential Suite at the Ritz Hotel overlooking the majestic symmetry of the Place Vendôme. On his first day in Paris, Todd went to see Alexandre de Paris, the most celebrated coiffeur in France, who gave him a crewcut. Elizabeth liked it so much that she, too, visited Alexandre, who became a friend and would design many coiffures for her in the years to come.

The haut monde of Paris fêted the famous couple. Marie-Hélène de Rothschild staged a gala for them, introducing them to the flotsam and jetsam of international society, as Elsa Maxwell had done during her marriage to Nicky Hilton.



Haute fashion czarina
Diana Vreeland

Mostly, Elizabeth attended the houses of the famous couturiers of Paris, including expensive visits to the showrooms of Yves St-Laurent, Givenchy, Balenciaga, and Marc Bohan of Christian Dior. She arranged for Bohan to design a ruby-red chiffon gown for her to wear to the Paris premiere of *Around the World in 80 Days*.

Ruby earrings dangled from her ears, and she wore a matching ruby diadem. Bohan told the press, "Let's be honest. Miss Taylor does not have a mannequin figure. But she has a fabulous face—simply fab—and those shattering violet eyes, made even more so with all that ruby flash."



James Galanos (right figure, above), an authority on E.T.'s "avoirdupois"

Elizabeth's fascination with the House of Dior did not always meet with acclaim among fashion critics. A London-based fashion writer, Herb Dorsay, wrote, "She looks dreadful in Dior, like a call girl trying to impersonate a princess. Nothing seems to fit her right."

Diana Vreeland, America's reigning fashion diva, earned Elizabeth's lifelong animosity when she referred to her as "the worst-dressed actress in America since Mae West. Taylor lacks taste, which you either have or don't have." James Galanos, a Los Angeles fashion designer, claimed, "Her avoirdupois has always been a problem," a grand way of referring to her weight.

In addition to paying for her wardrobe, Todd continued to spend all the money from royalties from *80 Days* as fast as it came in.

While she was in Paris, he purchased three paintings for her—a Degas, a Vuillard, and a Utrillo—for a combined price of \$75,000, from the Prince Aly Khan.

He also flew Wilding in from London to stay with them at their three-bedroom suite at the Ritz. "In Paris, that

raised only a few eyebrows,” Dick said. “The French naturally suspected a ménage à trois and let it go at that. After all, these were the people who invented the term.”

“We took our road show to England in July of 1957,” Elizabeth recalled. “In London, Mike seemed to generate more publicity than the coronation of Queen Elizabeth.”

“I wanted the world to know that there is another famous woman occupying the planet named Elizabeth,” said Todd. “She may not be Queen Elizabeth, but I’m sure that one day, she’ll at least be Dame Elizabeth.”

How right he was in his forecast.

In London, Elizabeth was told by John Gielgud that there was only one woman in England “who could equal your beauty—Princess Alexandra (aka The Honourable Lady Ogilvie), the cousin of Queen Elizabeth.”

Elizabeth told Todd “I want to meet this alleged beauty.” Consequently, he threw a lavish reception at Claridges for Princess Alexandra, who arrived with her mother, the Duchess of Kent (aka Princess Marina of Greece and Denmark).

As Elizabeth chatted with Princess Alexandra, she did indeed realize that she was a stunning beauty. But she could hardly have imagined that one day she would be engaged in a battle with that princess for the charms of Richard Burton.

Standing beside the princess, Marina, the Duchess of Kent, asked Elizabeth, “Are you expecting a boy or a girl?”

“A girl,” Elizabeth answered. “The world is not ready for another Mike Todd.”

When Tony Curtis was in London with Janet Leigh, Todd threw yet another party, this time honoring the wedding anniversary of a couple which had previously been widely recognized as “America’s Sweethearts.” America’s more recent “sweethearts, Eddie Fisher and Debbie Reynolds, also showed up for the event. Fisher was also in London at the time for the opening of his act at the London Palladium.

At the time, Curtis sported a beard as one of the accessories associated with his role in The Vikings with Kirk Douglas, who also appeared bearded at the party. When he spotted Curtis, Noël Coward, in front of Elizabeth, rushed up to him. “Come to me, you bearded beauty.”

As Elizabeth looked on, Coward kissed Curtis passionately...with tongue.

Coward later huddled with Elizabeth, telling her he wanted her to attend the opening of Wilding in his stage production of Nude With Violin. “I’m rehearsing him now,” Coward said. “He stumbles and stammers and gets into an increasing frizz at rehearsals. But then he throws me a good fuck at the end of the night and all is forgiven. I know why you were attracted to him.”

“Oh, such a sweet memory to share with me,” Elizabeth said. “You’re such a darling.” She walked away from him and sought out Wilding.

“I must introduce you to this charming lady,” Elizabeth told her former husband. She took his arm and walked with him across the room and introduced him to the heiress Susan Nell, a prominent London socialite.

“Liz almost had me married by proxy,” Wilding recalled. “She raved about what a wonderful personality Susan was, so much charm, so affectionate, the perfect mate for a lonely divorced man such as myself. Liz also told me that Miss Nell ‘was a millionairess in her own right.’”

After meeting Nell, Wilding began dating and eventually married her. “For a while she made me the maître d’ of a seafood restaurant she owned in Brighton, but she soon tired of me,” Wilding claimed. “We got a divorce.”

At that same party, Elizabeth got a dose of Gallic charm when Louis Jourdan, once voted “the world’s most handsome man,” appeared. When Todd ducked out to check his stockpile of champagne, Elizabeth kissed the

French actor. "One day, we'll do love scenes in a movie together," she promised him.

And so it came to be. Jourdan played the role of her lover in MGM's 1963 film *The V.I.P.s*, with Richard Burton as their co-star.

On July 2, 1957, Todd staged "a night of jubilation," to celebrate the London premiere of *Around the World in 80 Days*. He rented Battersea Gardens, a Thames-bordering park with a small-scale games arcade and amusement park.

As a means of attracting maximum press coverage, he staged the event as a charity for the Newspaper Fund, inviting some 1,500 guests, including journalists and some of the top names of tout London. Guests, including the Duchess of Argyll, were ferried across the Thames to its less-frequented, less stylish riverbank in ferryboats. Todd invited Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip, but the monarch cabled her regrets.

Elizabeth was the belle of the ball, appearing at Battersea in a red velvet Dior gown with a plunging décolletage and a ruby necklace from Van Cleef & Arpels. Todd had paid \$350,000 for the necklace. "It would have been the envy of Marie Antoinette had she been able to afford it," Elizabeth claimed.

As the evening deepened, and as more and more of the Fleet Street reporters became intoxicated, a journalist from the *Daily Mail* stepped on Elizabeth's gown, causing it to rip. Todd bodily picked up the reporter and tossed him into the Thames. Fortunately, the reporter wasn't too drunk to swim.

Prince Aly Khan showed up with his French mistress, a model known as "Bettina." Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh were seen at the event riding pink and purple circus horses. Debbie Reynolds danced the rumba with Baron Shawcross. Shawcross had led the British team of lawyers at the Nürnberg trials for Nazi war criminals.

At one point during the evening, Dick Hanley brought Aly Khan over for "an audience" with Elizabeth. He whispered in her ear, "I should have married you instead of Rita Hayworth."

As entertainment, Todd had hired six bands and dressed the cigarette girls as can-can dancers from the *Moulin Rouge* in Paris.

Guests consumed some 500 "Methuselah-sized" magnums of champagne. The producer also provided gold-painted buckets stuffed with florins and shillings for guests to play the slot machines he'd imported onto the site.

Elizabeth received a proposition that evening from Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., who promised her, "I can show you what drove Joan Crawford up the wall if you'll call on me later in my suite at the Dorchester."

Lord Dalkeith was seen swinging on one of the swings designed for kindergarten children, and Mrs. Gerald Legge proved to be the Annie Oakley of the night, an all-time sharpshooter winner in the park's amusement arcades.

A reporter for *The Times* approached Elizabeth. "Please say something I can print in a family newspaper."

Slightly tipsy from too much champagne, she looked up at him. "You can tell your readers that Mike Todd is my greatest lover...perhaps the greatest lover of all time. The first time he made love to me, my heart almost stopped beating."

To feed the roiling masses assembled at Battersea, bear meat was flown in from Colorado; huge prawns from Hong Kong; chocolate-covered giant ants from Africa; curried dishes from India; homemade pastas in thirty varieties from Italy; sweet potatoes from North Carolina; egg rolls from China, and strawberries and Devonshire cream from England itself.

A dozen bars were granted one-night liquor licenses. Amazingly, many Londoners from the press ignored the champagne and guzzled pint after pint of lager, which was dispensed until dawn. *Time* magazine later wrote, "Mike Todd would pass out salted nuts at his own hanging if he owned the beer concession."

The next day, the press raved about the food. Todd had arranged with the fishmongers of Billingsgate for an array of fish and chips served in replica copies of *The Times*, dated 1893, the year the character of Phineas Fogg in *80 Days* had embarked on his trip around the world. For those who didn't want such ordinary fare, Todd had arranged a mammoth display of the most succu-lent oysters, lobsters, shrimp, and crab. "Elizabeth, revealing what a low-class English girl she was, went for the whelks," Todd claimed.

That morning, Elizabeth announced to Todd that she'd lost their passports. In an amazing feat, he got the American Embassy to open up on a holiday, July 4, and issue them temporary replacements. "You know I'm a big man in New York, a big man in Hollywood," he told her. "Now, after that Battersea event, I'm a big man in

London. I bet the Queen wishes she'd attended."

With Dick Hanley opening the doors for them, Todd and Elizabeth were last seen departing London in their Silver Rolls, heading for Southampton and home.

On July 4, 1957, Todd and a pregnant Elizabeth set sail aboard the SS Liberté, heading for the port of New York. On their first night aboard, over caviar and champagne, he spoke of all the big plans he had for them "over the next forty years." Of course, he had no way of knowing he had only eight months to live.

During his long days at sea, Todd planned his next big film production, telling her he was going to produce and film an epic, Cervantes' Don Quixote.

"The fucker was a lousy novelist, but we can hire rewrite men," he told her. "Also, I'm telling the press that I plan to rent all of Spain for my production. I'll hire this artist—what's his face?—Picasso! to do the concept drawing for the advertising."

He wanted her to star as the scruffy, shrewish Dulcinea. Without reading the book, she agreed to the role.

He envisioned Cantinflas, one of the stars of 80 Days, as Sancho Panza with Fernandel playing the role of Don Quixote. Later, he changed his mind, preferring John Huston in the title role, with the part of the bumbling Sancho Panza going to Mickey Rooney.

"Like Don Quixote pursuing the impossible dream and chasing windmills across the plains of La Mancha, nothing came of the project," said Dick Hanley.

At midpoint across the North Atlantic, all thoughts of film production ended as Elizabeth was rushed into the emergency room of the Liberté. She was seized with the pains of premature labor, and she shouted at the ship's two doctors, "My baby's not cooked yet! It can't come out!"

The doctors anesthetized her, thereby preventing her from giving premature birth.

Todd brought up the possibility of a Caesarean birth, but neither of the doctors felt capable of performing such a life-threatening operation. As one of them told Todd, "I don't want to go down in history as the man who killed Elizabeth Taylor and her child."

When rendered unconscious by drugs, Elizabeth's contractions stopped. Even when she disembarked from the Liberté in New York and was rushed to the hospital, she appeared in no immediate danger of giving birth.

She was thoroughly examined and tested by more skilled doctors, one of whom warned Todd that if his wife brought the fetus to term, it might cause her to have a permanently curved spine. An abortion was suggested, but he refused. "Not on your nelly!" he said.

In her hospital bed, a metal brace was placed on Elizabeth's always fragile back. Because of that back support, her uterus with her future baby girl had been pushed upward to a precarious position under her ribcage.

She was administered doses of digitalis (foxglove), with the intention of stimulating her heartbeat, but it became obvious that the drug was dangerously affecting the baby's heartbeat too. Todd was warned that his young wife might die unless she submitted to a dangerously premature Caesarean.

The operation was performed on October 6, 1957. In its aftermath, Elizabeth Frances (Liza) Todd entered the world, weighing four pounds, fourteen ounces. She was pronounced a stillborn. However, a resuscitator, Dr. Virginia Apgar, rushed the baby to a resuscitator, and within fourteen minutes, she drew her first breath, although she had to be confined to an oxygen tent after that for two months.

Her doctor told Todd that because any future pregnancy might kill her, Elizabeth should have her fallopian tubes tied. As he took her hand to tell her the news, he said, "You're no Ma Kettle, baby."

Announcing the birth of his baby girl, Todd boasted to the press. "She is so beautiful, she makes her mother look like the Bride of Frankenstein. My Liz is a brave girl, and I'm currently negotiating with India to purchase a present for her: The Taj Mahal."

During her confinement to the hospital, Todd visited Howard Young, her art dealer uncle, and purchased three paintings from him—a Renoir, a Monet, and a Pissarro. However, after Todd's death, Young had to sue the estate. Todd had never paid for the valuable art he'd taken.

When Liza Todd was released from the hospital, Todd and Elizabeth in their Silver Rolls-Royce, took her to a twenty-three room mansion at Westport, Connecticut, which he'd rented for the summer. The little infant seemed to be suffering no bad effects from her premature birth.

Author Truman Capote came to visit, and he brought Elizabeth up on news about Monty Clift. "He's starting to pick up rough trade. These guys beat the shit out of him," Capote claimed. "Monty seems to enjoy it, and he's still crazy for those pills."

Before Capote left, he told her he was leaving the script of a play sent to her in his care by Tennessee Williams, with a note. "It's in your study."

In the whirlwind that encircled the Todds in the months ahead, she didn't open the script right away—in fact, she postponed it for months.

Returning to the Los Angeles area in September of 1957, Todd rented a Mediterranean style, twelve-room white stucco house on Schuyler Road, high up in Coldwater Canyon, overlooking Beverly Hills. Elizabeth didn't like the house, calling it "spooky and gloomy—all the fucking place needs is a resident ghost that looks like Elsa Lanchester in a Frankenstein fright wig."

When Dick Hanley came to visit, Elizabeth showed him the master bedroom. "The only thing I like about this Sunset Blvd. mansion is this gigantic baby blue and gold rococo bed where Killer bangs the hell out of me every night." She turned to him. "And who might be banging you these days?"

"A cute blonde Henry Willson trapped for me," Dick said. "Bland, but a real looker. Troy Donahue. Henry says he's going to be a big star. I say, when pigs fly. He's something to warm the bed at night. Not much in the breadbasket, though."

Sometimes Todd paced the floors at night, pondering their finances, or lack thereof. He'd spent all the millions generated so far from 80 Days and hadn't saved anything. Since he was out of money, he was eager for her to return to MGM to make the two final pictures she owed the studio.

The royalties were still coming in, however, and in a few weeks, his son, Michael Todd, Jr., sent him a check for two million dollars. Todd wanted to spend it right away. "He never could hold onto money," Elizabeth later recalled. He decided to invest these newly arrived royalties on a big publicity blast at Madison Square Garden in Manhattan and on another around-the-world tour, hoping to generate even more millions abroad.

She had hardly settled into her new quarters before Todd announced they were going on the road again. Somewhat reluctantly, she agreed and stashed her children with nannies. On October 17, 1957, Elizabeth and Todd were back in New York to celebrate the first anniversary of the release of Around the World in 80 Days. For the occasion, Todd rented New York City's Madison Square Garden for a private party, the same venue where he'd once hired Marilyn Monroe to make a spectacular appearance riding on top of a pink elephant.

On the morning of the party, Todd announced to the press, "This will be the biggest god damn birthday bash the world has ever seen." In contrast, he also told reporters, "I'm throwing an intimate party for a few chums." In all, including gatecrashers, the party would attract 18,000 people.

For the event, Elizabeth in her own words, "tried to make myself look like the Empress Josephine," wearing a designer red velvet gown with a diamond tiara. "Call me Napoléon's midnight delight," she jokingly told the press.

Instead of Monroe, Todd coaxed the distinguished British actor, Sir Cedric Hardwicke, to ride into the arena on an elephant, although he nearly fell off and broke his neck. Fernandel, the famous French comedian and actor, was the headliner on the evening's cabaret bill. Todd also announced that Fernandel had been selected as the star who'd play Don Quixote in his next film epic.

Todd didn't want to spend any of his money if he could get other companies, especially those selling food and drink, to supply a staggering amount of freebies for the throngs pouring into the garden. To help defray other costs, he contracted with CBS to pay him \$300,000 to film the event, which would be narrated by the newscaster Walter Cronkite. "It was the nadir of my career," Cronkite later recalled.

After seeing the Garden and its decorations, a journalist from Minnesota wrote: "Mike Todd and Elizabeth Taylor are the leading vulgarians of America."

At one end of the garden stood a forty-foot tall replica of "Oscar," crafted with a sheathing of gold chrysanthemums, evoking Todd's (and 80 Days') Academy Award for Best Picture of the Year. Over the heads of the revelers floated a mammoth hot air balloon.

To mingle with the hoi polloi, Todd also invited A-list guests. Amazingly, both Ginger Rogers and Janet Gaynor accepted invitations to the *mélée*. The master party giver herself, Elsa Maxwell, joined the list of guests that inevitably included the nosy Hedda Hopper. Beatrice Lillie showed up with her girlfriend Ethel Merman. Walter Winchell, Shelley Winters, and Tony Curtis were among the thousands of guests. Others included Steve Allen, Jayne Meadows, and Bert Lahr.

To join them, Todd cajoled the King of Siam to donate forty exotic cats in cages. Circus animals, including lions, tigers, and elephants were also placed around the Garden in cages. The uproar caused the elephants to panic. "Oh, my god," Elizabeth shouted. "Are we still filming *Elephant Walk*?"

Dozens of prizes were awarded, including four new Oldsmobiles and forty mink stoles. The grand prize was a Cessna two-seater private plane. Valuable pieces of jewelry were also among the coveted prizes of the evening.

George Jessel, "Toastmaster of America," was the emcee that night, appearing before thirty-five million TV viewers. He was followed by the famous clown, Emmett Kelly

Elizabeth was placed next to Senator Hubert Humphrey, who had been hired to make a speech at the event. The day before, Humphrey had rehearsed the final version of his speech before Todd and Elizabeth in their hotel suite. Not knowing who he was, she interrupted him. "Your speech is shit. It's so fucking corny."

Todd called her into the bedroom. "For god's sake, woman, cool it. This man is going to become President of the United States. With him in the Oval Office, we'll have a permanent suite at the White House."

The highlight of the evening was the arrival of a birthday cake, symbolizing the movie's first anniversary, weighing one ton. Todd had ordered the icing to be pale blue in color—"better for the TV cameras." The fourteen-tier cake had consumed 2,000 eggs and \$15,000 worth of batter.

Elizabeth, because of her bad back, had to climb a ladder to cut the first piece. She almost lost her footing and nearly fell into this mammoth glob. Those who managed to get a slice of the cake pronounced it inedible.

The cake cutting signaled the debut of a food fight on the floor, where waiters had been selling what was supposed to be free champagne at ten dollars a glass. Chic women in designer gowns ended up fighting sanitation workers for hot dogs with mustard. Melted ice cream cones in the aisle caused slippery floors and several slides. Pizzas were rammed into the faces of guests, and a bonbon war broke out. Guests were pelted; garments ripped and torn.



Elizabeth Taylor to
presidential hopeful (photo
above) **Hubert Humphrey**, not
realizing who he was: "Your
speech is shit...it's so
f...cking corny!"

Duke Ellington and his band tried to play for dancing, but there was not room on the floor. Thus, in lieu of dance tunes, Todd ordered him to play "The Star Spangled Banner."

TV's John Crosby claimed, "While Todd fiddles, New York burns." On stage, baton twirlers from Dallas went

wild. Instead of catching their batons, they became missiles when the girls in red, white, and blue costumes threw them high overhead and into the audience.

The following morning, the manager of Madison Square Garden presented Todd with a clean-up bill which witnesses defined as "massive."

What was to have been Todd's greatest public relations triumph ended in disaster. The press mocked both Todd and Elizabeth.

Not to be intimidated, he announced to her, "Fuck New York, we'll take our show on a world tour where we are more appreciated."

After the debacle at Madison Square Garden, Todd and Elizabeth set out on another world tour in November of 1957. Before she left New York, she fell in the bathtub, slipping on a bar of soap, injuring her back once again. She had to be carried aboard an Air France jet before its takeoff from New York's La-guardia airport.

That night, they flew to France to begin a trip that would take them to Stockholm, Oslo, Sydney, Hong Kong, Tokyo, London, and the most controversial stop of all, Moscow.

In Paris, Todd announced, "Napoléon and Hitler didn't succeed in conquering Russia, but I will. In fact, I may bring an end to the Cold War with this goodwill tour. My secret weapon is Elizabeth Taylor."

Before they flew out of New York, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles sent Todd an urgent telegram, pleading with him not to go to Moscow. The Secretary felt that the Todds were such explosive personalities that they might cause damage to already tense U.S./Soviet relations

J. Edgar Hoover at the FBI had previously sent Dulles an urgent letter, in which he claimed that Todd was a secret Communist. "He is planning to use Elizabeth Taylor as a propaganda tool against the West."

Todd had written to the Soviet Minister of Culture, urging a private meeting between Nikita Khrushchev and Elizabeth and himself. The Minister gave him the brush-off and did not respond.

Leaving Paris, Todd told the press, "Elizabeth and I lead the simple life. She pours her own Dom Perignon, and I make my own Beluga caviar sandwiches."

After a tour of many countries, including "Down Under," Elizabeth and Todd flew into Prague on January 26, 1958. She told the communist press that she had specifically written to Khrushchev, "demanding that he see Mike and me."

As the plane landed in Moscow, Todd, with Elizabeth at his side, announced that his next big epic was going to be a film version of Tolstoy's War and Peace, which would star Elizabeth. Then he denounced director King Vidor's 1956 version of War and Peace that had starred Audrey Hepburn and Henry Fonda. "I will make the authentic version."

Since the Soviet Union did not allow her American films to be shown, Elizabeth found that she was virtually unknown in Russia, even though she dressed like a movie star in ermine, diamonds, and red boots. One fan at the airport asked for her autograph, thinking she must be Marilyn Monroe.

With no private meeting with Khrushchev in the offing, Todd managed to bribe their way into a reception hosted by the Embassy of India, where Khrushchev would be an honored guest.

Dripping in diamonds, Elizabeth arrived at the event in a black cocktail dress sparkling with sequins and with a broadtail fur trim.

She and Todd received a brief handshake from the Soviet dictator, but no particular recognition. A journalist from Sweden wrote that, "Khrushchev must have thought that one of the Romanov princesses had returned from their mass grave."

Elizabeth managed to get her fill of black caviar and chicken Kiev before retreating back to their hotel.

After Moscow, Elizabeth and Todd flew into Belgrade, Yugoslavia, where they had begun to see themselves as traveling American ambassadors of good will. Todd had run into trouble with plans to move ahead with War and Peace, so he announced to the press that he was going to remake Anna Karenina, one of Greta Garbo's best films. Of course, Elizabeth would star as Anna.

At Belgrade's airport, she asked for a Scotch and soda, finding that she had to settle instead for a fiery slivotz

which "caused me nearly to choke to death."

She celebrated when her plane flew into Nice. Back on the French Riviera again, she proclaimed it as "a return to civilization."

She told the press, "I don't want to be a movie star anymore. Acting was just a hobby for me."

At long last, by December 17, 1957, she was in Palm Springs, where she entered the hospital to have her appendix removed.

Todd was depressed, telling reporters, "I'm nothing more than a god damn nurse. Life with Elizabeth is a series of hospital visits."

She was furious when this comment was published, but the Todds made up, as they usually did, and by March of 1958, they were settled into Los Angeles once again.

Director Josh Logan visited them, discussing with both of them the possibility of Elizabeth playing Nellie Forbush in the movie version of the Broadway hit, *South Pacific*. Todd urged Elizabeth to go for it.

The next day, she appeared before composer Richard Rodgers for an audition. "She didn't sing," he later said. "She croaked. I'd rather give the role of Nellie to Marjorie Main."

As they were leaving the studio, Todd and Elizabeth encountered Doris Day.

"Why are you here?" Todd demanded to know.

"To test for the role of Nellie," Day said.

She, too, was rejected for the part, as were both Jane Powell and Janet Blair. The role of Nellie in the film version eventually went to Mitzi Gaynor.

Recovering from her back pain in her study, Elizabeth finally got around to opening the script Truman Capote had left at the Westport rental home.

"Get well, Elizabeth," Tennessee Williams had scribbled. "The role of Maggie the Cat is waiting for you. Sharpen those claws of yours."



Boudoir games and dynastic politics: **Paul Newman** with **Elizabeth Taylor** in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Eddie Fisher

MATING GAMES WITH THE JEWISH SINATRA

Hollywood gossip columnists buzzed with excitement at the teaming of Elizabeth with Paul Newman in the film version of a hot play by America's leading playwright.

"When the man with the glacial blue eyes meets the girl with the eyes of a spring violet, the great movie romance of the century will surely unfold," one columnist wrote. "How can two such sex symbols resist the magnetism of each other?"

Many stars had wanted to star in the film version of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. George Cukor had agreed to direct. At one point, he interpreted the adaptation of the Tennessee Williams drama as an ideal vehicle for Vivien Leigh (though she was too old) opposite Montgomery Clift. Paul Newman and Elvis Presley were among those considered for the male lead of Brick.

After purchasing the film rights for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, MGM feared problems with the homoerotic subtext of its script. The explosive drama about a neurotic Southern plantation family had enthralled Broadway, but MGM felt it needed to "launder" this Pulitzer Prize-winning drama and remove any suspicion that Brick was a closeted homosexual still in love with his dead buddy, Skipper.

Cukor had angered officials at MGM when he announced to the press that the movie adaptation would have to deal up front with the issue of homosexuality. The battle heated up between Cukor and the studio, and the director eventually withdrew, asserting that he could not maintain the integrity of the Williams play because of the censorship imposed. In his place, Richard Brooks was designated as the film's more compliant director.

With Cukor off the picture, so went the focus on casting Leigh as Maggie the Cat. Just as she'd done in *Elephant Walk*, Elizabeth replaced Leigh as the female lead.

Shooting on *Cat* began on March 12, 1958, when Elizabeth showed up on the set to meet the other members of the cast. Coming together with Newman, she said, "You're more beautiful in person than on the screen, if such a thing is possible."

"You took the words out of my mouth," he said. "Surely, you are the most beautiful woman in the world, maybe in the universe for all I know."

"Your flattery will get you everywhere," she said. "If I were naming a perfume after you, I'd call it *Temptation*."

"If I were naming a perfume after you, I'd call it *Enchantment*."

"Come on, kids, break it up," said the film's new director, Richard Brooks, who was observing this interchange at the time. Elizabeth felt comfortable working with him. He'd helmed her through *The Last Time I Saw Paris* in 1954, and he'd later marry one of her best friends, Jean Simmons.

Before introducing Elizabeth to the rest of the cast, Brooks invited Newman and her to lunch in the MGM commissary. Over a club sandwich, Elizabeth asked Brooks, "Did Lana Turner really want to play Maggie?"

"She did indeed," the director said. "She's seriously pissed off at both you and me."

"It seems I'm always taking something from Lana," she said. "Usually a man."

"Had Monty accepted the role of Brick, he would be eating lunch with you today instead of me," Newman said.

"Had Grace Kelly not run off and married a prince, Maggie the Cat would be blonde—and not me," she said.

In the words of Brooks, Elizabeth "behaved like a queen when she was introduced to her fellow cast members."

Burl Ives was cast as "Big Daddy," the very Southern patriarch of the Pollitt family. As the film opens, he's the only member of his clan who hasn't been told he's dying of cancer. His dysfunctional family gathers around him

for last rites.

Ironically, Ives was only one year older than the actor who had been cast as his son in the movie, Jack Carson, who interpreted the role of Gooper. The brilliant lesbian actress, Judith Anderson, tackled the role of Big Momma, with Madeleine Sherwood playing Gooper's social-climbing, child-bearing wife, May. Gooper and May want Big Daddy's millions and the plantation, too. Their quintet of children (identified early in the script as "no-neck monsters") run amok amid the antiques and fine carpets of the Pollitt mansion.

Over lunch, Brooks delivered disappointing news to his stars. MGM had rejected the first, very provocative, draft of the script. In that original version, Brick confesses his homosexuality and his undying love for Skipper to his wife.

"You've got to understand my dilemma," Brooks said. "The Production Code doesn't even allow us to mention the word 'homosexual' on the screen."

At this point, they were joined at table by James Poe, a writer who was working with Brooks to craft a more acceptable version of the Williams play.

Elizabeth knew Poe because he'd worked with Mike Todd on the script of *Around the World in 80 Days*. Both Poe and Brooks later became sources of information about the relationship between Elizabeth and Newman during the filming of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

In many scenes during the early part of the film, the script called for Newman to appear topless, wearing only the bottom of his pajamas. He'd have to hobble around on a crutch, having broken his leg one gung-ho drunken night while running the hurdle at his old alma mater. He was trying to recapture the days of football glory he had shared with his deceased friend Skipper, for whom he is still in deep mourning, trying to drown his sorrows with liquor.

In the filmed, watered-down version of *Cat*, Maggie lies to the family, especially to Big Daddy, asserting (falsely) that she is pregnant. In the final stages of the script, Brick, as played by Newman, backs her up in her lie. He is seen throwing his pillow into a position beside Maggie's on the bed. The movie comes to an end as they are about to have a "horizontal reconciliation," with the implication that he will penetrate her and that they will actually make that baby whose birth has already been publicly announced by Maggie. As part of the film's happy ending, previous wrongdoings and misunderstandings fade away.

As lunch in the commissary came to an end, Newman turned to Brooks and Poe, saying, "I'll leave it up to you guys, as the writers, to show this shit to Tennessee."

Brooks tried to salvage the mood at the end of the luncheon with some good news: Whereas MGM had originally opted to shoot the picture, budgeted at two million dollars, in black and white, Brooks and Mike Todd had persuaded the studio to shoot it in Techni-color, if for no other reason than to show off the beautiful eyes of the two leading stars.



Film director **Richard Brooks**

The early rapport established between Newman and Elizabeth did not last through the film's early rehearsals.

"She's totally lifeless working with me," Newman told Brooks. "We have no chemistry at all. She's holding back."

When the actual filming began, and after Newman had seen the rushes, he revised his opinion of Elizabeth. "The moment the camera is turned on her, she becomes radiant," he said. "She's a much better actress than I ever imagined. I've never seen anything like it. She's a true film actress, not appropriate for the stage."

From the very beginning, Brooks was pleased with Newman's work on the screen. "Even though we were forced to remove a lot of the motivation from Paul's character, he pulled it off with his cool detachment cast opposite the hotto-trot Maggie. In spite of the weakness of the script, Paul would succeed in making Brick a creditable character, if not always properly motivated."

Mike Todd showed up on the set one day, introducing himself to Newman. He, too, had seen the rushes and thought Elizabeth "has never been better." He made no comment on Newman's performance.

"I completely changed my mind about her," Todd told Newman. "I didn't want her to play Maggie the Cat. I even flew her to London to see Kim Stanley when she was appearing as Maggie in the West End. I took Elizabeth backstage and tried to get Kim to convince her that the role was not for her."

"And why not?" Newman asked. "She's great as Maggie."

"I know that now," Todd said, "but originally I had one serious objection. I said, 'No one's gonna believe that any man—even if gay—would turn down the chance to fuck Elizabeth Taylor.'"

After only a few days of shooting, Elizabeth developed a severe head cold. She was running a dangerous fever and had to be sent home in a limousine. Brooks and Newman learned the next day that her illness had evolved into pneumonia.

Executives at MGM were anxious for Elizabeth to complete Cat, for which she was being paid \$125,000, according to the terms of her contract. But that contract was running out and slated to expire on June 1, 1958. After that, it was speculated that Elizabeth could command far more money on her next picture—at least \$350,000, perhaps a lot more.

Newman was still being paid the small salary in force as part of his original contract. Warners had asked MGM for only \$25,000 for lending him out as the star of Cat. In contrast, Tennessee Williams was getting \$450,000 for the screen rights to his play.

Brooks was the first to inform Newman that he'd have to shoot around Elizabeth until she recovered enough to come back onto the set. "I know her," he said. "She's very fragile, a woman of delicate health. I feared something like this might happen. A head cold was bad enough, but pneumonia could threaten her life. I've just come from a meeting at MGM. They're so worried that Elizabeth won't be able to finish Cat that they've called Carroll Baker's agent to see if she could be made available."

"I don't think it'll come to that," Newman said in astonishment.

"Let's face it: Elizabeth could die," Brooks said. "I've always had this intuition. I can smell death in the air."

On February 28, 1958, Todd had given a small birthday party for Elizabeth and included just a few friends. She didn't want some big event for the celebration of this, her twenty-sixth year. Eddie Fisher was invited, as were David Niven and his wife, Hjordis. Art Cohn showed up and Todd uncorked a bottle of champagne to celebrate Cohn's completion of his biography, *The Nine Lives of Mike Todd*.

The producer dominated the evening's conversations, talking about how wonderful Elizabeth was in the role of Maggie the Cat, "A sure-fire Oscar bet," Todd predicted. He was filled with life and plans for the future, including the filming of his upcoming epic, *Don Quixote*.

He told his guests that he and Elizabeth were going to board *The Lucky Liz* and fly to New York the following month. "I've painted the bedroom aboard our plane violet to match my little darling's beautiful eyes." Some 1,200 guests were scheduled to attend a Friars' Club dinner at the Waldorf-Astoria in Manhattan, honoring him as "Showman of the Year." The guest list was impressive. It included New York State Governor Averell Harriman, U.S. Attorney General Herbert Brownell, and distinguished stage and film stars such as Sir Laurence Olivier.

But just before departure, Elizabeth was too sick to make the trip. Not wanting to go alone, Todd invited Kirk Douglas, Eddie Fisher, director Joseph Mankiewicz, and comedian Joe E. Lewis to accompany him. He even

asked Richard Brooks to take the weekend off from directing *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. But each of the men he invited had another commitment.

AP reporter James Bacon originally accepted the invitation to go to New York, but an hour before departure, he called Todd and turned it down. "I urged him not to go," said Bacon. "It was the worst night I could ever remember in Los Angeles, with torrential rain, thunder, and 'second coming' lightning."



Elizabeth Taylor and Mike Todd aboard her dangerous namesake

Cohn, Todd's biographer, whom he defined as "my second best pal after Eddie," told him that he was free to fly to New York with him.

Todd had also dragooned Dick Hanley into flying with him. However, at the airport, Todd changed his mind and instructed Dick, "Go back to my beautiful broad. She's sick and might need you."

Before takeoff, Todd placed a final call to Elizabeth. "I love you, Lizzie Schwartzkopf. You're beautiful, doll. Remember, save those sugartits for your loving man."

Elizabeth later told Dick, "Mike may have had a fear that something dreadful might happen. He came back into my bedroom and kissed me goodbye five different times before leaving."

She pleaded with her husband to postpone his late-night departure until dawn, but he assured her he'd be safe.

"The night was very Macbethian," she recalled. "He didn't want to leave me. He said, 'I'm too happy. When a man is as happy as I am, something goes wrong.' I tried to go with him, but my doctor, Rex Kennamer, absolutely forbade it. When Mike left, my fever shot up dangerously."

Embarking on the final flight of his life, Todd flew out of Burbank Airport at 10:11pm on March 21, 1958.

He had promised Elizabeth that he would telephone her from Albuquerque, New Mexico, where his pilot planned to stop for refueling. It was a call that never came in. He also promised to call from Kansas City, where he planned to pick up Jack Benny for the ongoing segment of the flight to New York. Throughout the eastbound route, the pilot and passengers encountered heavy thunderstorms, lightning, and strong headwinds.

A report of what happened next was made available on April 17, 1959, nearly a year later, by the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB). An urgent message was received from *The Lucky Liz* by the night air traffic controller at Winslow, Arizona. The pilot, William S. Verner, requested clearance to climb to an altitude of 13,000 feet. The *Liz* was flying at 11,000 feet, and its wings were icing. The controller granted the request.

The next time it was heard from, *The Liz* sent a radio message to the air controller at Zuni, New Mexico, reporting that it had climbed to 13,000 feet, that it had been caught in a violent storm, and that its wings were still icing. It was the last radio transmission from the doomed aircraft.

At Grants Airport control tower in Grants, New Mexico, an air controller reported seeing a brilliant illumination of the March sky. At first, he thought it was a spectacular flash of lighting. However, an Air Force pilot, flying a B-36 through the same night sky, sent an air-to-ground communication, notifying the control tower that a plane had exploded. As revealed in the delayed CAB report, the time of the explosion was 2:40am.

Spiraling out of control after the shutdown of its single engine, *The Lucky Liz* had plunged to earth through a thick fog and burst into flames.

A CAB agent concluded, "The right master engine rod had failed in flight and the right propeller was feathered. Complete loss of control of the aircraft followed and the plane then struck the ground in a steep

angle of descent.”

The pilot lost control of the overloaded private plane. It had a weight limit of 18,605 pounds, but was actually carrying 20,757 pounds at takeoff. The extra tonnage contributed to the failure of the flight. The single engine failed, a situation aggravated by surface ice accretion. The anti-icing system was inadequate.

Todd’s plane went down in the Zuni Mountains of New Mexico some twelve miles southwest of Grants. The bodies were scattered over a two-hundred yard, snow-covered crash site.

At daybreak, a search party in New Mexico discovered the plane wreckage, which had turned into a funeral pyre for Todd, Cohn, and both pilots, Verner and co-pilot Thomas Barclay.

Although the bodies had been charred beyond recognition, Todd’s corpse was initially identified because his skeleton was still “accessorized” with the gold wedding ring he’d worn since his marriage to Elizabeth.

Later, when his ring was returned to Elizabeth, she had it melted down and reshaped for her finger. “I wore it every day until someone else who loved me told me to take it off. I have had two great loves in my life. Mike Todd was the first.”

The AP reporter, James Bacon, may have been the first person in Los Angeles alerted to Todd’s death. An AP stringer in Grants, New Mexico, called Bacon to check up on him. “Your name was on the passenger list. I wanted to make sure you were still alive.”

Shocked, Bacon explained that he had cancelled at the last minute. After getting details, he immediately called the Los Angeles Bureau of the Associated Press. Within fifteen minutes, news of the crash was flashed around the world.

Morning programs on the U.S.’s East Coast and in London were interrupted to broadcast the breaking news.

Even though millions of people around the world already knew about Todd’s death, Elizabeth did not. At around 5am, after a restless night, she’d fallen into a deep coma after taking sleeping pills.

MGM was notified and immediately, Benny Thau phoned Dick Hanley, asking him to break the news to Elizabeth before the wire services started ringing her. He called Dr. Kennamer and asked him to drive to her home with him. When the men arrived, a maid told them that Elizabeth was still asleep upstairs. Dr. Kennamer suggested that he and Dick wake her up and tell her the news.

She would later recall the moment the doctor and her friend walked into her bedroom as “one of the most traumatic moments of my life.” She had just awakened when the men came into her room. “When Dr. Kennamer and Dick came in, I screamed, ‘No, he’s not!’ even before they spoke.”

Debbie Reynolds had been at her dressing table that morning taking out her rollers when the call came in that Todd had died. She called her husband, Eddie Fisher, in New York. He’d flown there on a scheduled commercial flight, with the intention of singing at Todd’s upcoming Friars’ Club gala.

Fisher ordered Reynolds not to go to Elizabeth. It seemed he didn’t want to share the tragedy of Todd’s death with his wife. Defying him, she got dressed and drove to the Todd home to volunteer to look after Elizabeth’s children until she recovered.

Just as Reynolds walked into the house, Elizabeth appeared at the top of the staircase, screaming, “No! No! It’s not true! It’s not true!”

“I’ll never forget her look of terror and anguish,” Reynolds recalled. “I’ll also never forget that face—ashen, her violet eyes desperately sad, hair askew and wild—yet still incredibly beautiful, even in tragedy. And that piercing scream of agony after she called out Mike’s name.”

In 2003, on the Larry King Show, Elizabeth recalled that night and how, consumed with grief, she ran out into the street. “I was Tennessee Williams’ Baby Doll, you know, with the little panties? I fell onto my knees in the street shouting, ‘No, not Mike. Not Mike. Dear God, please not Mike!’ I was almost run over by a car. My doctor, Rex Kennamer, and Dick Hanley picked me up and carried me back to my bedroom. Rex shot me with a hypodermic needle.”

At Elizabeth’s home on Schuyler Drive, Dick put through a call to Cat on a Hot Tin Roof’s director, Richard Brooks. “Todd’s dead. His plane crashed in New Mexico.”

The director claimed he heard "this terrible shrieking noise in the background. I knew at once it was Elizabeth."

The first people to arrive at the Todd home were from MGM: Eddie Mannix and Benny Thau. She screamed at them, cursing them. "You don't give a shit about Mike. All you want to know is can I finish your god damn swampy picture."

Later, when Brooks came by, she denounced him as a "bastard. You've just come to see if I'm able to go back to work. Well, screw you and your Southern Gothic horror tale. I'm never coming back. Go fuck yourself!"

Because of the crowds gathering outside her house, the Beverly Hills police erected barricades and stationed patrolmen to guard the property. Before gaining entrance to the house, everyone had to pass through a security checkpoint. After being questioned, Sara and Francis Taylor were allowed inside, as was Michael Wilding. Her favorite hairdresser, Sidney Guilaroff, arrived to tend to her personal needs, including grooming.

Condolences poured in from around the world, including from the White House. One wire read: "The President and I extend our deepest sympathy. Mamie Eisenhower."

Another from Clark Gable, who had lost his great love, Carole Lombard, in a plane crash sixteen years previously, read: "I know what it's like to lose someone you love."

Toastmaster and entertainer, George Jessel, summed up Todd's life. "He went from being a sideshow barker at the Chicago World's Fair to the man who could tell Picasso, 'Wrap up those pictures. They'll make a nice present for Elizabeth.'"

The Todd home was bedlam, as photographers even climbed up onto the building's roof. Looters broke into the garage where Todd stored his liquor and made off with cases of Scotch and champagne.

Dick was out of a job after Todd's death. Subsequently, he took over Elizabeth's household and began to handle her personal and business affairs, even scooping up dog poop.

Phone calls were coming in from tout Hollywood and from reporters the world over. Dick handled each call graciously and efficiently, although denying all requests for photographs, interviews, and personal visits.

From New York, Fisher called Dick, claiming that he was "deeply concerned about her, afraid she would try to commit suicide or lose her mind completely."

On his first night alone with her, Dick read her letters from all over the world—"from the famous and the unknown."

In the middle of Elizabeth's depression, Dick told her that Lana Turner's daughter, Cheryl Crane, was said to have fatally stabbed her mother's lover, Johnny Stompanato.

"I bet Lana did it," Elizabeth said. "Johnny was once my lover. I'll always remember him. Lana didn't have to kill him. She could have kicked him out instead."

Dick routed very few of the incoming calls through to Elizabeth. However, she'd instructed him, "When Eddie calls, and I know he will, put his call through to me right away."

From New York, Fisher talked to Dick, telling him he was leaving the following day to fly to Elizabeth's side. He had to conclude some business before he could fly away.

The call from Fisher was directed to Elizabeth's bedroom. At times, Dick heard her screaming in agony into the phone, a call that he estimated took almost two hours.

When it ended, Dick entered the room. "I was contemplating suicide with sleeping pills," she told him. "But Eddie has given me reason to live. He told me he's always been in love with me. He also told me that he never loved Debbie and could never figure out why he'd married her. With him by my side, I know I can get through the night."

For many reasons, both professional and personal, Paul Newman was deeply concerned about Elizabeth's condition. He'd gone to her home as soon as he heard the news over the radio. But it was two days before he was able to clear security and was allowed inside.

Amazingly, one of the first persons he encountered in the crowd downstairs was Greta Garbo, who had just descended from Elizabeth's bedroom upstairs. She recognized him immediately. "Go upstairs and offer her

comfort. I did what I could," Garbo told him.

Mounting the stairs, Newman knocked on her door. There was no answer. As he turned, he spotted a photographer trying to conceal himself behind the open door of an adjoining bedroom. He confronted the photographer and demanded that he leave. As her security help later learned, the photographer had planned to barge into Elizabeth's bedroom and snap a picture of the grief-stricken widow, which no doubt would have appeared on the front covers of tabloids across the country.

After the photographer was evicted from the premises, Newman returned to the door of Elizabeth's bedroom and knocked again. This time Elizabeth herself opened the door. She stood before him in a sheer nightgown. When she saw him, she fell into his arms, and he guided her back into the room, where he gently returned her to her bed, covering up her nudity.

Without make-up and with no sleep for the previous two nights, she looked at him, her violet eyes bloodshot. In spite of her pain, she remained beautiful. She reached for him. "Don't ever let me go," she said, her voice barely a whisper.

Through tear-streaked eyes, she told him that "Mike had a premonition about that flight."

Elizabeth and Newman talked for about an hour, a session he later shared with Brooks. Fearing that she wouldn't be able to return to the film set of *Cat*, he had desperately wanted to assess the emotional condition of his co-star.

"I was always the strong one in any relationship I ever had," she confessed to him. "Even with my parents, and certainly through my marriages. But when Mike came along, I surrendered myself to him. He made the decisions. He was my shield against the world. I was his vassal. He solved all my problems. He loved me as no man has ever loved me. I was his. Without him, I have nothing."

Spontaneously, Newman blurted out, "You have me." Later, he would tell Brooks that he didn't really know why he'd said that. "The words just came out."

"Stay with me tonight," she whispered in his ear. "I can't stand to be alone. Mike slept here by my side. Last night I kept reaching out for him, finding nothing. No one."

"I'll be here for you," he promised.

If Brooks is to be believed, Newman told him that he made love to Elizabeth that night. "It was not a love of passion but a love of comfort," Newman allegedly told his director. "She needed me. My human warmth."

He also told Brooks that "I came to my senses the moment I left her house. I couldn't replace Todd in her life. I have a life of my own. A wife. Kids. I feared I'd horribly misled her. I can't be the next Mr. Elizabeth Taylor. I just can't."

Brooks assured him that he should feel no guilt for what he had done. "You were just tending to a desperate woman's needs."

The next day Elizabeth placed three frantic calls to Newman on the set, but he didn't return those desperate pleas to speak to her.

Still harboring his longstanding crush on Elizabeth, her aviator suitor of yesterday, Howard Hughes, finally connected with Elizabeth on the phone. Very generously, he offered her the use of one of his TWA jets to fly her to Todd's funeral in Chicago and then back to Los Angeles. She willingly accepted his offer and thanked him profusely.

During the flight to Chicago, the crew remembered Elizabeth clinging desperately to Fisher, and cuddling up protectively in his arms. The pilot later said, "Those two clung to each other like long lost lovers."

Ashen and veiled, Elizabeth disembarked from Hughes' TWA plane in Chicago. On the ramp, she was supported by her brother, Howard, and her doctor, Rex Kennamer. Dick Hanley followed them, carrying her two large purses.

Her arrival at Chicago's airport was greeted by some 2,000 fans, screaming her name and clamoring for an autograph, which she would not have given under any circumstances. A limousine whisked her to the Drake Hotel in Chicago, where a suite had been prepared for her. It was filled with flowers from friends and from fans expressing their sympathy.

Michael Todd, Jr., with his wife, Sarah, had met Elizabeth at the Chicago airport. He had gone ahead to make the funeral arrangements.

The next day, police estimated that some 20,000 frenzied fans lined the funeral route to Todd's grave site. It was believed that this was the largest turnout since Bugs Moran gang members were buried in the wake of the 1929 St. Valentine's Day Massacre.

Some of the more crazed fans showed up along the funeral route not to gape at Elizabeth but to scream and shout for Fisher. They were the more dedicated members of his Chicago fan club. Many of them brought their record albums for him to autograph. Of course, in these circumstances, he could not grant such requests.

Designer Helen Rose flew to Chicago with Elizabeth's "widow's weeds"—a black mink wrap, black leather gloves, a black suit trimmed with broadtail fur, a black velvet cloche hat, and a black veil that left her scarlet-painted lips visible.

Elizabeth specifically had not invited Monty, knowing that he found Todd distasteful. Ignoring her wishes, he showed up anyway. She spotted his face in the milling crowds.

Monty was horrified by the crowd. "It was noisy and vengeful. I saw envy in their faces, hatred, and bleakness."

Mike Todd's brother, David Goldbogen, had originally wanted a nine-foot tall replica of an Oscar statuette to function as Todd's tombstone. But the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences threatened to sue, and the plan was abandoned.

Defined during its aftermath by Dick Hanley as "a Todd extravaganza," the funeral of Michael Todd took place on March 25, 1958 at the Jewish Waldheim Cemetery in Zurich, Illinois, outside Chicago.

Fans ate potato chips and popcorn, trashing the cemetery with their garbage. Untamed children crawled over the Jewish tombstones. Hot dog vendors peddled snacks and drinks to the mob.

At Todd's grave site, covered with a black tent, Elizabeth bowed before the bronze casket containing his charred remains. "I love you, Mike," she said, sobbing. "I will love you for eternity. There will never be another."

As Rabbi Abraham Rose conducted the Orthodox service, his voice was drowned out by fans shouting, "LIZ! LIZ! LIZ!"

A photograph of the young weeping widow, supported by Eddie Fisher, was flashed around the world. In Dick's words, "Eddie had become a surrogate for Mike. Michael, Jr. was yet another surrogate. Elizabeth had two men in her life, both of whom were in love with her."

Fisher later referred to the funeral as "an agonizing ordeal—I didn't think I'd get through it." Like the widow, he knelt before the casket and sobbed. "I've lost the only real friend I ever had."

Dick stood nearby, mesmerized by the scene of the weeping Elizabeth with Fisher. "Eddie was behaving more like a widow instead of as a best friend," he later said. "I had heard only rumors about the intimacy of Eddie and Mike. It was not a traditional male/male friendship. They were asshole buddies in more ways than one, or so I heard."

As the police tried to clear a pathway for Elizabeth back to her waiting limousine, unruly spectators tried to break through the cordon of police, hoping to tear off pieces of Elizabeth's clothing. One woman with a camera ripped off Elizabeth's veil, saying, "Listen, bitch, I want a picture of your tear-soaked face."

Fisher managed to push Elizabeth inside the limousine, whereupon they discovered that the driver was missing—lost in the crowd. The mob surrounded the car. Some of the young men began to rock the vehicle, trying to force her to come out and to pose for pictures. She screamed, fearing the limousine would be toppled over. It took eight policemen to force the crowd to stand back from the limo. The driver finally appeared.

As Elizabeth recalled, "Hordes of people swarmed like insects all over the limo so we couldn't see out the window."

It took an hour for the police to clear a pathway for the limousine to leave the cemetery and take Elizabeth back to the Drake. Once there, she met privately with Monty. The confrontation did not go well, as she had not wanted him to come to Chicago. He was seen storming out of the Drake, where he hailed a taxi to take him to the airport and onto a flight back to New York.

Then Elizabeth and Fisher, along with their special guests, were driven to the airport for the flight aboard Hughes' plane back to Los Angeles in the wake of that grotesque funeral.

Throughout most of the flight, Elizabeth, in front of everyone, huddled with Fisher, his arms protectively

around her. He shared a memory of Todd with her:

"Mike told me that most young boys in America grow up wanting to become President of the United States. But Mike told me his life-long wish was to marry Elizabeth Taylor."

One of the strangest events occurred at the Todd household in Los Angeles after Elizabeth returned from Chicago. Roddy McDowall came over for a sleepover to look after Elizabeth because Fisher had a singing engagement that night.

Nicky Hilton showed up at the door demanding to see Elizabeth. He didn't wait for an invitation, but stormed up the steps and barged into her bedroom.

Roddy heard a drugged Elizabeth say, "Nicky, oh Nicky, you've come back!"

Roddy was asleep on the sofa when a disheveled Hilton, tucking in his shirttails, came downstairs at around 5am the next morning.

Roddy, who had known Hilton for years, was anxious to learn what had happened.

"I fucked her all night and I mean that literally," Hilton said. "Well, maybe I took a cigarette break here and there. I thought I could fuck her into a reconciliation, but she turned me down at 4am. I won't be back. I'll drop in and see you, kid, the next time I want a great blow-job."

Roddy stood on the Todd family's porch watching Hilton drive away to his next adventure.

By 10am that same morning, Michael Todd, Jr., arrived to see the sultry beauty who was technically still his stepmother. She had seen him only on carefully choreographed occasions during the course of her marriage to his father. Sometimes, he had been with his wife, Sarah, whom he'd married in 1953.

Todd Jr. admitted in his memoirs that he and Elizabeth "never left the house" following his father's funeral. He recalled that on several occasions "she relapsed into a state of near hysteria. She was crying and fighting against the fact of his death. When she'd pull herself together, she would say, 'Mike can't be dead. I don't believe it.'"

In the wake of Todd Sr.'s death, Elizabeth confided to his son, "I dream of Mike almost every night, dream that he is still alive. In the dream, I'm in his apartment on Park Avenue. Suddenly, he comes into the room. 'You silly nigger,' he says to me. 'You thought I was dead, didn't you? But I was just lying low till I got things straightened out.'"

"It wasn't the dream that shocked me as much as Elizabeth dreaming that Dad had called her a silly nigger," Todd, Jr. said. "That made no sense at all. I never heard Dad call anybody a nigger, especially his goddess wife."

In his hours-long talks with Elizabeth in her bedroom, Todd Jr. shared many stories about her late husband that she had not heard before. Some of these tales amused her; others made her jealous, especially if a woman was involved.



Mike Todd Sr. and Jr. in 1952

Todd Jr. claimed that Marilyn Monroe had desperately wanted to appear in a cameo in *Around the World in 80 Days*, portraying the saloon singer in San Francisco, a role that had gone to Marlene Dietrich.

"Monroe arrived at Dad's apartment on Park Avenue," Todd Jr. said. "He took her to his bedroom and auditioned her privately there. While I watched a Roy Rogers movie on TV, Dad and Monroe were in there for at least three hours. I heard a lot of giggling. It must have been some audition. Finally, Monroe emerged and wet-kissed me goodbye. In spite of her efforts, she didn't get the part. I never understood why not. Monroe would have brought more publicity to the film than Dietrich."

When the story was repeated to Fisher the next day, he said, "I also auditioned for Mike. He had me sing the same lyric all afternoon, but decided to give my part to Sinatra. He told me that Sinatra would bring him a lot more publicity. For his stint in the film, Sinatra was given a brand-new Thunderbird."

"Dad didn't believe in following the rules," Todd Jr. told Elizabeth, "and you know that's true. When I was eight years old, he told me you don't ask a policeman if you can spit in the subway. 'If you gotta spit, you spit, but you don't ask if you're allowed to.'"

Todd, Jr. said that he once visited his father in Palm Springs, where he and Elizabeth were resting from their world tour. One afternoon, Todd Sr. left to play golf and then to engage in some heavy drinking with Frank Sinatra.

"Elizabeth and I were alone around the pool," Todd Jr. said. "She had on this tight-fitting swim suit with a leopard print. At some point, she casually pulled it off and lay nude in front of me. She didn't come on to me, but she closed her eyes, knowing that I was taking in her beautiful body and big tits. I got an erection and I couldn't get it to go down for a while. If I'd fucked her then, and Dad had caught me, he would have held my head underwater until I drowned. Elizabeth was very provocative to do that. After all, I was her stepson."

"On some nights, we talked about reviving Mike's plan to film *Don Quixote in Spain*," Todd Jr. recalled. "Dad had talked about casting various actors over the years. But Elizabeth came up with a weird suggestion for casting the lean, lanky *Don Quixote*. 'Gary Cooper could be great in the title role,' she said. Maybe he would. The idea wasn't as crazy as it sounded at first."

"Elizabeth decided, at least for two or three weeks, that I was the only man on earth who could replace my Dad in her life," Todd Jr. claimed. "She went for me—I mean, came on really strong—and I caved in. She told me I was like a younger version of my father—and that thrilled her. She said she'd never gotten to know him as a young man, since he was already in late middle age when they met. She and I were contemporaries, and she said that by loving me, she was getting to experience what young love with Dad could have been. I knew that didn't make any real sense, but it was a conceit she harbored for quite a while, even though it was completely unrealistic."

Eventually, Cat's director, Richard Brooks, visited Elizabeth in her bedroom and later observed:

"I feared that a scandal was brewing because of Elizabeth spending so much time with that Fisher boy," Brooks said. "I confronted her. I don't want to sound greedy, but I was afraid fans would stay away in droves if news got out that Eddie had become the surrogate Mike Todd in her life—yes, including the fulfillment of marital duties."

The next day, Brooks shared Elizabeth's response with Paul Newman. It was a shocker, and we have only Brooks' word for this.

"I've known for months that Eddie is in love with me," Elizabeth allegedly told Brooks. "Even Mike knew that, but he dismissed it as a harmless flirtation. 'What red-blooded man on the planet wouldn't fall for Elizabeth Taylor?' he used to say. But I fear I've developed an attachment far more scandalous than Eddie Fisher. I think I'm falling in love with Mike Todd, Jr."

Often, Elizabeth and Todd, Jr. discussed how the death of Todd Sr. could have been prevented. "I urged him to get rid of that fucking plane," Todd Jr. said. "I just knew it wasn't safe. I even gave him an F.A.A. survey to show him that a plane like that was dangerous unless a lot of money was spent on it to bring it up to standards. He wouldn't listen. 'I'm too tough to die,' he told me. 'I plan to be fucking Elizabeth when I'm eighty-five.'"

"One night she asked me to pull off my clothes and get into bed with her," Todd Jr. said. "She couldn't sleep, but I fell asleep since I was exhausted. Sometime in the early morning hours, I woke up with this sensation. She was giving me this fantastic blow-job. I knew it was wrong, but I was too far gone. I had to go for it, and I did. I felt guilty afterward, though."

"It was a bizarre time in my life," Todd Jr. told Dick Hanley. "Elizabeth put my Dad's pajamas under her pillow. She refused to change the sheets where he'd spent his last night with her. She said she wanted to keep them as long as she could, and as long as his odor remained."

After a few weeks, Elizabeth was seen with Arthur Loew, Jr. Roddy McDowall, who visited Elizabeth frequently at the time, told friends, "Elizabeth was not romantically interested in Arthur. She was trying to throw the bloodhounds off the scent, which was of Mike Todd, Jr."

Elizabeth's agent, Kurt Frings, said, "She went after Eddie Fisher, all right. No question about it. She tried Mike Todd, Jr., first, but his wife Sarah finally said no and put a stop to it before it could develop too far. She got young Mike out of town fast before Elizabeth could move in on him any more than she had already."

"I was a fool at the time," Fisher recalled. "One night in the living room, I saw Arthur Loew, Jr. pull off Elizabeth's shoes and sensually massage her feet. She always said, 'Art and I are just friends.' There are all kinds of friends. Like an idiot, I urged her to spend less time with Loew and more time with Mike's son. That was like sending an innocent lamb to bed down with a she-wolf. What I didn't know at the time was that I was in love with Elizabeth but wasn't ready to admit it to myself."

In later years, Todd Jr. expressed no regret for his brief, rather tumultuous involvement with Elizabeth. "Basically, she was and is a warmhearted, thoughtful, and loving person," he said. "But because of her background as a child star, she can also be spoiled and self-centered. She has the courage, nerve, and ability to get what she wants and sooner or later to overcome any obstacles to her happiness."

It was his wife, Sarah, who rescued Todd Jr. from Elizabeth's clutches. Todd Jr. admitted, "I was very uncomfortable and thought my presence was no longer helping her to reconcile herself to my father's death, nor was it improving my state of mind."

In April, Todd's will was filed for probate. His estate was said to be worth \$5 million, but most of that would be consumed by debt. The estate was divided between Elizabeth and Todd Jr., with him receiving his inheritance outright. Her share was placed in trust, an arrangement which had originally been conceived as a means of providing her with an income for life.

Many casual observers thought Todd had left her a rich widow. But as Todd Jr. discovered, her late husband and his father had left a tangled estate. It would take dozens of lawsuits and years to settle. She faced immediate problems with the Internal Revenue Service, as Todd owed thousands in back taxes. Todd Jr. joined with her in filing a \$5 million lawsuit against the airplane company which had leased Todd the doomed plane. Negligence was charged. It took five years to settle the claim. In the end, \$27,000 was awarded directly to Liza Todd.

Even after they separated as lovers, Todd Jr. and Elizabeth continued a friendship and a business involvement as heirs to Todd Sr.'s estate. Their chief asset was *Around the World in 80 Days*, which by 1960 had begun to show its age, belonging, artistically at least, to the transient fads of the 1950s.

Todd Sr. had already managed to squander most of the gross from the film on his worldwide promotion tours and other stunts. Elizabeth and Todd Jr. were lured into believing that the film would eventually earn \$85 to \$100 million, but the profit fell far below that. Domestically, it earned only \$23 million.

In 1968, with Elizabeth's approval, *80 Days* was re-released, but brought in less than a million dollars. In 1971, Todd Jr. sold it as a telecast on CBS-TV for \$2 million, although Todd Sr. had always vowed it would never be shown on TV.

Back taxes on the Todd estate were not settled until 1971. "After everything was paid off, there wasn't a lot in the kitty," Dick said. Todd Sr.'s once vast estate was reduced to just \$13,000.

Even though, presumably, Todd Jr. was no longer sleeping with Elizabeth, he still tried to take over her career, something his father had done. At one point, Todd Jr. called a press conference, announcing plans for another roadshow extravaganza evocative of the most lavish of the events associated with *80 Days*. "It's called *Busman's Holiday*, and it's going to be spectacular. Elizabeth will be the star."

When Todd Jr. was producing the first and last Smell-O-Vision film, *Scent of Mystery* (later retitled *Holiday in Spain*), Elizabeth agreed to appear in an un-billed cameo. The film, a so-called mystery, starred Peter Lorre, Paul Lukas, and Denholm Elliott.

Fans of Elizabeth had to wait till near the end of the film for her brief appearance as "The Real Sally Kennedy." Her moment on the screen was greeted with gusts of perfume pumped through the air-conditioning

system. Many of her fans coughed and choked.

The movie had opened with images of a butterfly flitting through a sweet-smelling peach grove. Later on, a barrel of wine fell off a cart and rolled down a hill, smashing at the bottom, again to an accompanying odor.

In the advertising campaigns associated with his breakthrough in film technology, Todd Jr. announced "First they moved (1895)! Then they talked (1927)! Now they smell (1960)!"

After sitting through the movie, Fisher told Elizabeth, "The scent emanating from that flick wasn't Chanel No. 5. It stunk like shit."

Initially, the film was shown only in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles.

"If Todd had lived, I think she would have divorced him by the time she shot Cleopatra in Rome," said Dick. "The affair would have burned out by then because it was too intense. Also, he would have driven her into bankruptcy the way he did with his second wife, Joan Blondell."

Todd Jr. also doubted whether the marriage might have lasted forever. "The marriage might have lasted only if Dad never had a financial downturn. What if Don Quixote had flopped? Todd-AO faded with the fads of the 1950s. I suspect Elizabeth would have gone on to other lovers, especially Richard Burton, who would have lured her away from my Dad instead of taking her from Eddie Fisher."

Elizabeth said she could no longer stand living in the Schuyler Road house. She left her children with Loew and moved into a bungalow on the grounds of the Beverly Hills Hotel.

Her former beau, Loew was always there for Elizabeth, always willing to take care of her children and solve their many problems while she rushed off to her next adventure in New York or Europe. "I adore Elizabeth," he said, "and am only too glad to take care of her kids."

Quite by chance, the author of this biography, in Ireland in the mid-1970s with travel writer Stanley Haggart, once encountered Todd Jr. in a Dublin pub. He'd come in for a glass of gin and ended up having quite a few.

Todd Jr. spoke frankly about his failed dreams of becoming a big-time showman like his father. During the course of the evening, and after his sixth gin, he admitted that he had once fallen in love with Elizabeth. "I was the one who pulled away," he admitted, "because I knew our marriage—which would have been possible only after I divorced my-then wife Sarah—would have destroyed Elizabeth's career. Look what happened to another Oscar winner, Gloria Grahame, when she married her stepson, the son of Nicholas Ray."

Todd Jr., after suffering for years from diabetes—he even had one leg amputated—eventually died on May 5, 2002 in Ireland, the victim of lung cancer.

Faced with a mounting pile of bills arriving daily from episodes associated with Todd's promotions and travel worldwide, Elizabeth was also left with three children to rear—two sons from Michael Wilding and the little girl, Liza, from Todd himself.

Elizabeth returned to work on April 14, 1958, at the MGM lot in Culver City. Emerging from a month of seclusion, she had been driven to MGM by Dick. She had not even bothered to phone Richard Brooks. In the back of her limousine, she waited for him to come out of a sound stage and greet her. Dick had gone inside to search for him.

After he got into the limo with her, Brooks studied her face carefully. Her eyes were still red, but she claimed that she was able to go to work. "Mike loved me in the picture, at least what he saw of the rushes, and I want to finish Cat for him. Besides, it's a hell of a good role, and a gal doesn't get a lot of those in one lifetime."



Michael Todd, Jr.

He escorted her to her dressing room, which the crew the next day filled with violets to match the color of her eyes.

On her first day back, Paul Newman emerged from his dressing room to greet her. She kissed him gently on the lips. "Thanks for being there for me when I needed you," she said.

"She seemed very practical," Newman recalled. "She had to get back to work. She needed the money."

Newman was the gallant gentleman, and it was obvious to him that she did not want to continue their relationship after her one-night stand with him. She'd reached out for him in loneliness and desperation. As he told her, "If you need me, I'm here for you. Call me and I'll come running."

Throughout the remainder of the filming of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Newman provided Elizabeth with strong moral—but not physical—support. Their moment of intimacy, conceived and executed at perhaps the worst moment of her life, seemed to have been relegated to a far and distant memory within both of their brains.

In later years, Elizabeth expressed gratitude to him for his good manners during the conclusion of the shooting of *Cat*. "He was most courtly to me," she told friends, "a real gentleman. If I were about to have a nervous breakdown, he was by my side, guiding me through a scene."

"I think Elizabeth gave her greatest performance in *Cat*," he later claimed. "She turned out to be a real trouper."

That was his public position. Privately, he told Brooks, "I really wish I was a free man. In all my life, I never wanted anything as much. To be the man lying in bed with Elizabeth when she woke up in the morning. Those violet eyes gazing into my baby blues."

Newman remembered with horror the day he sat in a viewing room with Elizabeth, Brooks, and Tennessee Williams. The playwright cringed throughout the screening, and Newman kept shifting nervously in his seat. When the screening was over and the lights came up, Tennessee rose to his feet.

He looked first at Newman. "You looked fabulous without your shirt," Tennessee said. "One tasty morsel. And Elizabeth, you looked so sexy, no gay man could turn you down." Then he turned to Brooks. "You emasculated my play. You bastard! I'm going to urge the public to stay away from it." Then he stormed out of the studio.

On September 20, 1958, when *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* opened in theaters around the country, Elizabeth was sternly being denounced as "the other woman." Tabloid fodder for the press, she was accused of breaking up the marriage of America's so-called sweethearts, Debbie Reynolds and Eddie Fisher.

But instead of segueing "notorious Liz," as she was called, into box office poison, publicity generated by the illicit romance had movie-goers lining up around the country to gaze upon "this Jezebel."

Cat was nominated for Best Picture, Best Adapted Screenplay (in spite of Tennessee's assault), Best Director, Best Actor (Newman himself), and Best Actress (in spite of the negative press out there on Elizabeth).

At the Academy Awards, Newman faced stiff competition from Sidney Poitier in *The Defiant Ones* and Tony Curtis, also in *The Defiant Ones*. It can be assumed that two nominees for the same picture cancel each other out. Therefore, Newman had to measure up against David Niven in *Separate Tables* and Spencer Tracy in *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Eventually, Niven, playing a bogus war hero and child molester, walked off with the Oscar. Newman modestly

admitted to friends, "I didn't deserve the win this time. Maybe next time."

Ironically, Elizabeth lost to Susan Hayward for *I Want to Live*, a script that Newman had urged Hayward to make. That was not because he really wanted her to interpret the role, but because he hoped she'd reject *The Three Faces of Eve* so that Joanne Woodward could get the role.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof was MGM's biggest hit of the year, and polls in the autumn named Elizabeth as the number one star in Hollywood. "In this case," she said, "notoriety works in my favor. Apparently, the public wants to go into a darkened movie house and gaze upon the scarlet woman."

With the film wrapped, she flew to New York to make up with Monty, but spent far more time with Fisher, who was fulfilling contractual engagements on the East Coast.

She told Dick Hanley and Monty, "I'm starting my life all over again. God knows where the path will lead me this time."

Contrary to denials, Elizabeth had been sexually intimate with Eddie Fisher before the blossoming of their love affair into full bloom in Manhattan. He booked a site at Essex House, on Central Park South, and she booked an even more luxurious suite at the Plaza Hotel.

Partly because of such subterfuges, their romance initially escaped the attention of the press, although there were reports about how they were from time to time sighted together. Since Fisher was widely recognized as Mike Todd's best friend, it was assumed that he was merely offering comfort to the Widow Todd. But as it turned out, he was offering far more than comfort.

At the Plaza, after a night of love-making with Fisher, Elizabeth received her first call of the day. It was from Cary Grant. The bisexual actor had always had a crush on her, and he invited her to share an LSD trip with him. She turned him down.

She'd heard from friends that Grant's popularity at the box office had waned as he moved deeper into middle age. Privately, Louella Parsons told her confidants that "Cary wants to marry Elizabeth as a means of beefing up his heterosexual credentials."

Elizabeth said to friends, "Cary came on to me several times, but I never gave him a tumble. Everybody from Noël Coward to Doris Duke told me he's not very well endowed."

In her dates with Fisher in New York, she often used Dick Hanley as her "beard." He warned her, "You don't need Eddie right now. You really don't. Save your reputation and let me take care of his sexual needs."

"Oh, Dick," she said, "You really are so precious. What would I do without you?"

But instead of accepting Dick's advice, she spent the next four days and nights alone with Fisher in the bedroom of her suite. "Talk about getting to know someone," she later told Dick, "I feel more like a woman than I've felt since Mike died."

On Fisher's thirtieth birthday, Elizabeth presented him with Todd's money clip, which read:

BEING POOR IS A STATE OF MIND.
I'VE BEEN BROKE LOTS OF TIMES
BUT I'VE NEVER BEEN POOR.

He recalled, "I can't ever forget how her eyes burned into my heart that day: I felt her need for me from the depths of my soul. My feelings were identical to hers."

Todd had been an older man—forty-nine years old at the time of his death—but Fisher was young, thirty, and passionate. "We made love three, four, five times a day," he said of the weeks of their love affair. "We made love in the swimming pool, on Mexican beaches, under waterfalls, and in the back seat of a limousine on the way home from a party. There is nothing more erotic than Elizabeth Taylor and a moonlit beach. We fit together as perfect sexually as we did mentally."



A domestic drama that reverberated around the world: **Elizabeth Taylor, Eddie Fisher, and Debbie Reynolds**

Born in Philadelphia in 1928, Fisher was descended from Russian Jewish immigrants. He referred to his father as "a nasty, abusive man, a tyrant. And they say I'm no actor," Fisher said. "Imagine me having to sing 'Oh! My Pa-Pa!' and look adoringly at the man I hated smiling back at me from ringside."

Sometimes referred to as "The Jewish Sinatra," Fisher was four years older than Elizabeth. A popular teenage idol, he was good looking and boyish, although Mike Todd, Jr., claimed, "He didn't have much upstairs. His talents lay much farther south...and I'm talking Deep South!"

"Eddie was not just Mike Todd's best friend," said Dick Hanley. "He worshipped the man and tried to emulate him. Mike would order first in a restaurant, and Eddie would order the same. They drank the same liquor and fucked the same women. In time, they'd even marry the same woman."

The press called him, "the golden boychik of mainstream pop" or the "dimpled troubadour from Philadelphia." He rose to the top tier of America's entertainment industry between 1950 and 1954, a period which some social historians define as the most tepid and conformist five years in the history of 20th century music. Nineteen of his songs reached the Top Ten. When he was drafted into the Army during the Korean War, President Harry S Truman defined him as, "my favorite PFC."

Many biographers have claimed that Elizabeth's "big" attraction for Fisher was the result of his being hung like a horse. Yet in startling contrast, many of his former bedmates, including Las Vegas showgirls, referred to him as "Princess Tiny Meat." On the Oprah Winfrey Show, Debbie Reynolds, in reference to her former husband and his endowment, once pointedly performed a gesture with her hands, indicating that her former husband measured no more than four inches erect.

During his lifetime, Fisher, or so it is estimated, seduced some 1,000 men and women, mostly women. One would think that all these objects of his seduction could agree on the size of his penis. But such is not the case. Marlene Dietrich told Orson Welles, "Eddie is parlor sized." Her statement was enigmatic. Did Dietrich mean that he was hung appropriately for the parlor—but not for the bedroom?

Jane Ellen Wayne, a Hollywood biographer, worked in public relations at NBC during the period when Fisher was televising his musical show for Coca-Cola. She talked to two or three starlets whom Fisher had dated at NBC. "They would talk about how well-endowed he was, and how skilled a lover he was, ranking right up there with Gary Cooper and Frank Sinatra. If anyone had an interest in good sex—and Elizabeth Taylor is said to have been ardent about it—Eddie Fisher was somebody who would have impressed her."

In addition to maybe one thousand hookers, Fisher also seduced numerous stars over the years. They included Edie Adams, Pier Angeli, Ann-Margret, Nathalie Delon (wife of Alain), Marlene Dietrich, Mia Farrow (to Sinatra's fury), Judy Garland, Hope Lange, singer Jane Morgan, Merle Oberon, Stephanie Powers, Kim Novak, Carol Lynley, Juliet Prowse (to Sinatra's fury), Angie Dickinson (of JFK fame), Maria Schell, and Mamie Van Doren. Exotic conquests included Judith Campbell Exner (mistress of both John F. Kennedy and mobster Sam

Giancana), Pamela Turnure (press secretary to Jackie Kennedy), and Virginia Warren, daughter of Chief Justice Earl Warren.

He was also rumored to be a closeted bisexual, and may have had a few discreet affairs with young men, including waiters in Las Vegas. He has gone on record denying almost a hundred times that he was a homosexual.

"Oh, Eddie," Elizabeth said, "you protest too much. Why don't you shut up about it?"

After marrying perky Debbie Reynolds, Fisher's popularity soared, and he had a number of hit records, eventually commanding \$250,000 for his appearance at a single recording session.

Even Hedda Hopper approved of the Reynolds/Fisher marriage. "Never have I seen a more patriotic match than these two clean-cut, clean-living youngsters. When I think of them, I see flags flying and hear bands playing." Hopper would soon change her definition of what she saluted and what music she heard.

A popular New York columnist of his day, Earl Wilson, was among the first newspapermen to learn about the Taylor/Fisher love affair. On August 29, 1958, Wilson wrote: "Elizabeth Taylor and Eddie Fisher were dancing it up at the Harwyn Night Club this morning. Eddie having been Mike Todd's close friend is now sort of an escort service for Liz."

"After Wilson's column was published, all hell broke loose," Fisher claimed.

Wilson followed with almost nightly sightings throughout New York ranging from the Quo Vadis restaurant to the Embers Night Club.

What Wilson had to say about Reynolds could not be printed. "To put it bluntly, Debbie has more balls than any five guys I've ever known. She pretends to be sweet and demure, but at heart she's Hard-Hearted Hannah."



Hedda Hopper Interpreting E.T.'s involvement with E.F. as a personal betrayal

When Hedda Hopper read Wilson's column, she shouted, referring to Elizabeth, "That bitch! That slut!"

The Soviets had launched Sputnik, Alaska had voted for statehood, and Dr. Martin Luther King had been arrested in Alabama, but newspapers were obsessed with the unfolding saga of "Liz & Eddie."

On September 8, 1958, The Los Angeles Herald Express headlined a story—EDDIE FISHER IS DATING LIZ TAYLOR. That revelation got more play than Khrushchev threatening atomic retaliation against the United States if it attacked Red China.

In Manhattan for the taping of his television show for Coca-Cola, Fisher invited Elizabeth to spend Labor Day weekend with him at Grossinger's, the most famous resort in New York State's Catskill Mountains. Grossinger's was where he had launched his career in 1949. It had also been the setting for his wedding ceremony to Reynolds in 1955, when he had been the number one singing star in America. ("Eat your heart out, Frankie," he said.)

Thousands of Elizabeth's fans, nationwide, were outraged that she did not spend "at least a year in mourning," in the wake of Todd's untimely death.

In Hollywood, Reynolds could take it no more. At 2am on the morning of September 6, she telephoned Fisher's suite at the Essex House in Manhattan. There was no answer. She knew that Elizabeth was staying in a suite at the Plaza Hotel. Through a ruse, she called the Plaza's switchboard, claiming that she was a telephone operator in California and that Dean Martin was on the line, waiting to speak to Fisher.

Fisher came to the phone, "Deano, what in hell are you calling me for at this hour?"

"It's Debbie. Why don't you roll over in bed and give Elizabeth the phone?"

After five minutes of violent arguing, Fisher finally admitted the truth. "I'm in love with Elizabeth. I never loved you. I want a divorce."

"If you marry her, she'll dump you within eighteen months," Reynolds shouted back at him. She later asserted, "And Elizabeth did get rid of him, just as I had warned him."

On reflection, Reynolds claimed, "Eddie wanted to be a movie star. He married one. Then he left me for someone even bigger. Looking back, I can see that Eddie wasn't that interested in me. I was not a woman of the world, or a passionate woman like Elizabeth. He was way overmatched with her, but he didn't know that, and she didn't realize it at the time, probably because she was in such despair."

The New York Daily News claimed, "The storybook marriage of Eddie Fisher and Debbie Reynolds skidded on a series of curves yesterday—Liz Taylor's." Life magazine chortled, "Hollywood was caught with its make-believe down."

Elizabeth's former friend, party giver Elsa Maxwell, wrote: "The facts seem to me to prove she has been aggressive in her romances, ruthless in her disregard for the feelings of those who have stood in her path, and indifferent to the wreckage she has left behind her."

At the time this attack appeared, an MGM publicity picture of Elizabeth, sensually dressed in a white silk slip and satin pumps, was plastered across America. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* was soon to be released.

All the sympathy Elizabeth had generated after the loss of her husband faded as soon as news broke that she was involved in an affair with Eddie Fisher. In Stockholm, a newspaper headlined the story as BLOOD THIRSTY LIZ VAMPIRES EDDIE.

"Harlot" and "Jezebel" were some of the kinder words used to describe her after that. She was called "a viper," "a cannibal," "a barbarian," and "a man-eater."

Fan magazines such as *Photoplay* urged the public to boycott her films. She was denounced in newspaper editorials, and a minister in Los Angeles had his congregation burn her in effigy.

Max Lerner, a writer for *The New York Post*, for a brief time would become Elizabeth's lover. He defended her marriage to Fisher. "I like the fact that they are quite frank about their feelings for each other. This is a case where a joyous candor is far better than a hypocritical show of virtue."

She liked the column so much, she invited Lerner to visit Fisher and her in her suite. "I fell in love with her," Lerner said. "She told me how stimulating Eddie had been in bed the night before. 'Three and a half times, Mr. Max.'"

The following week, Elizabeth, still in love with Fisher, bizarrely launched a sexual affair with the chubby fifty-seven-year-old political columnist. Their on-again, off-again fling continued until 1961.

She met Lerner at times in secluded pubs in London, eventually inviting him back to her suite at the Dorchester when Fisher was away at a singing engagement. In time, she would tell Lerner, "I thought I could keep Mike's memory alive that way, but I have only his ghost in Eddie."

Until she got involved with Fisher, Elizabeth played Sinatra songs, but she switched to "Wish You Were Here," "I'm Walking Behind You," "I Need You Now," and "Oh! My Pa-Pa."

The adverse publicity whirling around his romance caused NBC to cancel *The Eddie Fisher Show*.

Elizabeth tried to defend herself from attacks. "Mike is dead. I'm alive. Maggie the Cat is alive." She very accurately told the press, "No one woman breaks up a happy marriage."

Reference to the scandal would last in the public mind for years. Even the widowed Jacqueline Kennedy, in analyzing the depth of her popularity in America, commented sardonically on her own situation years later: "Anyone who is against me will look like a rat—unless I run off with Eddie Fisher."

"I never suspected that Elizabeth was going to entice my husband away," Reynolds said. "I might not have been as surprised were it anyone else. But how it all happened was rather scandalous in that they didn't take more care to avoid hurting me. I understand when I look back on it. Who would pass on Elizabeth? No woman living was as beautiful as her. And Eddie had even tried to act like Mike Todd, smoking big cigars."

"I was the last to find out about the affair," Reynolds continued. "There had been hints in the papers, and I had noticed that when I turned up at a party, my own friends were whispering. Although I didn't want to find out the truth, I had to face up to it. Even so, it was a great shock to find them together. It left me shattered. The shock of discovering the affair was the day I lost my innocence. I was a virgin when I married Eddie. I was very religious, so I didn't believe in divorce. But they laid guilt on me that I was keeping them and true love apart. So, I finally let Eddie off the hook. I told him to go."

In later years, Reynolds said, "I should have married my first love, Robert Wagner. All we did was kiss. But Elizabeth, not me, bedded Bob. She knew him as Bathsheba knew David."

Over the years, Fisher made increasingly bitter remarks about Reynolds. "Debbie Reynolds was indeed the girl next door. But only if you lived next door to a self-centered, totally driven, insecure, untruthful phony."

"My trouble with Debbie began on my honeymoon night," Fisher told Elizabeth, "when I left her alone to join Frank Sinatra, Peter Lawford, and Sammy Davis, Jr., in a poker game. That, sweet cheeks, won't happen in my marriage to you."

Flying back to Los Angeles on an airplane separate from that used by Fisher, Elizabeth rented an elegant Bel-Air home where Tyrone Power, one of her former lovers, had lived previously with Linda Christian.

On November 15, 1958, Elizabeth was resting in the bedroom that Power had occupied within the house. It was from within the premises of that room that she took a call from Dick Hanley, who told her that Power had died of a heart attack during the filming of a dueling scene in Spain. The movie he was working on at the time was Solomon and Sheba, a biblical epic co-starring Gina Lollobrigida. [Power was replaced at that point onward in the film by Yul Bryn-ner.]

Newspaper editors were desperate for stories about "Liz and Eddie." Sometimes copy was falsely created. News stories surfaced that she'd had a nervous breakdown and was committed to the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, where she was said to have been forced into a straitjacket.

The day that false story appeared, she made a spectacular entrance into Chasen's in Los Angeles on the arm of Eddie Fisher. From other tables, some celebrities got up and walked across the dining room to greet her, including Gregory Peck, who kissed her on the mouth. "Sorry you didn't make Roman Holiday with me," he said. Bette Davis and Myrna Loy also greeted her. However, Joan Crawford, accompanied by a handsome young man, made it a point to parade by her table and pointedly ignore her.

Many of Elizabeth's other friends no longer received her, even refusing to accept her phone calls. She was greatly hurt by their rejections.

Fisher gave a small party for her, inviting those few friends who still were on good terms with her. Perhaps surprisingly, two of her most loyal supporters were Ronald and Nancy Reagan. Others who showed up at the party included the ever-faithful Rock Hudson and directors Richard Brooks and Joe Pasternak. Janet Leigh and Tony Curtis remained faithful, as did Peter Lawford and George Burns and Gracie Allen.

Toward the end of the party, Elizabeth learned that Lawford had given Hudson a blow-job in her bathroom.

During this period of her life, it wasn't all party time, dinners, and love-making with Fisher. Illness of some sort had always hovered over Elizabeth. This time, it was her daughter, not herself, who nearly died of double pneumonia.

Ignoring the press attacks on her, and perhaps as a means of helping her cope with them, Elizabeth devoted all her attention to Liza. "She was sort of blue gray in color," Elizabeth said. "They punctured her lumbar and had great big pipes going into her veins, and her little arms were strapped onto boards taped to the bed. Her chances were very slim. But with hope and a lot of prayer, the poor little thing came through. I don't think I could have borne it if Mike's daughter, my child, had died."

The near death of fifteen-month-old Liza didn't garner any sympathy for Elizabeth in the press. Instead,

Elizabeth during this crisis received some of her worst hate mail. Several death threats came in from the Ku Klux Klan in the Deep South. One member referred to her as “The Jew Cunt in need of circumcision.”

Elizabeth and Fisher were getting nothing but attacks and threats. In contrast, good and glowing press reports were devoted to Reynolds. She brilliantly played the role of the abandoned wife, appearing before photographers in pigtails with no make-up. For dramatic effect, she had diaper pins fastened to the corner of her blouse. “I am still very much in love with Eddie,” she told the press.

When Dick and Elizabeth heard that, they mocked her. “Yeah, right,” said Elizabeth. “That fucking bitch! That fucking liar! Twice, she practically hauled him into the divorce courts. The only reason she didn’t divorce him the last time around was because she found out she was pregnant.”

“I have to tell my children that Daddy’s not around any more,” Reynolds told the press in her best “Tammy” voice.

Fisher dismissed Reynolds’ antics, calling them “a charade for the media. She did not enjoy sex with me. I called her Mount Virgin. It was a real challenge to get to the summit.”

As Reynolds glowed in America’s approval, Elizabeth made another controversial move.

Before marrying Fisher, she converted to Judaism, a move she’d been considering while still married to Todd. The Arab League immediately banned her films. “I’m proud to be a Jew,” she said. “Eddie and I have so much in common now. I love him dearly and plan to be Mrs. Eddie Fisher forever.”

“My darling Elizabeth enters into every marriage thinking it is forever,” said Roddy McDowall in Hollywood.

“Even as a little girl, I wanted to be Jewish,” Elizabeth said. “In Ivanhoe, I was, although I was almost burned at the stake. Blame it on eating all those bowls of Louis B. Mayer’s chicken soup in the MGM commissary. I identify with the sufferings of the Jews. Being Jewish brings me closer to Mike Todd. I even have a new name—Elisheba Rachel. I also just purchased \$100,000 worth of bonds for Israel.”

In front of her parents, Elizabeth converted to Reform Judaism at Temple Israel in Hollywood. Sara equated the event as something equivalent “to attending a witches’ Sabbath.”

Mike Todd might have approved, but Fisher, not that keen on religion in any form, didn’t seem to care. He told columnist Rona Barrett, “Jewish girls are no good for fucking. They seem to feel they’re doing you a favor.”

During Elizabeth’s marriage to Fisher, the couple attended a synagogue only once, to observe the high holidays, and she never gave up wearing a gold cross.

In Hollywood, Sara, an anti-Semite, told her friends, “I hated Jews all my life, and now I have one for a daughter.”

Fisher now called Elizabeth “My Yiddena” (“my little Jewish woman”).

After her conversion, one small town newspaper in Alabama wrote that, “Elizabeth, the traitor, had denied Jesus Christ and will burn in hell’s fire.” Another claimed, “She has now joined the pagans—Marilyn Monroe, Sammy Davis, Jr., and Carroll Baker.”

Lesser lights such as singer Polly Bergen and the British bombshell, Diana Dors, had also recently converted to Judaism.

When a slightly tipsy Elizabeth at Romanoff’s was asked, “What do you see in all these Jewish husbands,” she had an answer: “The only difference is a small piece of skin.”

The Reynolds divorce from Fisher came through as an interlocutory decree in February of 1959. The final dissolution of the ill-fated marriage would require another year’s wait.

Elizabeth announced to the press that she had rented quarters for herself and her children at the Hidden Well Ranch in Pleasant Valley, Nevada, five miles from Las Vegas, as a means of being near Fisher, who had signed for an engagement there at The Tropicana.

Even at the time of the Reynolds/Fisher wedding in 1955, Fisher was already hooked on cocaine and methamphetamines, as he candidly admitted in his memoirs. Since 1953, he’d been receiving injections from the notorious “Dr. Feelgood” (Max Jacobson), who was also injecting Jack and Jackie Kennedy. As Fisher said, “Jack Kennedy and I shared drugs and women.”

"I have often been asked what I learned from marriage," Fisher said. "That's simple: Don't marry Debbie Reynolds. Sexually, Elizabeth was every man's dream. She had the face of an angel and the morals of a truck driver."

In divorce court, Reynolds claimed that her husband was interested in another woman, but did not name her. The judge granted her a divorce and the custody of her two children, Carrie and Todd Fisher. She also made off with two houses in Hollywood and a rumored million dollar settlement, plus an alimony of \$40,000 a year, with the understanding that the alimony would cease if and when she remarried.

Later, she became horrified when it was reported to her that Fisher was writing an autobiography which alleged that she had had a lesbian relationship with actress Agnes Moorehead. Reynolds publicly denied such a liaison and threatened her former husband with a multi-million dollar lawsuit. Forced to back down, Fisher asserted that he would write about her as "the perfect girl next door."

So that Fisher and Elizabeth would not have to wait a year for his divorce to become final, Reynolds agreed to recognize his brief residency in Nevada. Perhaps she opted to be cooperative because of the generous terms of her divorce settlement.

On the night of April 2, 1959, Fisher opened his act at the Tropicana in Las Vegas, having just learned that his contract for Fisher's Coke Time TV series had been canceled because of the public disapproval associated with his L'Affaire Liz.

He had desperately needed the six-week engagement. The cost of his divorce, which had included lawyer fees and the million dollar settlement on Reynolds, had drained his savings.

Elizabeth was driven to the Tropicana from her hideaway at the Hidden Well Ranch. As she walked into the club, she was greeted with scowling faces, picket lines, and signs saying "LIZ GO HOME!"

When Fisher received news that his divorce had been finalized months ahead of schedule, he was still singing at the Tropicana. He then directed his lyrics specifically at Elizabeth, who was sitting at ringside: "Another bride, another June, another sunny honeymoon."

After his show, he thanked the owners of the Tropicana for "giving me a job. I needed it."

Like Todd, Fisher bestowed jewelry on Elizabeth, including an evening bag studded with twenty-seven diamonds, one for every year of her life.

But despite his largesse (or perhaps because of it), Fisher had run out of money, supplying presents to Elizabeth he could ill afford—a \$270,000 diamond bracelet, \$150,000 for that evening bag, and a \$500,000 emerald necklace from Bulgari. In the 1950s, these sums were staggering. "To keep Elizabeth happy," he said, "you have to give her a diamond every morning before breakfast."

During Fisher's remaining performances at the Tropicana, Elizabeth made her appearance in the audience at 11:48pm, a few minutes before the beginning of Fisher's midnight show. As the spotlight focused on her in a different gown each evening, she would rise and blow him a kiss. Then he'd sing a love song to her.

While living in Las Vegas, Elizabeth told reporters, "When I began to grow fond of Eddie as a man, I wondered whether it was because I was seeing him as Mike. But I knew you couldn't create someone in someone else. It would be disastrous. I will always love Mike, but that's something different and separate. Eddie does have a lot of Mike's qualities, but finally, I was sure I was not trying to marry an image. I knew I was truly and deeply in love with Eddie."

Vernon Scott, from United Press International, had written many unflattering stories about her. When he approached her, she said, "Why don't you go screw yourself, Vernon?"

On May 12, 1959, during Fisher's court appearance that had been scheduled in the wake of having satisfied Nevada's residence requirement, Fisher spent only two minutes before District Judge David Zenoff before his divorce was approved.

"The Widow Todd," in a civil ceremony, married Eddie Fisher only a few hours after his divorce became final. In attendance were Sara and Francis Taylor, watching their twenty-eight-year-old daughter wed for the fourth time.

Outside, angry ex-fans picketed the wedding. Mike Todd, Jr., Elizabeth's most recent lover, was the Best Man, even though he had never been that close to Fisher.

Mara Taylor, Elizabeth's sister-in-law, functioned as her matron of honor. "I decided not to use Debbie Reynolds this time," Elizabeth said jokingly.

At the wedding, she made a stunning appearance in a magnificent Jean-Louis spring green chiffon dress. On hearing of her choice of color, Marlene Dietrich said, "Brides should never wear green. It brings them only bad luck. But surely no one deserves bad luck more than Liz Taylor, that London tramp."

The bride and groom stood underneath a chuppah, which had been decorated with white gardenias that gave off an intoxicating aroma, and a few hundred white and pink carnations.

It was a traditional Jewish wedding with Fisher sporting a yarmulke and stomping on a wineglass. Dick Hanley was there, along with hairdresser Sidney Guilaroff; her agent Kurt Frings; Eddie Cantor (who had launched Fisher's career); Dr. Rex Kennamer, and MGM's Benny Thau. Also present was a hip and handsome young actor, Robert Evans, who would later become the president of Paramount.

In time, Fisher and Evans would pursue the same Renata Boeck, whom both men hailed "as the most beautiful woman in the world." Presumably, they placed Elizabeth as number two in that category.

In the midst of all this turmoil, MGM decided to release *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof*, even though there were certain elements demanding a boycott of the film. In spite of dire predictions, it became a huge box office success for MGM.

Far from being condemned, Elizabeth drew some rave reviews. The New York Herald Tribune claimed, "If there is any doubt about the ability of Miss Taylor to express complex and devious emotions and to deliver a flexible and deep performance, this film ought to remove them. The Los Angeles Examiner cited her beauty and passion which makes her "the most commanding young actress of the screen." The Saturday Review raved, "Hers is unquestionably one of the finest performances of any year."

As Mrs. Eddie Fisher, Elizabeth left Las Vegas, flying with her new husband to New York, where she would change planes and head to Europe for her honeymoon, for a new film (*Suddenly, Last Summer*), and for a new life.

"I'm the happiest I've ever been," she told reporters in New York, repeating the line she'd used with her three previous husbands.

"This time around, I've got it right in my choice of a man," Elizabeth told reporters when she landed in London. "Eddie and I will grow old together."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

A Honeymoon with Liz and Eddie

"I have never been happier in my life. Eddie and I will be on our honeymoon for thirty or forty years."

—Elizabeth Taylor, at her wedding to Eddie Fisher, May 12, 1959

As Elizabeth embarked on her honeymoon with Eddie Fisher in Spain, she said, "From now on, I want to devote my time to being a good wife and a mother. After all, a career makes a poor bedfellow on a cold night."

The suggestion was that she planned to retire and be supported by Fisher. The trouble with that plan was that Fisher had no singing gigs. She was the breadwinner in the family, and was arguably the most sought-after actress in the world. Some offer of some sort came in every day. In fact, even on her honeymoon, she had work commitments, including shooting exterior scenes for *Suddenly*, *Last Summer in Spain*. She also had to make a cameo appearance in Michael Todd, Jr.'s ill-fated *Smell-O-Vision* film entitled *Scent of Mystery*, or *Holiday in Spain* (1960).

Producer Sam Spiegel lent Elizabeth and Fisher his 120-foot yacht, the *Orinoco*, for a cruise of the Mediterranean. *Orinoco* was a converted two-hundred ton minesweeper staffed by six servants and a French maid. But it was the Belgian chef that caused Elizabeth to overeat.

Their stateroom with its four-poster bed was a replica of Christopher Columbus' cabin aboard the *Santa Maria*. Their bed was built into the bow of the ship, and consequently was tossed and agitated more than if it had been positioned in its center. "It was horrible," Fisher recalled. "I hated that bed. We had a hard time making love in it."

At the still fledgling resort of Torremolinos, along the Spanish Mediterranean coast, Elizabeth was joined by her children. That Sunday, she and Fisher drove the kids to see their first bullfight at the ring in nearby Málaga.

Once during the bullfight there was a call for volunteers to face off against a deadly bull. Fisher volunteered in spite of a warning from Elizabeth, "If you do, I'll break your fucking head."

Drunk and drugged at the time, he claimed that, "The bull was more attracted to a skinny Jewish singer than he was to red capes. As he came toward me, I was totally paralyzed with fear. I think Elizabeth saw her entire sex life about to disappear as the ferocious bull went for the family jewels." After making a successful pass, Fisher eluded the bull and ran for safety as skilled Spanish matadors re-directed the path of the charging animal.

After Spain, the *Orinoco* sailed east toward the Côte d'Azur, with stopovers along the gilded ports of the French Riviera. At every port at which they anchored, especially St-Tropez, mobs turned out to gape at them. When she went on a shopping expedition, Provençal women from the hills journeyed down to the port to offer their freshly scrubbed babies for sale to Elizabeth.

Coming into port at Cannes, Elizabeth spent five nights at the villa of Prince Aly Khan. At dinners he staged for them, she was also seen with Gianni Agnelli and Aristotle Onassis, each of whom invited her for day trips aboard their own lavish yachts.

On her first night in Cannes, Elizabeth became furious when a newspaper in Paris broke the story that she and Fisher had been intimate even before and during her marriage to Todd. She wanted to sue, but Fisher advised against it. "Since their information is true," he told her, "we might be exposed as liars and even more embarrassed."

With Onassis at her side, a champagne-fueled Elizabeth appeared at the casino at Cannes and won \$5,000 for her trouble.

Elizabeth was vastly intrigued with Prince Aly Khan, whom she'd met twice before. She told her secretary-companion, Dick Hanley, "I wonder if it's true that he's the greatest lover of our times. I should have asked Rita

Hay-worth. After all, she was married to him. Rita and I have shared other lovers— take Victor Mature, for instance.”

“You wouldn’t dare,” he said. “You’re on your honeymoon with Eddie.”

“Hell with honeymoons,” she said. “On the first night of my honeymoon with Nicky Hilton, he balled two prostitutes—and not me.”

The Prince was the son of Aga Khan III, who claimed direct descent from the Prophet Mohammed’s daughter, Fátima. The Aga Khan III, who had functioned as President of the League of Nations in 1937-38 and who had been instrumental in the formation of the modern nation of Pakistan, was the Imam (supreme spiritual leader, a sort of pope) to some fifteen million followers in Asia and Africa. They were known as Ismaili Muslims.

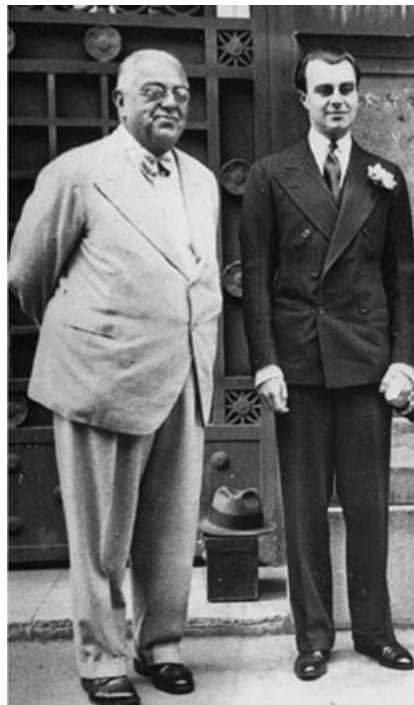
At the time Elizabeth was the Aly Khan’s guest, he was a media event, worshipped by millions as “the son of God.” An international playboy, he was not only a religious leader, but a multi-millionaire, bon vivant, sybarite, Casanova, gentleman jockey, horse breeder, hunter, pilot, auto racer, daredevil, solidier, United Nations diplomat, and globe trotter.

In spite of that, he was snubbed by certain elements of international society. But he had a comeback: “They called me a bloody nigger, and I paid them back by taking their women.”

The number of women in Khan’s life can never be known, but it can be assumed he reached the legendary Don Juan figure of “a thousand and three.”

Over a drink with Onassis, the Greek billionaire told Elizabeth that “a woman is really déclassée if she hasn’t been to bed with Aly at least once. When he first meets you, he’ll give you a gold cigarette case with a large emerald embedded in it. After he fucks you, he’ll give you a diamond bracelet.”

Throughout his contacts in the film industry as Louis B. Mayer’s secretary, Dick had learned many of the secrets of Khan’s success with women. Among a bevy of beauties from all walks of life, he had seduced such actresses as Kim Novak, who claimed, “Aly just loved women too much.” Rita Hayworth, who married and divorced him in 1949 and 1953, respectively, had said, “He went to bed with Gilda and woke up the next morning with me.”



FAMILIES WHO FEUD
left figure, above: **The Aga Khan III**, imam
to the Ismaili Muslims, with his
Europeanized son (right), **Prince Aly
Khan**, in Milan in 1936

Aly’s other seductions included Merle Oberon, Irene Pappas, Gene Tierney, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Yvonne De Carlo, Joan Fontaine, and the French chanteuse, Juliette Greco.

When Elizabeth arrived in Cannes to be Khan’s house guest, he was in residence with the international model

known as "Bettina," whose real name was Simone Bodin.

Dick told Elizabeth, "Aly is known for his 'staying power.' He can have intercourse for hours and hours. In Cairo, he was trained in an ancient Arabic sexual technique. They call it *Imsák*. He keeps a bucket of ice by the side of his bed. When is about to climax, he plunges his arms into the bucket of ice and starts all over again."

"Oleg Cassini learned one of Aly's secrets from Gene Tierney," Elizabeth said. "I hear that Aly is one of the world's leading cunnilinguists. Supposedly, he performs his specialty on any woman he's involved with at least three times a day."

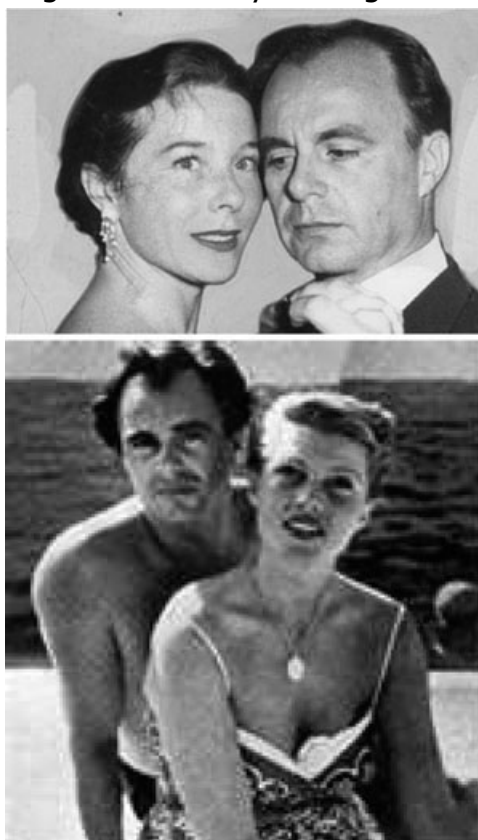
After her first dinner with the Prince, Elizabeth later said she found "Aly's company very seductive. As for Eddie, he seemed to have eyes only for Bettina. At dinner, he didn't look at me once."

On the following night, Fisher was invited to go with Onassis to the casino at Monte Carlo. Elizabeth falsely claimed she had a headache, and Khan said he had a vital business meeting at the Carlton Hotel in Cannes. Bettina agreed to go with Fisher to the casino, followed by a visit to a night club in the same complex.

Within an hour of Fisher's departure for Monaco, Khan, as she'd later confess to Dick, "appeared at my bedroom door. He was completely nude and what a sight it was. I had some music playing and I was wearing a sheer black *négligée*. He took my hand and guided me to the floor, where he danced with me until this foot-long protrusion separated us."

"He was a thrilling lover," she claimed. "He told me, 'I only think of the woman's pleasure when I am in love, and I am in love with you from the day we first met. I want to marry you.'"

Fortunately, at a party in Paris, Elsa Maxwell had warned Elizabeth, "When Aly falls for a woman, it is madly and deeply. The only problem is that it might last for only one night."



Two views of **Prince Aly Khan**: top photo: with **Bettina** lower photo: with **Rita Hayworth**

"All the rumors about Aly's sexual success are true," Elizabeth told Dick the next day. "If I hadn't married Eddie, I would have accepted his proposal of marriage, even if it weren't all that sincere. I adore this man. No man ever took me to the plateau he did. Imagine being seduced by a man skilled in the sexual secrets of the ancient Egyptians. If Cleopatra were still around, she would surely have dumped Marc Antony for Aly."

"You look so very sad, and you seemed so happy," Dick said. "I noticed Aly didn't leave your room until four o'clock in the morning. Bettina and Eddie got back at six o'clock from Monaco. So I hope two hours was time

enough to recover."

"If I'm looking sad, it's because I know that I have experienced the greatest love-making of my life. It will all be downhill from here."

She and Khan didn't connect again, and he kissed her goodbye before her return to Spiegel's yacht. In front of Dick, she whispered in Khan's ear, "Any time, any place, just give me a call. Let me put it this way: You are the world's greatest host."

"And you are the century's love goddess," he told her.

"Don't let Rita hear you say that."

After her not-always idyllic honeymoon with Fisher on the Continent, Elizabeth and Fisher flew into her familiar London, where Sam Spiegel turned over to them a fifteen-room estate next door to Windsor Castle. The property was surrounded with a high wall which had been topped with barbed wire. An ominous sign read: WITHOUT AN APPOINTMENT, STAY OUT!

Tout London ignored her, and she felt isolated at Windsor. Consequently, she demanded (and prevailed) that Spiegel rent the two best suites at the Dorchester for Fisher and herself.

One night at the bar of the very elegant Dorchester, Elizabeth joined Dick and her agent, Kurt Frings, who was actually running her career. She told very unflattering stories about Eddie. "He struggled and struggled last night, but he couldn't give me an orgasm," she admitted to them. "He claims I'm castrating him." Then, when she saw him walking across the bar to join them, she said in a whisper, "Who needs Eddie Fisher?"

Ostensibly, Elizabeth was in London for the exterior shots of *Suddenly, Last Summer* being filmed at the Shepperton Studios in the London suburbs.

Director Joseph Mankiewicz had encountered Elizabeth's divorced husband, Michael Wilding, at a party in Mayfair. "I plan to both direct and fuck your ex-wife," he told Wilding.

"Good luck, ol' boy," Wilding responded.

Although he was one of the most acclaimed singing stars in America, Fisher was unhappily settling into the role of Mr. Elizabeth Taylor. "My real job was keeping her happy," he wrote. "My own career was disappearing. My singing, which had once been the thing I lived for, was becoming more of a well-paid hobby."

Both Fisher and Elizabeth seemed hellbent on spending their every last cent, often on presents for one another. While in London, he flew her to Paris to shop at the House of Dior, where he purchased for her a dozen designer gowns and dresses by Yves Saint-Laurent.

She returned the favor by buying him a Jaguar. He bought a thirteen-room brick mansion for her in Purchase, New York, set on five acres, and also a \$350,000 chalet in Gstaad, Switzerland. In addition to the Jaguar, on another occasion, she gave him an emerald-green Rolls-Royce convertible.

Imitating Mike Todd, Fisher forged ahead to set up independent film companies such as Pisces Productions and MCL films as a means of starring Elizabeth in such features as Pearl Buck's *Imperial Woman* or Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Neither of these projects was ever filmed.

"What really turned her against Fisher was what he was doing to use her as a future bread ticket," Dick said. "In addition to other film companies, he set up the Fisher Corporation and announced that it would produce all Elizabeth Taylor films in the future. But he was getting nothing off the ground. He was a total failure as a producer. At least Mike Todd had launched *80 Days*. Perhaps the coup de grâce occurred when she found out that all those diamonds he was giving her were actually being charged to their joint account."

When Max Lerner came to London, Elizabeth resumed her affair with him. The columnist later admitted, "We got so serious there for a while, we talked of marriage. When my fellow journalists learned of our affair, they called it 'The Beauty and The Brain.' A similar reference had been used to describe the marriage of Marilyn Monroe to Arthur Miller. Elizabeth must have been attracted to my brain. It sure wasn't my body."

Dick wasn't surprised that Elizabeth took up with other men after having been married to Fisher for such a brief time "She was terribly attracted to Eddie in the beginning. They couldn't get enough of each other. But she soon tired of him. She lost respect for him when he lost his career, though she may have been responsible for

that. He'd gone out and spent all his money and now he was forced into the position of being her kept boy. She didn't like that. So she started treating him like a slave, demanding he obey her every wish."

She was not only bossing Fisher around, but increasingly, she was using her new found clout with producers and directors. Consequently, Elizabeth insisted that Monty Clift be included in the cast of *Suddenly, Last Summer*.

Unfortunately, in his previous film, *Lonelyhearts* (1958), Monty had virtually ruined his reputation among the power elite of Hollywood during his portrayal as an "agony uncle" [an "Advice to the Lovelorn" columnist]. Because of his drinking and drug abuse, he'd had a rough time getting through the production. Word spread from studio to studio, and, as a result, he became an uninsurable risk. Elizabeth was nonetheless adamant that he be cast in *Suddenly, Last Summer*. Otherwise, she threatened to bolt from the picture herself.

Since no company would insure Monty, Joseph Mankiewicz was placed in the frightening position of having to direct the film with one of its three principal players uninsured.

Mankiewicz had good reason to be worried: In London, Monty came to visit Elizabeth and Fisher in their respective suites at "The Dorch." At one point during the evening, he went out and balanced himself precariously on the iron balustrade of their terrace, "wobbling a few inches from his death," in Fisher's words.

When Fisher lured a drunken and drugged Monty back into the suite, Elizabeth told Monty that many friends, including Janet Leigh, had told her not to accept the role in *Suddenly, Last Summer*. According to Elizabeth, as transmitted by Fisher, "Janet said, 'It will ruin what's left of your reputation.' She said 'The gay stuff is barely acceptable to the general public, but the cannibalism is just too damn much.'"

For the first day of shooting, Elizabeth and Fisher were driven outside London to Skepperton Studios. In her hand, she clutched a hastily marked-up copy of the script of *Suddenly, Last Summer*, which was based on a one-act play by Tennessee Williams. The screenplay had been written by Tennessee's friend, rival, and fellow gay author, Gore Vidal. Since she'd had such success with Williams' material in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, she was hoping to score another win with *Suddenly*.

She was being paid half a million dollars for her participation in *Suddenly*, which made her the highest paid salaried actress in the world.

Showing up for work, she had the hint of a double chin. As Sam Kashner wrote in *Furious Love*, "It seems hard to believe that someone whose reputation and livelihood depended on flawless beauty would risk it all by sheer overindulgence. Yet it's possible that Elizabeth had a love-hate relationship with her beauty. It was her beauty that had stolen her childhood and imprisoned her in an unreal life. She was a freak of nature, constantly being gawked at, lusted after, envied, and subjected to extreme scrutiny. It's not surprising that a part of her would want to destroy it. So she would eat and eat and eat."

The director wanted Elizabeth to take publicity stills of herself in a white swimsuit, which would be flashed across the world. When she first tried on the suit in her dressing room, with Mankiewicz present, he instructed her to "tighten those muscles. It looks like you've got bags of dead mice under your arms."

On hearing this, Elizabeth lunged at him, threatening to "tear out your fucking eyeballs." Dick pulled her off the director.

Just prior to and during the filming, she would go on a crash diet, which restored her youthful beauty. By the end of filming, she claimed, "Hell, I look like I'm seventeen again—and a virgin."

Even though they fought each other, there was an obvious physical attraction between Elizabeth and her director, and this was all too obvious to the cast and crew.

While professing undying love for Fisher, Elizabeth launched a summer (1959) affair with Mankiewicz, who had recently suffered through the ordeal of his wife committing suicide. Elizabeth told Monty, "Joe is my kind of man, like Mike Todd in many ways—bombastic, strong, determined, powerful. He combines strength with vulnerability, a combination I have always found irresistible."

"Dad had a habit of bedding his leading ladies, such as Joan Crawford and Gene Tierney," claimed his son, Chris Mankiewicz. His other son, Tom Mankiewicz, agreed with his brother, "In *All About Eve*, Dad passed on Bette Davis, but not on Eve herself [a reference to Anne Baxter]."

Fisher heard that Elizabeth was having an affair. Perhaps to save his pride, he denied it. When pressed, he said, "Joe is in love with Jean Simmons one day, Judy Garland the next day, and now Elizabeth. There is no affair."

Mankiewicz more or less admitted to the affair in 1962 when he was directing Elizabeth in Rome during the filming of Cleopatra. A reporter from a Roman newspaper asked him if he were "having an affair with Cleopatra."

"Fuck, no!" the director shouted at him. "That was during our last picture together!" a reference, of course, to Suddenly, Last Summer.

The film was promoted with Elizabeth in that swimsuit, with the caption: "Suddenly, Last Summer, Cathy (the character played by Elizabeth) was being used for evil."

The "evil" referred to her being used to attract men that her cousin, Sebastian, would then seduce. Previously, Sebastian had used his mother, Violet Venable (as played by Katharine Hepburn) for procuring, but she had grown too old. The assumption, of course, was farfetched.

Sebastian had been killed in a traumatic episode of cannibalism, and Violet orders Dr. John Cukrowiz (as played by Clift) to perform a lobotomy on the episode's only witness, Cathy (Taylor).

In the film, the details of Sebastian's grisly death are not clearly depicted, but the plot calls for Sebastian to be chased, bludgeoned, and stripped by a group of angry, vengeful young men and pieces of his flesh eaten. After seeing the filmed version of the scene, Tennessee Williams said, "That is the ultimate parody of a blow-job."

Mankiewicz at first had been courteous and respectful of Monty. But when he invited him to dinner, he was appalled. Monty reached for food on the plates of others, and even tossed pieces of meat into the faces of his fellow guests. He ate with his hands and made outrageous remarks. "Let's go around the table," he said. "I want to know the size of every man's penis. As for the women, I want to know the largest object you've ever inserted into your vagina."



Joseph Mankiewicz

Facing Monty before the camera, Elizabeth realized just how much his mental and physical condition had deteriorated. Monty simply could not remember his lines, which incited almost violent attacks from Mankiewicz. At one point, the director wanted to shut down the picture and cast another actor in the role.

Zombie like, Monty walked through the film, giving a strangled and neurasthenic performance. He spends a great deal of time on screen repeating the words of others, reformulating them in the form of a question.

Elizabeth exploded and denounced Sam Spiegel when she learned that he was negotiating with Peter O'Toole to take over Monty's role. She threatened to walk off the picture.

The character of Violet Venable (Hepburn) was based on Tennessee's mother, Edwina, who permitted (some say encouraged) doctors to perform a lobotomy on his sexually frustrated sister, Rose Isabel Williams.

Several biographies have suggested that until she made Suddenly, Last Summer, Hepburn was not aware of what homosexual men did in bed together and that Gore Vidal had to explain it to her. That, of course, is a laughable assertion about a woman who had spent decades in Hollywood among homosexuals. As a lesbian herself, she was deeply involved in a platonic relationship with another closeted homosexual actor, Spencer Tracy. Her best friend was George Cukor, the gay director, and her best female friend and lover was Laura Harding, the American Express heiress.

On the set one sultry afternoon, when London was experiencing a rare heat wave, a jittery Hepburn confronted Vidal and Elizabeth, who were sitting in directors' chairs, discussing the next scene.

"Mr. Vidal, I talked it over with Spence last night, and he and I decided I can't go on with this film. Your script is just too vile. Give the role to that poor, wretched Mildred Dunnock. She'll play any part, no matter how demented. With all its flesh-eaters, lesbian nurses, sadistic nuns, it's all so Grand Guignol," Hepburn said. "No movie-goer will sit through this muck. The characters you and Mr. Williams have created are perverted. I do not understand perversion— never have, never will. I'm far too mentally healthy to be appearing in such demented trash."



Discussing the nuances of perversion **Katharine Hepburn** (left) as Violet Venable and Gore Vidal (right)

"Miss Hepburn," Vidal said with gravitas. "You understand perversion to your toenails. You'll give one of the most electrifying performances of your life. Forget Dunnock. Do you want us to give the role to Bette Davis? You'll probably get nominated for an Oscar."

"Perhaps you're right," Hepburn said before walking away.

She went ahead and finished the film as Vidal had written it. In fact, she worked even harder to improve the demented and perverted quality of Violet Venable's character.

Vidal's prediction about Hepburn being nominated for an Oscar turned out to be accurate.

That same day, a reporter encountered Elizabeth and asked her what she thought about appearing in such a controversial film. "I've always wanted to appear on screen with Venus's-flytraps," she said. That was a reference to the recreation of a carnivorous garden as a set within the movie.

SUDDENLY, LAST SUMMER
"A world of degenerates obsessed with rape, incest, homosexuality, and cannibalism."

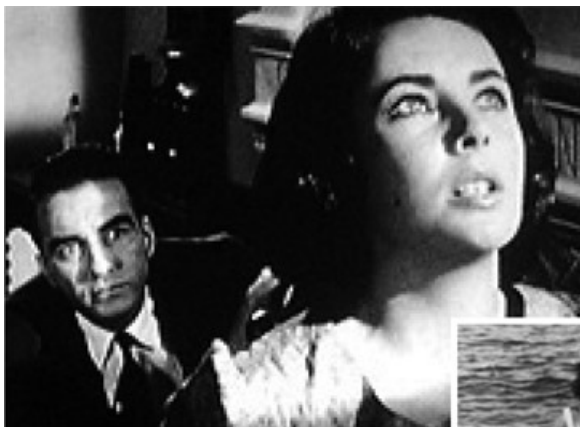


photo above:
Clift and E.T.



photo above:
Hepburn, Clift, and E.T.



photo above, left to right:
Sebastian (in white suit), **Cathy** (as played by **E.T.**) and the outstretched arms of "all the young cannibals"



photo above:
Tennessee Williams

As a kind of gag, Fisher appeared uncredited as a street urchin begging Elizabeth for food. Frank Merlo, the lover of Tennessee Williams, also made an uncredited appearance, as did Gore Vidal. He and Merlo can be seen among the audience in a wraparound balcony observing Monty in his role as a surgeon performing an operation in a "surgical theater" below.

Mercedes McCambridge, cast as Elizabeth's greedy mother, recalled what an unhappy time filming *Suddenly* was for everybody: "Monty was coming apart right on the set, but Elizabeth could not provide her usual help because of her own misery. I read constantly in the papers about how much she loved Eddie Fisher. London was an inferno that summer. She and I walked off the sound stage to get some fresh air. Outside, she was in tears. 'My life is a shambles,' she admitted. 'I made a horrible mistake. I married Eddie and I don't love him. At times, I can't even stand him.' I could not believe my ears. Once we went inside, Eddie was there. She made a spectacle of showing her affection for him."

"Whereas working with Joan Crawford is a nightmare, working with Elizabeth Taylor is merely a disturbing experience. On the set she sounded like a fishwife, calling people 'assholes' or 'schmuck.' I thought she was completely outrageous. She was tender to Monty, but by the end of the shoot, she wasn't speaking to Hepburn. Elizabeth told me that Hepburn came on to her in her dressing room one afternoon—and she was rejected. That's why Hepburn was so bitter. A lot of those old dragon stars of the 1930s were dykes—not just Hepburn, but Garbo and Dietrich, too. Might I have the honor of adding Joan Crawford to that list—I should know!"

Tennessee arrived on the set and spent time with Elizabeth. He told her, "I was with Monty last night. He's washing down his codeine pills with brandy. But who am I to cast stones? He told me that after the accident, he has become impotent and the only way he can achieve sexual satisfaction is to perform fellatio on a man or else be penetrated by one."

"Thank you, Tennessee, you're a darling, but I really don't know what I can do with this personal data about Monty," Elizabeth said.

When Truman Capote saw the movie, he claimed that Elizabeth's final dramatic monologue was "the best scene she'd ever performed before or likely ever again. She should win the Oscar."

Mankiewicz defined her long, concluding monologue as "an aria from a tragic opera of madness and death."

After she shot that scene, Elizabeth became hysterical and couldn't stop crying for hours.

Throughout the filming, Katharine Hepburn had been consistently furious with Mankiewicz for his brutal treatment of the tormented Monty. She was also furious at him for his treatment of herself as well, interpreting his behavior as condescending.

On the last day of Hepburn's appearance before the camera, the tension between Mankiewicz and Hepburn was obvious to the entire crew. By ten o'clock, she and the director were screaming at each other. But once the camera was turned on her, the star became her carefully controlled, professional self, giving an awesome interpretation of her particular manifestation of evil.

By five o'clock that afternoon, Mankiewicz defined the experience as a wrap. Then Hepburn walked over to him. "Are you absolutely sure that that is all you'll need from me on this film?"

"I am absolutely sure," he told her. "You're free to go."

"Fine, she said. Then in front of everybody, including Elizabeth, she spat in his face, turned her back to him, and stormed off the set.

Wiping the spit off his face, Mankiewicz, in front of Elizabeth said, "Miss Hepburn is the most experienced amateur actress in the world. Her performances, though remarkably effective, are fake."

In contrast, Capote found that "Hepburn is the Queen of High Camp as she stands in that fantasy New Orleans garden filled with insectivorous growths. Monty looks as if he is going to expire at any minute. Although I detest the film's scriptwriter, Gore Vidal, I have to admit Suddenly, Last Summer marks the end of the 1950s. The public is obviously eager for a more candid expression of sex."

The Catholic Legion of Decency forced the studio to edit much of the dialogue so that the homosexual theme is only implied, and that the actual gay character has neither a face nor a voice in the film.

"Homosexuality is truly the love that dare not speak its name—or show its face," Tennessee said. When he was presented with a screening of the film's final cut, he sat silently through it. At the end, he rose from his chair. "It made me want to throw up. Elizabeth Taylor was totally miscast."

In spite of their difficulties during the shoot, Mankiewicz later said, "Her role as Cathy was the best performance Elizabeth ever gave on the screen."

Time claimed that watching Suddenly was like being crushed in the "clammy coils of a giant snake." The critic for Variety made the claim that, "It's the most bizarre film ever made by a major studio."

Inadvertently, film critic Bosley Crowther increased attendance in droves when he wrote that the movie was about "the world of degenerates obsessed with rape, incest, homosexuality, and cannibalism." By "degenerates," he was referring, of course, to Vidal and Williams.

"We could not have asked for better advertising," Vidal said, in response.

"It stretched my credulity to believe such a 'hip' doll as our Liz wouldn't know at once in the film that she was 'being used for something evil,'" Tennessee said.

In contrast to Tennessee's objections to Elizabeth and her performance, he referred to Hepburn as "a playwright's dream. She makes my dialogue sound better than it is. She invests every scene with the intuition of an artist born to act."

The New York Times shrieked that Suddenly, Last Summer "was a celebration of sodomy, incest, cannibalism, and Elizabeth Taylor at her most voluptuous."

Ultimately, she came to prefer Suddenly as her favorite film—"emotionally draining, but also emotionally stimulating."

In spite of the critics, and in spite of the doom-predicting Hedda Hopper, Suddenly became the fourth highest grossing movie of 1960, earning nearly \$6 million in domestic ticket sales alone.

Far from emerging as a flop, as some in Hollywood had predicted, Suddenly catapulted Elizabeth into the

ranks of Hollywood's Top Ten box office stars, a list that was dominated at the time by Rock Hudson and Doris Day in the wake of their highly successful *Pillow Talk* (1959).

She went to that year's Academy Award ceremony assured that "I will win. They're sure to give it to me for *Maggie the Cat*."

Dick Hanley warned her, "Don't get your hopes up. Katharine Hepburn is nominated for the same movie. Academy members who like *Suddenly, Last Summer* will split their vote. Hepburn should have run for Best Supporting Actress, but the old dyke wouldn't listen to reason."

As the Oscar winner was announced at the Academy Awards, Elizabeth had her hopes crushed. She and Hepburn came in at second and third place, respectively. The Oscar winner for the year's Best Actress was Simone Signoret for her role in *Room at the Top*.

After London, where she'd filmed the interiors of *Suddenly, Last Summer*, Elizabeth's next picture was to be shot in Hollywood. Accompanied by Eddie Fisher, she returned to her old stamping grounds at MGM. According to the terms of her contract, she owed them one final picture, a film that would be entitled *Butterfield 8*.

On September 9, 1959, she and Fisher moved into two rented bungalows on the grounds of the Beverly Hills Hotel. She also moved in her three children, along with their nannies.

She had not yet turned thirty, and already she'd reached a crossroads in her life. Like many stars in the late 1950s, including James Stewart, she was going independent and freeing herself from the influence of Louis B. Mayer and MGM, which had been a stern parent to her since she was a little girl and had first come to work for them.

She'd always detested Louis B. Mayer, but he was now dead (1957). Now that he no longer controlled her professional life, she attacked him as a "bigoted vulgarian." To certain of her friends, such as Shelley Winters and Janet Leigh, she claimed that Mayer had tried to molest her when she was a little girl. There is evidence that she made up this charge after Mayer was gone. During her experiences with him, she'd never leveled such a claim. Neither had she told Sara or Francis. Her accusations appear to be untrue. It seemed to be a way of presenting herself as a victim of the studio which had held such power over her.

When she did arrive at MGM to make her final film, she gave Mayer a backhanded compliment. "If Louis B. were still alive, I wouldn't be playing a whore in *Butterfield 8*."

In one of the bungalows, Elizabeth and Fisher entertained Michael Wilding and his current wife, the British socialite, Susan Nell. As part of what would turn out to be a very rare occasion, Debbie Reynolds, the following night, dropped off Fisher's two young children, Carrie and Todd, as a means of helping to form friendships within their "reorganized" family circle.

Elizabeth had been back in Los Angeles for less than a week when an invitation arrived to join four-hundred of the top stars in Hollywood to greet Nikita Khrushchev, who was paying a visit to 20th Century Fox where *Can-Can* was being shot with Frank Sinatra and Shirley MacLaine.

Elizabeth and Fisher watched as "Richard Burton made an ass of himself" when he threatened to rush to the head table and attack the Soviet dictator for "his malicious attack on capitalism."

The following day, a surprise offer arrived for her to appear in an epic even before she'd begun serious talks about her final film at MGM.

Word had spread across Hollywood that Elizabeth was making her last film for MGM and would be free after that to accept offers from other studios. Nearly every major studio had a movie that might have been suitable for her, but the biggest offer had come in from 20th Century Fox.

Producer Walter Wanger and Spyros Skouras, the head of 20th Century Fox, had been in production on their upcoming movie *Cleopatra* for two years. Originally, they had envisioned a fairly inexpensive movie, even using some of the sets featured in the 1917 version of *Cleopatra*, a film that had starred the silent screen vamp,

Thecla Bara.

Joan Collins was at the head of the list of possible stars who might bring Cleopatra to life again. Two Italian beauties, Sophia Loren and Gina Lollobrigida, were also in the running. Before settling on Elizabeth as the lead, Fox had also suggested Audrey Hepburn and later, Marilyn Monroe. Skouras, however, thought Elizabeth should play Cleopatra.

Months later, when Pandro S. Berman at MGM learned about the stars being considered for Cleopatra, he said, "Audrey Hepburn and Marilyn, presumably in a dark wig, would be the worst casting mistakes in the history of Hollywood. Even Elizabeth Taylor is a bit of a stretch."

Dick Hanley went by Fox and picked up a copy of the original script. In bed with a headache, Elizabeth asked him to read it to her. Drinking champagne, she sat patiently through the entire reading, only commenting at the end.

"That is pure, unadulterated shit," she told Dick. "I hear they want Peter Finch to play Julius Caesar. He's a hot number. Who do they want to play Marc Antony?"

"That good-looking hunk, Stephen Boyd," he said.

"Boyd is gay, Michael Wilding told me, so you'll get to cash in on that," she said.

"What do you want me to tell Skouras?" he asked.

"I don't want to see a headline—LIZ TAYLOR NIXES CLEO—so tell him I'll make the fucking stinker, but only for a million dollars."

He whistled at the amount, as it was considered a staggering sum at the time.

When Dick delivered her demand the following day, Skouras bellowed so loud he could almost be heard across the Fox lot. He told his staff, "Any hundred dollar a week call girl can play that whore, Cleopatra."

However, in a huddle with Wanger, he suddenly changed his mind. "We'll increase the budget to three million and use Hollywood's favorite whore, Miss Taylor herself. Should we keep in the scene where Cleo got fucked by forty-two of her male servants in just one long night?"

Elizabeth needed money and her Austrian agent, Kurt Frings, promised to get it for her once she finished one more picture at MGM, according to the terms of her contract.

His clients included Audrey Hepburn, sex kitten Brigitte Bardot, and Lucille Ball, who was the queen of 1950s television. Elizabeth envied Hepburn for taking home \$350,000 for her appearance in War and Peace in 1957.

Simultaneous with the details associated with the Cleopatra project, Frings began to negotiate a deal for Elizabeth to star in Two for the Seesaw, a play that had brought fame to Anne Bancroft on Broadway. There was talk of paying Elizabeth half a million dollars, the largest salary a movie actress had ever received.

Producer Samuel Marx urged her not to accept the part she'd been offered: That of a little Jewish girl from New York who can't get a date and falls in love with a traveling salesman who goes back to his wife.

"Who in hell would believe Elizabeth Taylor can't get a date?" he said. Eventually, for many reasons, Elizabeth's link with the Seesaw deal collapsed, and Shirley MacLaine took the role opposite Robert Mitchum, with whom she eventually had an affair.

With Seesaw gone, Elizabeth turned to her two more pressing films. She wanted to appear as Cleopatra at Fox and then, when her work there was completed, return to MGM to film her last movie at that studio. "I want that million dollars from Fox, and MGM will pay me only \$125,000 for Butterfield 8."

Lawyers at MGM refused her proposal, telling her that she had to complete her contractual obligations for MGM before she could film Cleopatra at Fox. Their motivation derived partly from wanting to capitalize off the notoriety of l'affaire Fisher in their selection of her as the hooker in Butterfield 8.

John O'Hara, author of the novel which had inspired the movie, had based his character on a prostitute named Starr Faithful, who had been found dead in Palm Beach on June 8, 1931.

When MGM had first sent Elizabeth the script of Butterfield 8. she had turned it down, defining it as pornographic. She told her immediate staff, "MGM wants me to play a non-charging hooker. It's their revenge on me for not renewing my contract."

When he heard of her refusal, her longtime friend at the studio, Pandro S. Berman, came to Elizabeth and warned her that, "It's a new day at MGM. Stars are not handled delicately any more. Our lawyers can make it rough on you. Legally, they can hang on to you for another two years and prevent you from working at another

studio. You've got to get MGM off your back. Make the fucking movie and then go on as an independent to demand a million dollars for every picture you make in the future."

His argument, after about a two-hour discussion, finally prevailed. "Okay, I'll be MGM's whore. They've fucked me before. Why not one final blast-off?"

What Berman failed to tell her was that he personally owned a huge share of the movie rights to *Butterfield 8*.

Years later, Berman expressed nothing but contempt for Elizabeth. "I went through hell with her. Sure, she had a lot of crummy parts, but all contract players do. I came to despise her. She let herself get fat as a pig. I've been a woman chaser all my life, and I never found her sexually attractive. Katharine Hepburn either. Those two!"

Immediately, Elizabeth seized upon the chance to demand that MGM cast Eddie Fisher in a role within *Butterfield 8*. MGM had no respect for Fisher as an actor, considering his utter failure in the 1956 *Bundle of Joy* with Debbie Reynolds. But because of such continuing worldwide press about "Liz and Eddie," it was decided that the pair might jointly generate another \$2 million at the box office.

She needed the money and won the concession to have Fisher cast in the movie as her song-writing platonic friend, the second male lead. David Janssen was set to play the role, but at the last minute, he was dropped.

Benny Thau didn't want to use Fisher, but told Berman, "She has us by the nuts. At least with Fisher on the set, he might control the cunt. The kid's a bum, a drug addict, and, to top off matters, a fucking lousy actor. Cast him!"

Tired of all the conflict raging around her in Hollywood, Elizabeth also demanded that the film be shot in New York. MGM also agreed to that.

Fisher had spent more than a year without a singing engagement before he was offered a two-week gig at the Desert Inn in Las Vegas. He received that contract only because Elizabeth agreed to appear at ringside every night cheering him on.

Before Fisher was scheduled to participate in the filming of *Butterfield 8*, he had time to accept an offer for a gig at the prestigious Empire Room at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in Manhattan. His success at the Desert Inn in Las Vegas had prompted the offer. The hotel was also excited by the prospect of Elizabeth, who had agreed to appear ringside every night he was performing in the Empire Room.

On Fisher's opening night, she was seated at the head table with Prince Aly Khan, who was visiting New York at the time. Other guests included the world's heavyweight boxing champion, Swedish-born Ingemar Johansson, and Dick Hanley.

As Khan listened to Fisher sing love songs to his wife, he secretly ran his hand up her dress, meeting no objections. Dick noted that she also seemed "absolutely enthralled with Johansson." "I was, too, but Elizabeth had more to offer the champ than I did. Aly had another engagement that night, but after Eddie's first performance, we disappeared upstairs with Ingemar. I was the guardian waiting in the living room while all the action took place in the bedroom."

The handsome, solidly built Swede became one of Elizabeth's least known affairs. Nicknamed "The Hammer of Thor," Johansson in 1959, the year Elizabeth met him and seduced him, defeated Floyd Patterson by a TKO in the third round.

She told Dick that Johansson was "an absolute powerhouse in bed. I felt like three pounds of Swedish sausage was pounding inside me. He fucks a woman like he intends to deliver a knockout punch—and he does. He scores a KO. What a guy. No wonder he's called Hammer."

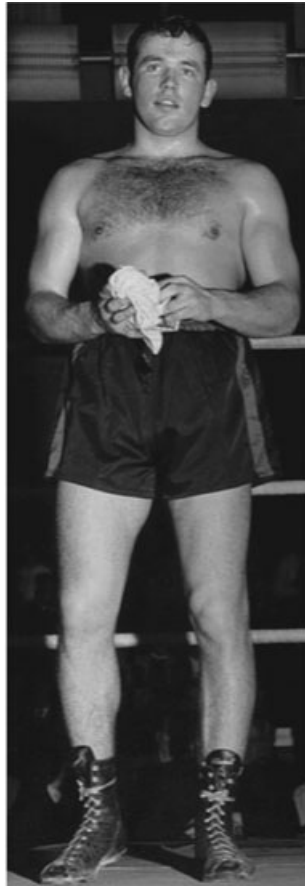
Unlike boxers who were supposed to be in training, Johansson liked the nightclubs of New York. When Fisher was performing, Elizabeth often sneaked off with him. Sometimes, the boxer and the star used Monty's apartment for their sexual trysts.

"I can't get enough of him, and he can't get enough of me," she told Dick. She made arrangements for him to train at the Catskill resort of Grossinger's, Fisher's favorite place and the site of his earlier, long-ago wedding to Debbie Reynolds. Johansson also told Elizabeth he wanted to be a movie star. She was instrumental in getting him cast as a Marine in the Korean War film, *All the Young Men* (1960).

A nude picture snapped of him in a gym shower in 1960 was reprinted on a postcard-sized replica and became one of the best-selling celebrity nudes in the world. Kiosks along the Seine in Paris hawked it to American tourists.

Long after their affair flickered out, Elizabeth occasionally spoke on the phone to Johansson. It was a tragic sorrow for her to learn that beginning in the mid-1960s, the former champion suffered from Alzheimer's disease and dementia. At the age of 76, he died on January 30, 2009 from complications following pneumonia. At the time, he was living in a nursing home in Sweden as his health deteriorated. For years, he kept an autographed picture of Elizabeth by his bedside.

When he died, Elizabeth recalled, "He was a real champ in so many ways. After knowing him, I came to realize why Mae West was so hung up on boxers."



Ingemar Johansson

Elizabeth's nightclubbing came to an abrupt end on October 26, 1959 when she collapsed on Fifth Avenue during a shopping expedition with Dick. "I can't breathe," she called to him, gasping for air.

He rushed to the nearest phone and called an ambulance as onlookers crowded around her. En route to New York's Presbyterian Hospital, "she still had her wits about her," Dick said. "She asked me to put lip gloss on her."

Within a few hours, she was diagnosed as suffering from viral pneumonia, complicated by a bad case of influenza.

Bulletins were issued for almost a week. Confined to an oxygen tent, she was in critical condition. While in the hospital, she made a "reckless decision." She ordered her doctors to reverse an operation in which she had previously had her fallopian tubes tied.

Thinking she might solidify her marriage to Fisher by having a son or daughter with him, she wanted to be able to get pregnant again, even though previously, doctors had warned her that bearing another child might threaten her life. She was determined, however, to submit to the surgery.

For reasons not entirely clear, her fallopian tubes could not be untied.

While Elizabeth was undergoing exploratory surgery and told she could have no more children, rumors surfaced about one of the unsolved mysteries of her life. Stories spread that she'd had a "love child" in the early

1950s. But details of the rumored birth would not be revealed in print until after her death when stories about it were published in such newspapers as London's Daily Mail.

Celebrity psychic John Cohan was a friend and confidant to Elizabeth for many years, in addition to being her psychic. During one of their sessions, she had revealed to him one of her darkest and most painful secrets. She told him that she'd once given birth, out of wedlock, to a baby girl named Norah.

According to rumors, since such a birth would have destroyed any actress's career during the more uptight 1950s, she was forced, based partly on the urging of both Benny Thau and her mother, Sara, to give the baby away.

"Money changed hands," Elizabeth told Cohan. "Norah was adopted by a family in Ireland."

The child, now a mature woman, of course, knows that Elizabeth was her mother, but is said to resent her for abandoning her. She was once quoted as saying, "I want nothing to do with Elizabeth Taylor."

Cohan's revelations were published by Cindy Adams, a columnist for The New York Post. Adams admitted that she could not confirm either the accuracy of the story or the existence of the daughter, "but I'm reporting it because one can't ignore the story in case there's some truth."

Elizabeth admitted to Cohan that at the time of the birth, she was involved with three different men and therefore could not be certain who the father was.

"I am still guilt ridden about having to abandon my child, even to this day," Elizabeth said to Cohan. She also extracted from Cohan the promise that he was to "say nothing about Norah until I'm gone."

The celebrity seer also had other shocking revelations. He said that he and Elizabeth were mutually involved in a short affair "between her marriages to Richard Burton. She told me I was a much sweeter and darling lover than Richard ever was. 'He was too rough at times,' she claimed."

She also admitted that Mike Todd had been "the love of my life, my soul-mate—and not Richard."

As a final bombshell, she claimed, according to Cohan, that she believed that Burton had died from some AIDS-related disease.

Cohan has been a celebrity psychic to the stars for more than three decades. During much of that time, he has supplied Cindy Adams with his yearly predictions, which have turned out to be surprisingly accurate.

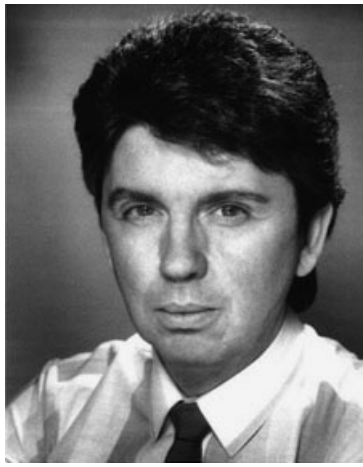
More revelations about the stars can be found in Cohan's memoir, *Catch a Falling Star: The Untold Story of Celebrity Secrets*, published in 2008.

In his book, he has much to reveal about Natalie Wood, Merv Griffin, River Phoenix, John F. Kennedy, Jr., and Elvis Presley. He even writes about what Mick Jagger and Rudolf Nureyev were caught doing at the Flesh Palace Disco in Manhattan. He also writes about his dear friend, Nicole Brown Simpson, as well as "the love of my life," Sandra Dee.

"On one day, Elizabeth would become obsessed with fear that she was losing Eddie," said Dick Hanley. "On yet another day, she would be plotting ways to get a divorce that would cause the minimum of bad headlines for her. I never told her, but Eddie was going out with showgirls while she was confined to a hospital bed. He also had some homosexual involvements. During her absence, he even invited me to a small orgy he staged in her suite at the Waldorf with three handsome gay waiters. He assumed that I'd be discreet and enjoy myself, but because of my loyalty to Elizabeth, I didn't go."

When she returned from the hospital to her suite at the Waldorf, and was in bed recovering, Fisher brought Dr. Feelgood (Max Jacobson) for a "medical consultation" in their rooms. The "speed" he injected into her veins caused her to experience sleepless nights, nervous exhaustion, fits of depression, and a dangerously rapid heartbeat.

"She would go to incredible highs and then plunge to the pits," Dick claimed. "She would be walking on some mile-high trapeze during the day, then she'd demand sleeping pills to plunge her back to earth. Sometimes, she fell into a coma-like sleep. Once, she slept for an entire day and night."



John Cohan Celebrity Seer

To prepare him for his upcoming role in *Butterfield 8*, Elizabeth decided that Fisher should take acting lessons from Monty. When Monty arrived at their suite at the Waldorf, and after he'd paid his respects to Elizabeth, he began to review the script with Fisher.

"I was in no great shape myself to take acting lessons," Fisher later recalled, "and Monty was in even worse shape. As he sat on the sofa with me, he tried to feel my jewels. At the time, I was living on amphetamines from Dr. Feelgood. I went to get Monty another drink. By the time I got back, he'd fallen asleep with a lit cigarette and had set the script on fire. To complicate matters, Elizabeth was taking three or four hot baths a day. In the middle of my lesson, she called me for a waterborne fuck."

In a weakened condition in the wake of her recent hospitalization, Elizabeth reported to work in January of 1960 to begin the filming of *Butterfield 8*.

The film was heavily censored in the cinematic creation of Elizabeth's character of Gloria Wandrous. Even so, the script still contained references to how Gloria had been sexually abused as a child—and that she had actually enjoyed the experience.

Exterior shots of Elizabeth were filmed in the vicinity of Sixth Avenue and West 10th Street in Manhattan's Greenwich Village.

On her way to the filming, swathed in fur and laden with emeralds, Elizabeth passed by the nearby house of Detention for Women. As she did, she heard all sorts of catcalls—everything from "LET ME SUCK YOUR PUSSY, BITCH!" to "YOU CHEAP WHORE."

The film's director, Daniel Mann, said that when Elizabeth arrived for work, she looked unattractive. "She was overweight and had dark circles under her eyes. Her clothes had to be constantly refitted, and special undergarments and corsets were employed to hold her body in shape. She had lost the firmness of youth and looked matronly before her time. I also determined that she could-n't see a thing without contact lenses; she was myopic."

Brooklyn-born Mann, a stage actor since childhood, had directed the film versions of *Come Back, Little Sheba* (1952) and *The Rose Tattoo* (1955). He had very little flair for visual dynamics, but an excellent ear for dialogue.

The line Elizabeth delivers to Mildred Dunnock, who played her mother in the film, was the one Elizabeth most objected to: "Face it, Mama: I was the slut of all time!" Mann insisted that she utter that line.

With his frequent references to the Method acting technique, Mann did not impress Elizabeth. One afternoon, during the filming of a bathtub scene, he told her, with complete seriousness, "Make believe you're fucking the faucet. That's the expression I want."

After that remark, she gave him the finger and stormed off the set, refusing to work for the rest of the day.

The title of *Butterfield 8* referred to a telephone exchange in Manhattan's "Silk Stocking" district of the Upper East Side.

"I will be the screen's first female Casanova," she said of her role as Gloria Wandrous.

Of course, after leading such a tawdry life, Elizabeth's character in the film had to pay a price. At the end of the movie, her character of Gloria is killed in a car accident. Screenwriter John Michael Hayes concluded, "We can't let a whore like that live. Even her enemies will flock to the movie to see Elizabeth Taylor die, die, die."

On the set of *Butterfield 8*, Elizabeth met the English movie star, Laurence Harvey.

At first, he detested her, referring to her as "The Bitch" or "Fat Ass." But after a few days, he was drawn to her and they became friends, a relationship that lasted until his untimely death in 1973.

It was ironic, but Harvey and Michael Wilding would each wed the same woman, actress Margaret Leighton.

After an onscreen night with the character played by Harvey in his bedroom while his wife is away, Elizabeth, as Gloria, awakens after he leaves the apartment the following morning. She is seen putting on a slip and then "borrowing" a mink coat from his wife's closet. "I'm Venus in furs," Elizabeth (as Gloria) says before heading out to face the day.

The actress playing the very rich owner of that mink coat and the wife of the character played by Harvey was the very rich (in real life) Dina Merrill, the only child of Post Cereals' heiress Marjorie Merriweather Post and her second husband, Wall Street stockbroker Edward Francis Hutton.

Elizabeth found Harvey "very campy and very gay."

"I can keep my panties on around Harvey," she said with a sneer to Fisher. "He'll welcome blow-jobs from you, though."

He told her that "I fuck women on that odd Saturday, but don't get your hopes up. You're not my type, I have this Oedipus complex in that I'm attracted to older women, even that battle axe Hermione Baddeley."

In reference to his own homosexuality, Harvey told her, "When I see a man I like, I go after him, never worrying about rejection. I think Sean Connery is the hottest man in England. He told me I was such a bitch I could play Hedda Gabler."

"John Gielgud called me Florence of Lithuania," he told Elizabeth. "I was born there. I like to do outrageous things," he said, "especially with a few drinks in me. When I first met that ugly little toad, Peter Lorre, I grabbed him and kissed him, ramming my tongue down his throat. At this party for Princess Margaret, I sat next to Lord Snowdon, her husband of the moment. I placed my hand at his crotch and felt every inch. I told him, 'I just wanted to find out what turns on Her Royal Highness. I'm not a princess, more a queen.'"

"You're my kind of guy, Larry," Elizabeth said. "I adore you."

She also had many serious talks with Harvey, especially about her role in *Butterfield 8*, which, deep into the shoot, she still detested. She later thanked him for giving her "some sound advice."

"Darling," he said, "I should have been cast as the whore. As heaven knows, I am one myself."

During a writer's strike at MGM, Elizabeth wanted some of the dialogue associated with her character sharpened and extra scenes added. She especially wanted changes in the script to include love scenes between Fisher and her. Prior to her involvement, her character had pursued an onscreen relationship with him that was strictly platonic.

She approached her friends, Tennessee Williams and Truman Capote. Williams was rather reluctant to get involved, but agreed to work on some of the dialogue. On the other hand, Capote was delighted. When he came to visit her, she said, "I have to work. I have no money. Eddie has no money. Debbie Reynolds took it all...every last cent."

She and Capote conceived of a torrid love scene "under the sheets" between Fisher and herself. Capote came up with a scenario that Daniel Mann claimed was perhaps too hot to film, yet his curiosity was voyeuristically intrigued, and he arranged for the scene to be shot, despite his sense of caution.

On the set, on the day of the actual filming, both Fisher and Elizabeth stripped completely nude and crawled together under the sheets.

As Fisher later claimed, "Having the camera on Elizabeth and me and with that faggot, Capote, drooling at the mouth, turned me on. I had sex with Elizabeth. We really went at it. She liked it rough, and I delivered."

Later, in his memoirs, he denied that he had a climax, but Elizabeth, in dialogues with Capote, said that he did.

"It was evident that Fisher was blasting off inside Elizabeth," Capote said. "From the look on her face, she was also experiencing an orgasm. She was not good enough an actress to fake it."

Later, their scene was judged as too hot for the screen, and it ended up on the cutting room floor.

Any future rewriting that had to be done was given back to John Michael Hayes, who'd been responsible for getting Peyton Place past the censors.



Liz (center figure) as a tramp and homewrecker coming between **Dina Merrill** (left figure) and **Laurence Harvey** (right figure)

After watching a screening of the final cut of Butterfield 8, Elizabeth hurled her glass of bourbon at the screen. Storming out of the screening room, she went to Pandro S. Berman's office door, which was partially crafted from a sheet of translucent glass. On the glass, in lipstick, she scrawled NO SALE! She was re-creating a scene from the movie in which her character of Gloria writes NO SALE! on the living room mirror after spending a night having sex with the character played by Harvey.

Dick Hanley had sat with her during the screening of Butterfield 8. "Actually, I liked the picture," he said. "I thought that tossing bourbon and writing in lipstick was a very erratic and childish way to conclude her long years of association with MGM. After all, it was MGM which made her a star, and Butterfield 8 would bring her an Oscar. I wished she had found a more graceful exit from the studio, but no one tells Elizabeth Taylor how to exit a building."

"My final insult from MGM came when I had my last meal in the commissary," Elizabeth said. "The chef had already renamed the Elizabeth Taylor salad 'the Lana Turner salad.'"

After the release of Butterfield 8, one critic wrote, "The innocent little girl from National Velvet is now a full blown whore."

[On the night of the Academy Awards presentations, Shirley MacLaine, a friend of Elizabeth's, went to the ceremony hoping to win for her brilliant acting job in The Apartment. She applauded, but appeared hearbroken when she didn't win, the Oscar going instead to Elizabeth. Later, MacLaine cracked, "I lost to a tracheotomy."

MacLaine was referring to Elizabeth's life-threatening surgery in a London hospital during the early weeks of the shooting of Cleopatra.]

In Hollywood, Fisher and Elizabeth made plans to go abroad while still living in a bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Their next door neighbors were Yul Brynner and his second wife, Doris Kleiner, a fashion house executive.

Elizabeth had first met Brynner at a Hollywood party when William Holden had introduced them. After Brynner walked on his way, Holden said, "He's one of the biggest shits I've come across in show business. He is just a pig."

But Brynner had always intrigued her. Like so many actors she knew, Bryn-ner was known in Hollywood circles as a notorious womanizer and part-time homosexual. In Paris, he'd been known for smoking opium and carrying on an affair with the French author, Jean Cocteau.

Sal Mineo had told her that Brynner had pounded him nightly when he was a young boy appearing on stage with him in the Broadway production of *The King and I*. He was also known to be in love with Frank Sinatra, one of his best friends. But mostly he was celebrated for his seductions of actresses, including Tallulah Bankhead, Anne Baxter, Joan Crawford, Claire Bloom, Ingrid Bergman, Yvonne De Carlo, Judy Garland, Marilyn Monroe, and Maria Schell. He was infamously linked to Nancy Davis before she married Ronald Reagan. He had also had a long, torrid affair with Marlene Dietrich before he dumped her.

Fisher had become quite close to Brynner during their residency at the Beverly Hills Hotel, and often Fisher was next door with Brynner when Max Jacobson, their Dr. Feelgood, came to visit.

Both men, as well as Elizabeth herself, had become dependent on the doctor's injections of speed.

James Bacon, the columnist, heard some gossip he could not print in the newspaper, but which he later recounted in his memoirs, although his editor cut it. Nonetheless, the story made the rounds at Hollywood parties.

According to the tale, Dr. Jacobson had sent a delivery boy, Horace Bryant, with a shipment of drugs and paraphernalia addressed to Eddie Fisher, to Elizabeth's bungalow.

Bryant had been told that Fisher was not at home, but that Elizabeth, if he knocked on the bungalow's door at four o'clock, would accept the delivery.

Timing his arrival for exactly four o'clock, Bryant knocked on the bungalow's door. It took a long time before the door was finally opened by Elizabeth, who appeared in a see-through pink peignoir.

"I could see all the way to Honolulu," Bryant claimed.

"She invited me inside, as she was suspicious that someone might be watching. She went over to her purse and removed a hundred dollar bill. I couldn't believe it was so much, but I was very grateful. From the bedroom emerged Mr. Brynner with a big erection. It had a hood on it, something a Jewish boy like Fisher didn't have, I'm sure," Bryant told Bacon.

"Thanks, kid, for the delivery," Brynner said to him. "As you can see, I'm busy and there's a crowd."

"Excuse me, sir," Bryant said before rushing out of the bungalow with his hundred-dollar bill.

On June 20, 1960, Elizabeth and Fisher were flying to New York again. She had been given ringside seats for the heavyweight boxing rematch between Ingemar Johansson and Floyd Patterson.

In her book, *Growing Up at Grossinger's*, Tania Grossinger remembered the bout. She sat three rows behind Fisher and Elizabeth.

"She wore a revealing low-cut blouse that left nothing to the imagination," Grossinger wrote. "Suddenly, out of nowhere, this man walked over, plucked a breast out of her top, held it up for all to see, and shouted: 'Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you. Isn't this a beautiful sight?' Elizabeth was completely nonplussed, and majestically put her tit back where it belonged." [In her memoir, Grossinger did not identify the man by name.]

Patterson won in a fifth round knockout. As Elizabeth was leaving with Fisher, she was hissed and booed by the crowd. Several boxing fans shouted "whore" at her.

Turning to face the mob, she made a clenched fist, a total "Fuck you!" to her detractors.

The next day, Fisher and Elizabeth sailed from New York to Rome on the maiden voyage of the *Leonardo da Vinci*. In Rome, they attended the 1960 Olympic Games.

The writer, Art Buchwald, traveled with them. He later wrote, "As Elizabeth came into the stadium, a lot of young men crowded around her, more than Fisher could keep at bay. I could not believe my eyes. These guys were feeling her up, grabbing her breasts and the cheeks of her ass. Several greedy little hands reached inside to feel her vagina. Finally, the police arrived to free her. I thought about the cannibal scene in *Suddenly, Last Summer*. She was being devoured. Elizabeth was no longer an international movie star. She was a living legend, but one unlike Hollywood had ever seen before and may never see again."

After their time in Rome, Elizabeth and Fisher flew to London and were installed in suites back at "The Dorch" on Park Lane.

At long last, production had begun on the much-postponed *Cleopatra* at Pinewood Studios outside London.

On their first night in London, Elizabeth invited Peter Finch (cast as Julius Caesar) and Stephen Boyd (playing Marc Antony) for dinner.

Dick Hanley was among the guests, but “I felt like the odd man out. Boyd flirted with Eddie all night, and it was obvious that Finch was going to renew his conjugal rights with Elizabeth, an affair that had heated the sheets during the filming of *Elephant Walk* in 1954.”

“Before the evening ended, I realized why Elizabeth always insisted on two suites at The Dorch,” Hanley said. “After I left, Finch stayed on for a night cap with Elizabeth, and Fisher accepted Boyd’s invitation to visit a hot little club in Soho. The next morning, when I came into Elizabeth’s suite at ten o’clock, Finch was still there, moving around in his jockey shorts. I knew where to find Eddie and Boyd. I was certain they were in the suite next door.”

“If I thought that was the most outrageous scandal that would happen during the making of *Cleopatra*, I was dead wrong,” Dick said. “Before that god damn film was wrapped, Elizabeth would scandalize the world.”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Cleopatra

FALLS IN LOVE WITH MARC ANTONY

CLEOPATRA: "Without you, this is not a world I want to live in."

MARC ANTONY: "Everything that I want to hold or love or have or be is here with me now."

En route to London in 1960, Elizabeth heard that the Motion Picture Herald had named her the number one box office attraction of America, followed by Rock Hudson, Doris Day, John Wayne, Cary Grant, Sandra Dee, Jerry Lewis, William Holden, Tony Curtis, and Elvis Presley.

No sooner had she settled into her suite at The Dorchester Hotel on Park Lane in London than Elizabeth picked up the tabloids and read: "It is rumored that Elizabeth Taylor, in London to shoot Cleopatra at Pinewood Studios, is already rehearsing love scenes with the handsome hunk, Stephen Boyd, who plays Marc Antony to her Cleopatra."

Seemingly, the London tabloids did not know that Boyd was gay. Perhaps they did, but didn't want that fact to get in the way of his faux romance with Elizabeth.

"If Boyd was screwing around with either of the Fishers, it was definitely with Eddie, not Elizabeth," said Dick Hanley, who'd accompanied her to London.

"Eddie had his own suite next to Elizabeth's at The Dorchester, and I saw Boyd coming and going on several occasions—that is, when Freddie was working out or had a boxing match outside London."

The reference was to Freddie Mills, a famous British boxer, with whom Boyd had a long affair.

Shelley Winters, in London filming Lolita, visited the Fishers since she also was staying at The Dorchester. "Elizabeth was spending every evening with Peter Finch while Eddie was drowning in martinis. At one point, Elizabeth got into a screaming match with Eddie, accusing him of trying to run over a drunken Peter with his Rolls-Royce."

In a private talk with Winters, Fisher admitted, "I'm trying my hand at producing. I tried to get Irma La Douce for Elizabeth, but it went to Shirley MacLaine. My other job is making love to Elizabeth. I have to have my monster ready any hour of the day or night she wants to get plugged."

"If you ever have a dry spell, stroll down to my room," Winters told him.

The columnist Max Lerner flew into London, and Elizabeth discreetly renewed her affair with him. When Peter Lawford dropped in to visit her at The Dorchester, she told her old friend, "I'm just crazy about Max because he reminds me of Albert Einstein."

When Winters heard of the affair with Lerner, she said, "I always make it a point not to go to bed with men who have bigger boobs than me. Max could pose for a Playboy centerfold with those huge tits of his."

Elizabeth eventually ended her affair with Lerner when he published a column comparing her to Marilyn Monroe, after Monroe's death in 1962. In it, he asserted that whereas Elizabeth was a living legend, Monroe was a myth. Elizabeth called him the next day. "How in bloody hell is Marilyn a myth and I'm just a fucking legend?"

"She's a myth because she's dead."

"I don't give a god damn about that. She couldn't hold a candle to me when the bitch was alive."

One Sunday afternoon, Winters met with Elizabeth for a private lunch where they could catch up on all the gossip about Hollywood and New York.

Winters said that before she left New York, she'd seen their mutual friend Roddy McDowall performing in Camelot on Broadway with Richard Burton and Robert Goulet.



Camelot Richard Burton (left) and Roddy McDowall on Broadway in 1963

"I went backstage to kiss Roddy and to visit with Burton," she said. "When I came into Burton's dressing room, he locked the door and invited me for a drink. After he'd had a couple, he put his hand up my dress and played with my pussy."

"How quaint!" Elizabeth said. "His antics don't amuse me. In Manhattan some time ago, Tyrone Power invited me to his apartment. I went with Roddy. Burton was there."

"Roddy asked me if I knew that Burton was fucking Ty," Elizabeth said. "I told him I wasn't jealous because I'd already had Ty. My affair with Ty didn't work out because I lacked the right sexual equipment. Burton was such a show-off. He amused us by giving these devastating impressions of John Gielgud and Laurence Olivier. As I was leaving, he was singing bawdy songs while Oscar Levant accompanied him on the piano."

The producer of Cleopatra, Walter Wanger, visited Elizabeth at The Dorchester, telling her that Fox was having its doubts about casting Peter Finch as Julius Caesar and Stephen Boyd as Marc Antony. "Personally, I think Laurence Olivier would make the best Caesar, and Richard Burton would be perfect as Antony."

"Of course, Larry would be great in the role, but I have my doubts about Mr. Burton," she said.

He also informed her that the casting department at Fox wanted Cary Grant as Julius Caesar and Burt Lancaster as Antony." What Wanger didn't tell her was that the people at casting wanted either Susan Hayward or Jennifer Jones to play Cleopatra.

Actually, Mankiewicz secretly preferred Marlon Brando in the role of Antony. "He had been so good as Antony in Julius Caesar in 1951, but he was all tied up making Mutiny on the Bounty."

For a brief period, the director of Cleopatra, Rouben Mamoulian, had promoted the unorthodox casting of the African-American actress, Dorothy Dandridge, in the lead role. "This idea caused heart attacks at Fox," said Wanger. "Remember, this was 1960."

It was the last day of August when Elizabeth in London began work on the ill-fated Cleopatra. She suddenly got into a battle with the unionized hair-dressers of Britain when she demanded that her favorite hairdresser, Sidney Guilaroff, be employed.



WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN...

Peter Finch (left photo) as Julius Caesar, **Dorothy Dandridge** as Cleopatra, and **Stephen Boyd** (right) as Marc Antony

That was not the only problem caused by Elizabeth. Right from the beginning, she came down with a virus infection and a high fever, accelerated by the unseasonably cold and bitter weather in London that September. Near the end of October, Fox was already out two million dollars for a picture that had originally been budgeted at that exact amount.

On the night of November 13, 1960, Elizabeth's condition worsened, and Lord Evans, the personal physician of Queen Elizabeth, was called to The Dorchester. After a brief examination, he phoned an ambulance and had Elizabeth delivered to the privately run London Clinic. There, she was examined by Dr. Carl Goldman, who spoke to Dr. Rex Kennamer, her private doctor in Los Angeles. He immediately flew to London to be by her side.

She suffered from meningitis, an inflammation of the protective membranes covering the brain and spinal cord.

She recovered in a week, but so far had not done one day's work on Cleopatra in three entire months. Lloyds of London, which held the insurance policies on Cleopatra, asked Fox to replace her with Kim Novak, Marilyn Monroe, or Shirley MacLaine. Why Lloyds would select Monroe remains a mystery, as she was known for holding up production more than any other actress in Hollywood.

Upon Elizabeth's release from the clinic, she and Fisher flew back to California, where she underwent a period of rest and recuperation at Palm Springs.

In the wake of Elizabeth's illness, during her recuperation, Fox shut down production at Pinewood.

Under threat of getting fired, Mamoulian, from London, placed an urgent call to Elizabeth in California. During that dialogue and in the aftermath that followed, she double-crossed him by advising him to resign "until the heat blows over." She then made a commitment that she would refuse to work on the picture unless Fox re-hired him as its director. Mamoulian subsequently resigned.



Rouben Mamoulian



Spyros Skouras

But the very next day, Elizabeth called Spyros Skouras at Fox and told him that unless he hired Joseph L. Mankiewicz, she wouldn't make the picture.

Mamoulian never forgave her for her betrayal.

Skouras phoned Mankiewicz in The Bahamas, where he was staying with Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy.

Mankiewicz came to Fox demanding (and getting) hard terms. In addition to his other compensations, the studio had to pay three million dollars to buy him out of a previous commitment he'd made to direct Lawrence Durrell's *Justine* for Figaro Films.

Elizabeth and Fisher were back in London at The Dorchester in time to attend Walter Wanger's New Year's bash at the elegant Caprice Restaurant, where they welcomed in 1961.

She wore a Dior gown that was the color of her eyes. She showed so much décolletage that a Peeping Tom waiter accidentally spilled hot coffee on her, eliciting a scream.

During the first week of January, 1961, Mankiewicz arrived at Pinewood to take over the direction of *Cleopatra*. Once in London to direct Elizabeth again, as he had done in *Suddenly*, *Last Summer*, he learned that only ten minutes of completed film had been shot "and all of it is unusable. The sets are a disaster, and the fucking script is unshootable."

Mankiewicz wanted Finch and Boyd replaced and a new production launched "from scratch," as he said.

He called Elizabeth with his grand scheme. "I want to make two motion pictures, one starring you and Rex Harrison in *Caesar and Cleopatra*, and the other starring Richard Burton and you in *Antony and Cleopatra*."

Rex Harrison was free and willing to sign on for the role of Julius Caesar. Getting Burton to play Marc Antony would be far more difficult and costly.

Burton was pleased with the casting of his friend, Harrison, in the role. "Larry [a reference to Laurence Olivier] would have hammed it up too much."

Spyros personally disliked Burton—"I can't understand Welsh," he said. "Not a word he says."

When Burton heard that, he said, "Anything that comes out of Spyros' mouth is Greek to me."

At the time, Burton was appearing on Broadway in *Camelot*, co-starring with Julie Andrews, Roddy McDowall, and Robert Goulet.

Wanger and Mankiewicz persuaded Burton to sign for \$250,000. Fox also paid \$50,000 to buy Burton out of the Broadway production of *Camelot*. The understanding at the time was that he would be paid that initial fee for what was to have been three months of work on *Cleopatra*. But, in his own words, "I would make a fortune in overtime when Cleo ran months behind in production."

Burton had one condition that he insisted upon. He wanted his current lover, Roddy McDowall, to be cast in Cleopatra in the role of Octavian. That meant that Roddy would also have to leave the Broadway production of Camelot. Even before flying to Rome, Roddy and Burton agreed that he would play Octavian as "campy and sexually ambiguous."

Dick Hanley told Elizabeth that "Marc Antony, so I hear, is pounding the ass of your boy Roddy every night."

"You're just jealous, you bitch," she responded, mocking him. "I bet you wish Burton was pounding you."

"You got me there," Dick said.

During the run of Camelot, "Richard was more Lancelot than Arthur toward women," said co-star Robert Goulet. "As a bisexual, he had double the choices than the rest of us regular guys."

His dressing room at Broadway's Majestic Theater, where Camelot was playing, became known as "Burton's Bar," drawing the likes of Mike Nichols, who would later direct him in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* along with Tammy Grimes, Jason Robards, Jr., Robert Preston, Alec Guinness, Lauren Bacall, and Burton's co-star in Camelot, Julie Andrews.

When he arrived in Rome, he would "reopen" Burton's Bar in his dressing room near the sound stages of Cleopatra.

He was known for romancing his leading ladies, including Susan Strasberg, Jean Simmons, and Claire Bloom, but he told Roddy, "Elizabeth Taylor leaves me cold, like yesterday's poached egg."

When he spoke to Goulet, Burton had a different point of view. "I'll have Taylor within two days of my arrival in Rome. That's guaranteed."

In New York, between telling his entourage Rabelaisian tales, he revealed that he'd met "the fat little tart" before, at Stewart Granger's house in Hollywood. He added, "that was before she married that busboy," a reference, of course, to Eddie Fisher.

Sometimes, when select members of the Camelot audience came backstage, Burton entertained them with a perfect mimicry of Elizabeth's voice. When he impersonated her, his speech was riddled with obscenities.

Roddy warned him, "You just might fall for her."

"No, she's too dark for me," he said. "I also heard she has to shave all that black hair that covers her body. On my women, I like hair on her head and in only one other place."

In New York, preparing for his departure for Rome, Burton told a reporter, "I guess I've got to don my breastplate once more, this time to play opposite Miss Tits."

Before accepting the role of Antony, he had been trying to establish himself as a serious actor, winning the 1961 Tony for Best Actor on Broadway for his role as King Arthur in Camelot. He was tired of being labeled as "Britain's Brando" or "the Poor Man's Laurence Olivier."

He'd married a Welsh actress, Sybil Williams, in 1949, but was never faithful to her. He often preferred sex with actresses, his list of seductions including everyone from Lana Turner and Zsa Zsa Gabor to Barbra Streisand.

Even though married to Sybil for more than twelve years, on Broadway, Burton was also romancing Pat Tunder, a beautiful blonde chorus girl who was only twenty-two.

Joan Collins, who had been his co-star in *Sea Wife* (1956), a British drama shot in Jamaica about the survivors from a torpedoed British refugee ship during World War II, found Burton's greenish-blue eyes "piercingly hypnotic." But she was turned off by other aspects of his physicality. "His back and shoulders were deeply pitted and rutted with pimples, blackheads, and what looked like small craters."

From 1944 to 1947, he had served in the Royal Air Force as a Navigator. "Near the end of the closing months of the war, soldiers fucked each other a lot," Burton said. "Blokes who might die tomorrow didn't care where they put it."

Biographer Melvyn Bragg asserted that Burton had sex with many men in the RAF [Royal Air Force] during World War II, "when hundreds of thousands of men fumbled for comfort and release in the male warrior bondings of the war."

Before meeting Burton to work with him, Elizabeth read a profile of him by Barbara Gelb in *The New York Times*: "A tug of war began in him at the age of two after the loss of his mother, and the two sides of his nature have never been reconciled. He appears to be at once self-possessed and uneasy with himself, unsure

where the caustic Welsh clay stops and the silken veneer begins. He is simultaneously the dark and self-destructive Celt and the glossy ideal of classical actor, circumspect and disciplined. In his bemusement over which of these selves to champion, he often takes refuge in a third and safer self—the little boy lost.”



**Richard Burton and his wife Sybil
Williams Burton in 1962**

Both Burton and Roddy were well aware the night then-Senator from Massachusetts John F. Kennedy and his beautiful and elegant wife, Jackie, came to see *Camelot*. Backstage, the Kennedys greeted Burton and congratulated him, although he later heard that the future president found the music boring. Jackie, however, found the legend of *Camelot* fascinating. The world would realize the degree to which she was intrigued after the assassination of her husband in Dallas in 1963.

Whereas Senator Kennedy planned an immediate return to Washington, Jackie planned to remain in New York for two days of shopping.

“I asked her if I could call on her at the Carlyle and discuss the legend of *Camelot* with her,” Burton later confided to Roddy. “To my amazement, she agreed.”

The following night, Roddy was eager to learn all the details of Burton’s visit to the suite of the future First Lady. “Over drinks, we spent an hour talking about *Camelot*,” Burton said. “We had more than one drink. She’s a fabulous dame, really fabulous. If I had a dame like Jackie full time, I swear I’d never have to cheat on her.”

“I know, I know,” said an impatient Roddy. “The question is, did you score?”

“A bull’s eye,” he bragged. “She’s prim and proper, but once you get her panties off, she’s a tigress.”

In February of 1961, while Mankiewicz was working almost around the clock to complete the script of *Cleopatra*, Elizabeth and Fisher flew to Paris, where they boarded the Orient Express to Munich.

She wanted to experience Munich’s version of Fasching, an annual pre-Lenten carnival, with its masked balls, one of which she planned to attend dressed as Marie Antoinette. But instead of impersonating Louis XVI, Fisher, wearing silk breeches, was to be attired as her footman.



Very Famous People who become fascinated with Other Very Famous People: **Richard Burton** and **Jacqueline Kennedy**

Once in her hotel suite, she seemed to be relying to an increasing degree on pain killers which were far more potent than her usual sedatives. Partly as a means of understanding her condition better, and perhaps partly as a recreational experiment, Fisher swallowed one of her capsules. As he remembered it, "In a few minutes, the entire suite was moving in front of my eyes, the furniture doing a naughty jitterbug. I collapsed on the sofa in the living room and woke up at noon the following day. I didn't know how she could take such strong medicine."

Later that day, he tried to talk to her. "I was giving up my life for the thankless task of standing by watching the woman I loved self-destruct," he recalled.

Challenged by him, she fought back, and their fight escalated. She hurled vases at him, one glass object hitting him in the forehead, causing him to bleed.

"I made a terrible mistake," he recalled afterward. "I threatened to fly back to New York in the morning, abandoning her to her own survival not only in Munich but in London."

She looked at him in disbelief. She appeared in a state of shock, as if she had not heard him correctly. "Okay, Buster," she said in a voice that would emerge from a future film, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. "You might be leaving in the morning, but I'm departing from the world right now." Then she ran into the bathroom and locked the door.

He knew what she was doing. He called hotel security guards to break down the door and summoned the house doctor, an elderly but efficient Berliner who may have been Jewish, having survived Hitler's gas chambers. "I don't know exactly what he did in her bedroom," Fisher said. "But two interns came with equipment. Perhaps her stomach was pumped. I know I heard the sound of vomiting. The doctor sedated her."

Hoping the press wouldn't find out, Fisher gave the doctor the equivalent of two thousand dollars in Deutschmarks.

When Elizabeth woke up the following morning, she called for him, "Oh, Eddie, darling, come to me. Don't ever say you'll leave me again. I'd die if you ever left me!"

By the time he got her back to London, he noticed that she was suffering from exhaustion. He checked her into a hospital. Then he did a strange thing. Needing a rest himself, he also checked himself into a hospital, pretending he was suffering from appendicitis. Actually, he wasn't. He allowed his appendix to be removed, even though it was a healthy organ.

"I had to get away," he later said, "I had to have someone take care of me and wait on me for a change."

On March 4, 1961, illness struck again, as Elizabeth came down with a severe case of Asian flu.

Fisher wanted the best care for her, and summoned Lord Evans, the personal physician of Queen Elizabeth. He ordered an oxygen tent for her. Not only that, but he sent over a portable toilet, the same one used by Her Majesty when she traveled to remote corners of the Commonwealth.

Fisher also ordered around-the-clock nurses for her. In the early morning hours, a night nurse noticed that Elizabeth's face was turning blue, and she was gasping for breath. She called the desk and shouted for them to

get a doctor quick.

In a touch of irony, some doctors were having a late-night reception at The Dorchester. Among them was Dr. J. Middleton Price, one of the best anesthesiologists in the British Isles. He was rushed to Elizabeth's suite. "She had turned blue as the sea," he said, "and was unconscious. I estimated that if I had not gotten there, she would have died in fifteen minutes."

The doctor picked her up by the heels and tried to make her lose some of the congestion in her chest. That did not succeed. Next, he stuck his finger down her throat, hoping to make her gag and breathe again. Still, nothing happened. He then pounded her chest,

"So the doctor started gouging at my eyes," Elizabeth related in her memoirs. "He gouged like mad and I opened my eyes...I took a deep breath, which kept me alive."

Dr. Price determined that only a tracheotomy would save her life. But the operation had to be performed in a hospital, although it was very risky to move the patient. He decided, however, that it was worth the chance, and an ambulance was summoned to The Dorchester.

With dome lights flashing and sirens wailing, she was rushed to the private London Clinic where Dr. Terence Cawthorne awaited her. He performed the life-saving tracheotomy by drawing a scalpel across the soft part of her throat right above her breastbone. Here, he made an incision allowing him to insert a breathing tube connected to a respirator.

His diagnosis was acute staphylococcus pneumonia, which is most often fatal. She would retain a small scar at her throat for the rest of her life, although she would in most instances cover it with a piece of jewelry.

Still desperately ill, she was put in an iron lung as a means of controlling the rate of her respiration and linking it to just the right amount of oxygen.

Seven doctors, including Lord Evans, were at her bedside. Dr. Evans even gave Queen Elizabeth a daily bulletin on his famous patient. It was Dr. Evans who also discovered that she was suffering from anemia, and he ordered blood transfusions, intravenous feedings, and doses of antibiotics. He also prescribed a rare drug, staphylococcal bacteriophage lystate, which Milton Blackstone, Fisher's agent, personally carried with him aboard a hastily scheduled flight to London.

While in the hospital in London, Elizabeth had been fed intravenously through her ankle. Regrettably, that caused an infection in her lower leg. As she admitted in her memoirs, "I almost lost my leg...I just let the disease take me. I had been hoping to be happy," she said. "I was just pretending to be happy. But I was consumed by self-pity."

Early on the morning of March 6, 1961, a radio station in Pensacola, Florida, broadcast the news: "Elizabeth Taylor is dead. Doctors in London fought to save her, but it was hopeless. The little girl who won our hearts in National Velvet died a living legend."

The news was picked up and broadcast on other stations before a bulletin was issued from London: "Elizabeth Taylor is not dead. She is in the hospital in a fight for her life, but is still very much with us."

London tabloids began preparing "Second Coming" headlines.

A few newspapers published her obituary, and Elizabeth got to read a summation of her life. She later commented, "These were the best reviews I ever received, but I had to die to get these tributes."

On March 10, the first optimistic bulletin was released, claiming she had made "a very rare recovery."

Later, she defined the experience as "absolutely horrifying. When I would regain consciousness, I wanted to ask my doctors if I was going to die. But I couldn't make myself heard. Inside my head, I heard myself screaming to God for help. I was frightened. I was angry. I was fierce. I didn't want to die. I stopped breathing four times. I died four times. It was like falling into this horrible black pit. Dr. Evans later told me I lived because I fought so hard to live."

Also residing at The Dorchester, author Truman Capote was one of the first guests allowed to visit her after her operation. He recalled it as a "media event, with the streets clogged with fans and the idle curious." At her request, he slipped in a magnum of Dom Pérignon and some books to read, mostly his own.

"I visited her in London in the hospital when she had that tracheotomy. She had what looked like a silver dollar in her throat. I couldn't figure out what held it in place, and it surprised me she wasn't bleeding or oozing. A few nights later, I went out with Eddie Fisher. The next afternoon, Elizabeth told me that Eddie

thought I was trying to make a pass at him. At that moment, she played a trick on me and yanked at the plug in her throat, spurting out champagne—I'd brought her a magnum of Dom Pérignon—all over the hospital room. I thought I was going to pass out."

Fans on every continent mourned her, even though she was still clinging to life, but just barely. Mobs of people descended on the London Clinic for around-the-clock vigils.

Each day, her condition improved until it was finally judged safe for her to leave the hospital, though in a vastly weakened condition.

On March 27, 1961, Elizabeth, in a wheelchair, made one of the most spectacular departures in England's history. Wrapped in sable, with a white scarf covering her neck and in preparation for her flight to New York, she was handled with the care of a porcelain doll as London bobbies held back the threatening hordes and a mob of paparazzi. Airport security nestled her into a kind of canvas sling, and lifted her into the waiting plane.

With Cleopatra delayed once again, Elizabeth was coming home. She predicted to Fisher that "Cleopatra will never sail down the Nile on that barge of hers."

Skouras at Fox sued Lloyds of London for three million dollars, but settled for two million, as compensation for the production delays on their attempt to film Cleopatra at Pinewood.

In a huddle, Wanger and Skouras decided that England was no place to film an exotic epic like Cleopatra. They agreed to scrap \$600,000 worth of sets at Pinewood and relaunch the film in Rome in September of 1961, allowing Elizabeth time to recuperate.

By April 18, 1961, she was back in Hollywood to receive her Oscar for Butterfield 8, telling the press, "I nearly had to die to wrest this prize." She'd later write in her memoirs, "I was filled with profound gratitude at being considered by the industry as an actress and not as a movie star. I knew my performance had not deserved it, and that it was a sympathy award."

One June 7, 1961, Elizabeth accepted an invitation to fly with Eddie Fisher to Las Vegas for a lavish party at the Sands in honor of Dean Martin's forty-fourth birthday. She almost turned down the invitation when she learned that Sinatra had also invited Marilyn Monroe, with whom he was having an affair. Fisher talked her into going, claiming that "Frankie will be awfully hurt if we don't show up. He might get even with us. He takes these rejections personally."

Finally, Peter Lawford assured Elizabeth that her contact with Monroe would deliberately be kept very brief. "At ringside, I'll see that the headwaiter seats you at the far end of the table from Marilyn."

But at the Sands, Elizabeth was annoyed when Monroe greeted Fisher with a sloppy wet kiss. She was curious as to what, if any, relationship with Monroe that her husband had had to invite such intimacy. When Monroe shook Elizabeth's hand, she did not even fake a smile. She was still furious that executives at Fox had considered firing her as Cleopatra and turning the role over to Monroe.

Later that night, when he was drinking with Rat Packers Martin and Lawford, Fisher admitted he'd "pumped" Monroe on more than one occasion. "What red-blooded male like me would turn her down?"

"One time when Elizabeth was in the hospital, I had to get it from somebody," Fisher said. "Or at least that's what Marilyn told me when she called me for a date. I took the bait. Before the mailman arrived, I'd had the blonde vixen three times."

"Our farewell wasn't all that romantic," Fisher claimed. "Marilyn told me, 'Thanks, Eddie. It's important for me to be reminded of what turns Elizabeth on.'"

At the Sands, the maître 'd followed Lawford's instructions and seated Elizabeth and Monroe at opposite ends of the ringside table, very close to the stage where Sinatra would be singing. Seated with Elizabeth were Dean Martin, the guest of honor, and his wife, Jeanne.

Elizabeth noted that Monroe was already drunk before the party had really begun. She was talking loud enough to be overheard by everyone at the table. She told Fisher, "I'll always love Frankie, but I know I can never tie him down. If it were possible, I'd be married to both Joe (DiMaggio) and Frankie at the same time. This is supposed to be a free country, yet bigamy isn't allowed. It should be legal."

Elizabeth whispered to Martin, "I can agree with Marilyn on that bigamy thing. I always seem to be in love with at least three men at once."

As the evening progressed, Elizabeth watched in horror as Monroe made a spectacle of herself, even slobbering on herself.

Fisher took note of this, too, later asserting, "Marilyn is a beautiful woman, but on that night, she looked like a broken-down and washed-up Vegas hooker. But what did I care? I was married to Elizabeth, the most beautiful woman in the world."

At one point, Monroe staggered off to the women's toilet, returning to seat herself between Patricia Kennedy Lawford (JFK's sister) and Patricia's husband, Peter. Then she reached out to fondle Lawford's crotch. "For old time's sake," she said, loud enough for Elizabeth to hear. The other guests also overheard what Monroe then said, as what might have been interpreted either as an insult or as a bemused tease: "What happened to your peter, Peter? It seems to have shrunk."

As Sinatra came out onto the stage, Elizabeth didn't know where to look. Her choices included a view of Sinatra, onstage and singing, or a view of Marilyn, whose ample breasts were literally falling out of her low-cut pink satin dress.

After the show, Fisher escorted Elizabeth backstage to greet Sinatra. Monroe beat them to it. In full view of Elizabeth, Monroe gushed about Sinatra's performance and planted wet kisses on his face. Elizabeth noticed that Sinatra was looking at Monroe with disgust. He'd once told Elizabeth, "If there is one thing I can't stand, it's a drunken broad."

"Then the unspeakable occurred," Elizabeth recalled. "Monroe was so drunk, she threw up on Frank's tuxedo." He ordered a security guard to take her back to his suite. A photographer was standing nearby and attempted to take a candid snapshot, but Sinatra knocked his camera to the floor, stomping on it. He then fled to his dressing room to change into a fresh tuxedo."

With Fisher at her side, Elizabeth stood next to the photographer. "Monroe is a mess, isn't she? How she holds onto her beauty, I'll never know. She drinks far too much, and obviously can't hold her liquor. Now, me, I'm a girl who knows how to handle booze."

Far more intriguing than Monroe's drunken debacle at Sinatra's opening was what occurred the following afternoon when Fisher left the Fisher/Taylor suite to meet with executives from the Desert Inn for a discussion about a possible singing engagement.

Elizabeth was startled when she picked up the receiver and heard Monroe's voice apologizing "for my outrageous behavior last night." After repeated urgings, Elizabeth finally agreed to let Monroe visit her in her suite.

On that hot Las Vegas afternoon, what transpired between Elizabeth and Monroe is still a hotly debated topic. Years later, in their edition of April 11, 2011, *The Globe* revealed that the two women engaged in a shared lesbian tryst.

In her diary, Elizabeth wrote that she was entranced by the way Monroe moved. "She was the sexiest woman I ever met, and her touch was electric," Elizabeth claimed.

She later confided to Roddy McDowall, "I wanted to see how far the bitch would go. But she had to do all the work. I felt empowered somehow, like I was the grand diva and she a lowly slave, if that makes any sense."

Unless there is something not yet discovered, it's likely that Elizabeth never had an encounter like that before. If she did, she carefully concealed it. Unlike Monroe, who "could work both sides of the waterfront" (a phrase from Tennessee Williams), Elizabeth was a woman who reserved her charms for men—and a lot of them.



What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas—or does it? **The Globe**, April 11, 2011

A short time later at the Beverly Hilton Hotel, Monroe entered the bar accompanied by her masseur, Ralph Roberts. Roddy, Fisher, and Elizabeth were in the bar that night, emptying a few champagne bottles. Elizabeth was overheard telling both Fisher and Roddy, “Keep that dyke away from me tonight.”

On July 9, 1961, Elizabeth, in plunging décolletage, sat next to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy at a fund-raising dinner for the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital in Los Angeles. Behind them sat Rat Packers Joey Bishop, Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, and Peter Lawford. A view of RFK was snapped by photographers gazing down at Elizabeth’s amply displayed breasts.

When the attorney general finally diverted his gaze, Elizabeth delivered a short speech written by Joseph Mankiewicz:

“Dying, as I remember, is many things. But most of all, it is wanting to live. Throughout many critical hours in the operating theater, it was as if every nerve, every muscle, as if my whole physical being were being strained to the last ounce of my strength, to the last gasp of breath. I remember I had focused desperately on the hospital light hanging directly above me. It had become the vision of life itself. Slowly, it faded and dimmed like a well-done theatrical effect to blackness.

I died.

It was like being in a long dark tunnel with no light at the end. I kept looking for the light. I heard voices urging me to come back into life, to live. The experience was both painful and beautiful, like child birth itself.”

Elizabeth donated \$100,000 to the charity, and her fellow guests, including RFK, contributed a massive total of \$7 million that night. After the dinner, Kennedy invited her for a drive with him along the coast. She suggested that they stop at her cottage in Malibu for a midnight swim. No one knows where Eddie Fisher was that night.

As she was to tell Dick Hanley. “It was one of the most memorable nights of my life.”

She also recorded the events of that night in her diary, and would allow both Dick and Roddy McDowall to read it. She had described her experience in such graphic detail that Roddy was a bit shocked. He said, “Elizabeth, my dear, you should have been a pornographer.”

As her two memoirs revealed, no one could write more boringly about her own life than Elizabeth. In two of her autobiographical memoirs, she gave almost no details of some of the most infamous events of her life.

In her diary, however, while relaying her encounter with Robert Kennedy, she may have been more explicit because Peter Lawford had told her that Marilyn Monroe had recorded “steamy passages” in her red diary about

her sexual encounters with both President Kennedy and his brother, Robert. "Elizabeth obviously did not want to be bested by Monroe," Roddy said.

"I can write with passion, too," she told Roddy. "After all, I read Forever Amber." She was referring to the best selling romance written by Kathleen Winsor, who at one time was married to bandleader Artie Shaw after his divorce from Ava Gardner.

"Bobby and I spent about two hours on the beach in the moonlight," Elizabeth told her gay friends. "Our bathing suits became too restraining. Bobby finally got to enjoy those breasts he'd been staring at all night."

"You've got it bad, girl," Roddy said.

"When it was over, he kissed me several times and told me I was a goddess," she relayed, as reported by Roddy and Dick. "Other men have told me that, but coming from Bobby, I really could delude myself into believing it. That night, with Bobby on the beach, I was a goddess. But when I drove home, I found Eddie there and we got into a big brawl. The goddess, I fear, became a harridan."

Later, in her diary, she wrote: "It is a shame that when a man and a woman want to be together, they often have to leave each other while they pay homage to people in their lives they'd rather not deal with. Men and women should be free. Even though I've been married four times, it was four times too many. I will never marry again— and that's a promise I've made to myself that I will never break."



Breast gazing: **Elizabeth Taylor** with **Robert Kennedy** in 1961

In the months leading up to his assassination, RFK, at least according to Dick Hanley, seduced Elizabeth on three different occasions. On one of these occasions, he left the bed of Jackie Kennedy in New York in 1966, flew to Los Angeles, and woke up in Elizabeth's bed in Beverly Hills the following morning."

As she told Dick, "I have known more perfect bodies, but Bobby's physique thrilled me. He was long and lean, no bulging beefcake. But he moved with such grace...undeniable masculinity. A strong chest, a thin waist, and a cock that was not the biggest I'd ever seen, but one that was gorgeous and knew all the right strokes."

It was a busy summer in 1961. The U.S. State Department asked Elizabeth and Fisher to represent the United States at the Moscow Film Festival, beginning on July 11.

Decked out in a white chiffon cocktail dress from Dior, Elizabeth made a spectacular entrance. But she almost screamed when she spotted Gina Lollobrigida wearing an identical outfit. As a publicity stunt, Lollobrigida had learned what outfit Elizabeth planned to wear and had instructed her dressmaker to duplicate it.

To make up to Elizabeth, the House of Dior offered her any gown she wanted from their inventory in Paris. She selected an embroidered number, the most expensive Dior had, one that would otherwise have been priced at \$10,000.

Once inside their hotel suite in Moscow, Elizabeth and Eddie, assisted by Dick Hanley, searched every inch of it, looking for hidden microphones and cameras. "Eddie was convinced that the Soviets had wanted to secretly film them making love, probably for Khrushchev's evening entertainment," Dick said. "Later, there was a rumor

that such a film was actually made, and that it was viewed within the Kremlin. When Elizabeth heard this, she said to me, 'My first porno.'"

**MOSCOW NIGHTS WITH ELIZABETH AND EDDIE (FUN AND GAMES
IN RUSSIA)**



Nikita Khrushchev (left photo) and his mistress, the Soviet Union's dreaded Minister of Culture, **Yekatarina Furtseve** (center photo)



...and a fashion catfight with
Gina Lollobrigida

When Khrushchev had visited Hollywood in September of 1956, as part of an event hosted by Twentieth Century Fox and spearheaded by Frank Sinatra, he'd had a "private" session in his hotel suite with Marilyn Monroe, but had merely shaken hands with Elizabeth.

Now, at the time of her Moscow visit in 1961, he requested a private session with her. She went alone, thinking it might lead to a sexual tryst "with Nikita and all his hairy warts."

When she arrived at the Kremlin, she found the Soviet premier sitting with Yekatarina Furtseve, his Minister of Culture. She was also his mistress. The meeting lasted only fifteen minutes. Later, Elizabeth said, "Obviously, he prefers Monroe to me."

JACKIE: "I hate Elizabeth Taylor."

ELIZABETH: "Jackie Kennedy is a gold-digging bitch."

When her husband was running for President, and even when he occupied the Oval Office, Jackie Kennedy

had to face competition not only from Marilyn Monroe and so many others, but from Elizabeth Taylor, too.

Revelations about the Taylor/JFK affair came to light after the death of Dame Elizabeth in 2011. Details were leaked to the press from her private diaries which may, in time, be edited and published.

Of course, Hollywood insiders like actor Robert Stack knew that JFK had seduced a much too young Elizabeth after his service in the Navy during World War II.

Elizabeth had first met JFK in England in 1939 when his father was the United States' Ambassador to the Court of St. James's.

It appears that Robert Kennedy himself arranged several liaisons between Elizabeth and the President in 1961, as well as enjoying her considerable charms himself.

But long before the affair with JFK came to light, Jackie knew about it. Her informant was Peter Lawford, who often functioned as a "double agent," feeding Jack information about Jackie, and supplying Jackie with secret data about her husband.

Reportedly, Elizabeth was mesmerized by both the Kennedy brothers. (Apparently, Teddy never got around to her.)

During JFK's 1960 campaign for president, she had visited him on occasion in a bungalow at the Beverly Hilton Hotel. She also had perhaps three sexual trysts with him in Beverly Hills during the summer of 1961, when she'd had her first fling with Bobby.

Except for Marilyn Monroe, none of the affairs JFK had were with women as famous as Elizabeth.

"Kennedy did more than fundraising when he came to California," Eddie Fisher later said. "Kennedy was widely known for fucking Elizabeth look-alikes like Judith Campbell Exner. I guess on occasion he wanted the real thing—not merely the mock. I had Judy myself. She made herself up to look as much like Elizabeth as she could."

"Elizabeth swore to me that her relationship with Jack never went beyond friendship," Fisher said. "But I never believed her. I'm sure she never believed me when I told her that I was 'just friends' with some of the women I was bedding. When Jackie heard of the affair, she said some really vicious things about Elizabeth, so I was told. And you should have heard what my potty-mouthed wife said about Jackie. It was a real catfight waged on two different coasts."

The tabloids eventually picked up on the Elizabeth/Jackie rivalry, and sometimes the two "Queens of America" made the front pages of many a magazine, appearing in separate photographs blended together.



Elizabeth Taylor (top photo), on the lookout for **John F. Kennedy** and her implacable enemy, **Jacqueline Kennedy**

Jackie's rivalry with Elizabeth really broke out in 1968 when the former First Lady married the Greek shipping tycoon, Aristotle Onassis. Word leaked out of Greece that "Ari" had originally wanted to marry Elizabeth when he heard that she was breaking up with Richard Burton. "I can give you even bigger diamonds than Richard Burton because I have more money," Onassis told Elizabeth one night when he was sailing with her aboard his yacht, the Christina.

When Johnny Meyer, pimp for Onassis, the same position he'd held with Howard Hughes, told him that Jackie might be available to marry him, Onassis decided to make a play for her. "After all, Jackie is an even bigger prize than Elizabeth," Onassis said.

When Elizabeth heard about the upcoming marriage of Jackie and Onassis, she told Modern Screen, "It will be the strangest marriage of the century. Mrs. Kennedy is now reduced to taking my rejects."

Her comment was never printed.

Later, Jackie turned down an invitation to sail on another cruise aboard the Christina before her marriage. Word reached her that Elizabeth, who went on the voyage, flirted with Onassis every night over dinner.

When Jackie confronted the shipping magnate about it, she told him, "It's either the Taylor bitch or me. Your friendship with this international tramp has to end—NOW!"

Movie Mirror picked up on this feud, crafting headlines that yelled: WHAT REALLY HAPPENED THE NIGHT LIZ TRIED TO CUT JACKIE OUT!

[After the death of Onassis in 1975 and Elizabeth's second divorce from Richard Burton in 1974, Motion Picture magazine began labeling Elizabeth and Jackie as AMERICA'S TWO FALLEN QUEENS.

The only face-to-face meeting between Jackie and Elizabeth occurred on June 20, 1976, when both of them attended a performance by the legendary British ballerina Margot Fonteyn at Manhattan's Uris Theater. Backstage, Elizabeth and Jackie awkwardly encountered one another on the way to Fonteyn's dressing room. Each woman smiled politely at the other. What did the two fabled divas say to each other? Someone who stood behind them revealed, "They said absolutely nothing—not a word."

After that, coverage of the two divas in the tabloids became less shrill and less frequent. In the November, 1976 issue of Photoplay, reportage on the exploits of Elizabeth vs. Jackie had been reduced to the last words on the cover, without even a picture, and even that ran beneath the larger headline: THE SALLY STRUTHERS NOBODY KNOWS.

Ironically, after her marriage to Senator John Warner of Virginia in December of 1976, Elizabeth assumed the same official role that Jackie had once held—that of a U.S. Senator's spouse.

Elizabeth told reporters that "John [Warner] is the best lover I've ever had. I want to spend the rest of my life with him, and I want to be buried with him."

After her divorce from Warner, Elizabeth took a final husband, construction worker Larry Fortensky, whom she'd met in rehab. She married this unlikely candidate on October 5, 1991 at a lavish \$1.5 million wedding paid for by Michael Jackson at his Neverland Ranch. Elizabeth said, "At last in Larry I've found the kind of rugged individual I've been seeking all my life. He'll still be with me when it's time to bury me."]

Back in Los Angeles in the summer of 1961, Elizabeth underwent plastic surgery at the Cedars of Lebanon to remove most of her tracheotomy scar. The operation was not successful.

Fisher returned to his stamping ground, the Cocoanut Grove, at Hollywood's Ambassador Hotel for a singing engagement which had been offered to him partly, according to local cynics, because of his Elizabeth-related notoriety.

His act was sabotaged when the Rat Pack took over. Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, and Sammy Davis, Jr. yelled at him from the audience, interrupting his songs. Fisher became nervous and botched three numbers. "If I were you, I wouldn't be singing," Martin called out. "I'd be home fucking my wife."

Finally, the Rat Packers mounted the stage, telling filthy jokes about Fisher. Sinatra did a bad impression of Fisher's singing. Finally, when the three musketeers, who were falling down drunk, left the stage, Fisher was allowed to finish his act.

“There are those, including Elizabeth, who say that that night marked the end of the Rat Pack,” Fisher wrote in his memoirs. “They were booed off the stage. Each of them, and that includes Sinatra, made an ass of themselves.”

By August of 1961, with Fisher’s singing engagement over, he and Elizabeth flew to Rome to begin filming “Cleopatra Segundo” as they called it, even though no film of any consequence ever evolved from the time and money wasted in London on “Cleopatra Primero.”

Before their work was scheduled to begin in Rome, they had time for a brief cruise of the Greek Islands in that same yacht that Spyros Skouras had lent them for a tour of the French and Spanish Mediterranean ports during their honeymoon.

“This was our second honeymoon,” Fisher proclaimed.

On his private island, Skorprios, Aristotle Onassis was their host for two days and nights.

Whether true or not, Onassis told friends who included Maria Callas, who repeated it to friends of hers, that both Fisher and Elizabeth, on separate occasions, took sexual advantage of Kostas Cafarakis, the strikingly handsome First Mate aboard the Christina.

“Many of my women guests—and some of the men, too—went for Kostas,” Onassis said. “He was built like a Greek god, a true son of Zeus.”

When the story surfaced in a newspaper in Athens, Fisher vehemently denied it and threatened to sue for libel.

Onassis told him not to bother. “Tomorrow, fishwives will be wrapping the day’s catch in it.”

“It was the calm before the storm,” Fisher later recalled about their flight from Athens to Rome. At the airport, Dick Hanley was on hand to greet them and drive them to their villa, which would become the scene of great drama.

At her temporary home, Elizabeth wandered around the fifteen-room Roman mansion, Villa Pappa (sometimes spelled “Villa Papa”), which was faced with pink marble. It stood on the ancient Appian Way, surrounded by gardens and accessorized with an Olympic-size swimming pool and a tennis court.

To Rome, she’d brought her entourage and her children, even her doctor, Rex Kennamer, who was paid a fee of \$25,000 for a six-week visit. A staff of twenty had been hired, even a chauffeur to drive Fisher around Rome in the Rolls-Royce she had purchased for him.

Before Elizabeth showed up on the set, Hermes Pan, the famous dance director, was already rehearsing the dancing girls for Cleopatra’s triumphant entrance into ancient Rome.

When Dick checked out the studio at Cinecittà, he told her that wardrobe was planning some seventy costumes for her alone, plus thousands of other costumes for members of a black ballet troupe, swordsmen, chariot drivers, and all the other attendants who, collectively, would recreate the splendor of the ancient world. Irene Sharaff had been brought in to oversee Elizabeth’s vast wardrobe. Her most spectacular costume would be a fifteen-pound ceremonial dress of gold which Cleopatra wears during her entrance into Rome before the mobs.

Before Cleopatra was wrapped, Elizabeth would not be speaking to Sharaff after the designer had suggested that Elizabeth “was putting on a few pounds.”

A private beach had been rented from Prince Borghese at Anzio, where American forces had landed in January of 1944 before their march to Rome during World War II, and which, to Fox’s horror, had to be swept clear of any remaining land mines, thereby adding another \$22,000 to the budget.

At her luxurious Villa Pappa, filled with servants, Elizabeth entertained in a grand manner during her first days. “She really thought she was Cleopatra,” said Dick. “She ordered her Italian butlers to color-coordinate everything to match her gown for the evening, and that included candles, napkins, tablecloths, flowers, even cigarette holders and matches.”

Dick Hanley made all the arrangements for their first luncheon at Villa Pappa, inviting Audrey Hepburn, Elizabeth's sometimes rival, and her husband, Mel Ferrer, to a Roman meal beside the swimming pool. Most of the talk centered around Hepburn winning the coveted role of Eliza Doolittle in the film version of *My Fair Lady*, a role which Julie Andrews, who had played the character for years on Broadway, had coveted. Audrey told Elizabeth that she would be co-starring with Rex Harrison and planned to meet him while he was in Rome appearing as Julius Caesar in *Cleopatra*.

Elizabeth was most gracious to Hepburn—in Dick's words, "Overly polite, masking her jealousy."

At the end of the luncheon, after everyone had kissed each other, pretending affection not felt, Elizabeth went over to the bar and poured herself a stiff drink. With barely concealed rage, she confronted Fisher. "Listen, Mr. Bigtime Producer. You get me that role of Lisa (sic) Doolittle—or else!"

"I can't do that," Fisher protested. "As you plainly heard, Audrey's got it sewn up."

"You little asshole," she yelled at Fisher. "GET ME THAT PART! I'm warning you!"



Two views of **Audrey Hepburn** in the role Elizabeth coveted, *My Fair Lady*. Top photo: Dancing with **Rex Harrison**

"Please, I can't do it, but I swear I'll try," Fisher said. "I'll try. I'll meet with Walter Wanger tonight and see what connections he has."

Of course, he failed to get her the part.

Dick said, "Elizabeth never forgave Eddie. Night after night she taunted him for not getting her the role.

"If only Mike Todd were alive, I'd be signing the contract to play Doolittle," she yelled at Fisher.

Eventually, Elizabeth took charge herself, summoning Kurt Frings, her agent, to the Villa Pappa. He was also the agent for Hepburn. He finally convinced her that "the contract with Audrey has already been signed."

"Then it's your god damn fault for not getting me the part." She refused to speak to Frings for the next five days.

After the film's disaster in England, shooting on the "new" version of Cleopatra began in Rome in September of 1961, with the escalating costs estimated at \$20 million spent so far.

Most of the filming of Cleopatra would be done at Cinecittà, a mammoth film studio originally constructed at the behest of Mussolini.

Dick got to see a Roman crew designing a Sphinx, 65 feet long and 35 feet high, to be used as a backdrop for Cleopatra's entrance into Rome. He also said that Plutarch's description was being used as a kind of instruction manual for the construction of two mammoth barges.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars would be needed to hire charioteers, bowmen, trumpeters, and acrobats who could whirl on their backs. Snake charmers were needed, as were white horses and elephants.

Fisher later claimed that he recommended Rex Harrison for the role of Caesar and Burton for Marc Antony. "I could have kicked myself afterward."

As production began, filming focused almost entirely on the first half of the screenplay, which consisted mostly of scenes between Elizabeth and Harrison in his portrayal of Julius Caesar. Even though Burton had been put on the payroll and flown to Rome, he really wasn't needed during the first half of the movie. He spent his time "boozing and boffing," as he graphically put it.

"Hell, I could have finished my run in Camelot," Burton told Harrison. "Wanger brought me to Rome months before I was actually needed on camera. But I was getting a paid vacation."

Chris Mankiewicz, the then-22-year-old son of the director, Joseph Mankiewicz, was assigned the job of getting Elizabeth to work every morning. On the first day of his assignment, he became familiar with the bizarre household at Villa Pappa. The first person he encountered was Dick Hanley. He was not impressed.

"Hanley was an angry, embittered, shrill fagola," Chris maintained. "When I walked in on him, I found him examining Elizabeth's underpants. At first I thought he was a panty sniffer. But he explained to me in his high-pitched voice that his first job in the morning was to inspect her drawers to see if she had the rag on. Her contract since A Place in the Sun always stipulated that she didn't have to work if she were having her period."

The producer, Walter Wanger, was already on the scene before Elizabeth had arrived in Rome, and Chris was not impressed with him, either. "He was a ludicrous old fop who had shot the balls off his wife's lover and had gone to prison for it [a reference to the night he shot Joan Bennett's lover, her agent, Jennings Lang, in the testicles]. Even before Elizabeth arrived on the set, Wanger was showing up at noon, cracking a few jokes, and then wandering off to spend the rest of the afternoon and night chasing after hookers along the Via Veneto."

At Cinecittà on the sound stage, Burton was talking with Harrison when "Cleopatra" made her spectacular entrance, attired in a full-length black mink. She was preceded by her advance guard of Eddie Fisher, followed by Dick Hanley; her hairdresser, Sidney Guilaroff; her chauffeur; her wardrobe lady; her two sons; and her young daughter, Liza Todd.

Mankiewicz rushed to give her a big kiss. "How are you today, my little darling?"

"Ready to work," she said.

"My Queen, you leave me breathless," the director said.

"Of course, I do," she said. "I was born to leave men breathless."

Since Elizabeth seemed to be avoiding him, perhaps deliberately, Burton walked over to her, looking her up and down. "You're much too fat, luv, but you've got a pretty face."

Somehow she found this amusing and laughed, a laugh he later compared to "a horse's whinny." She walked over and plopped down on Fisher's lap.

She turned to Burton. "Everybody, including Roddy, has told me what a brilliant actor you are and an inveterate womanizer. On this film, I hope we'll see more of the former and less of the latter."

"Don't worry, luv," he said. "You can keep your panties on and save it for Eddie. I'm not interested." Turning his back on Elizabeth, Burton walked back to rejoin Harrison about fifty feet away.

Elizabeth told Dick and Fisher, "This is one leading lady that Burton will never fuck."

Mankiewicz came over to join the Fishers. He asked her what she thought of the revised script.

"I think it is the greatest woman's role ever written for the screen," she said. "It may become the most important film ever made, and I fully expect to win my second Oscar. As for you, I have to echo Marlene Dietrich's remark about Orson Welles. She said he was a genius. I feel the same way about you as a director."

You're not all that hot in the hay, however."

"My other leading ladies had only praise for me," he said defensively.

She quickly assured Fisher that her intimate relations with Mankiewicz had occurred before her marriage to him, and not during the filming of *Suddenly, Last Summer* in London. He looked as if he didn't really believe her.

"And how do you see the character you're about to play?" Mankiewicz asked. "Theda Bara played Cleopatra like a vamp, Claudette Colbert played her like...well, like Claudette Colbert, Tallulah Bankhead played her like Catherine the Great, and Vivien Leigh played her like a teenage vixen."

"She was more a tigress than a Brigitte Bardot sex kitten," Elizabeth said. "I think she was a very complicated woman—very ambitious, highly strung, fully aware that a great dynasty might end with her if she didn't maneuver carefully between Julius Caesar and Marc Antony. I identify with her. To me, Mike Todd was my Julius Caesar." She kissed Fisher on the lips. "Eddie is my Marc Antony."

Mankiewicz looked skeptically at Fisher.

Harrison joined Burton back in his dressing room, where he rethought his earlier assessment of Elizabeth's beauty. "This stuff about her being the most beautiful woman in the world is pure nonsense. She's a pretty girl, of course, and she has wonderful eyes. But she has a double chin and an overdeveloped chest—and she's rather short in the leg."

The following morning, she had to shoot her first scene with Burton. He arrived on the set battered from the previous night of carousing.

She immediately saw what bad shape he was in. "He was kind of quivering from head to foot and there were grog blossoms [skin blemishes] all over his face." Instead of turning her off to him, she became more sympathetic.

As she remembered it, "He ordered a cup of coffee to sort of still his trembling hands. I had to help it to his mouth, and that brought out my motherly instincts. He was so vulnerable, so sweet, so shaky. In my heart, I cwtched him—that's Welsh for 'hug'"



On location in Rome, the most famous woman of the modern world (**Elizabeth Taylor**) impersonates the most famous woman of the ancient world (Cleopatra) as she fine-tunes a doomed alliance with her future consort, Marc Antony (**Richard Burton**)

Even so, he pulled himself together until she felt he "had the grandeur of a Roman emperor's bust." The problem was, he kept blowing his lines.

In contrast, he found her "walking pornography." Fisher was on the set that day, handling her make-up man and costume personnel. As he described in his memoirs, "When she had emerged dressed in Cleopatra's golden

gown, I was very, very sad. I had this premonition that I had lost her. She no longer needed me. I broke down and cried."

Earlier, when Elizabeth had been shown to her dressing room, she said, "It's not a dressing room, it's a god damn house. All five rooms of it, even a room just for my wigs and an office for Eddie. At least those cocksuckers at Fox are not being cheap with me."

Fortunately, Fisher was not at the studio on January 22, 1962 when Mankiewicz directed Marc Antony and Cleopatra in their first love scene.

As Mankiewicz told producer Wanger, "Their succulent lips came together. He locked her into a deep, wet kiss. I ordered the scene reshot four times. I could feel their passion for each other. It was almost frightening, like an on-coming tornado. Finally, I had to say, 'Would you two mind if I say `cut?'"

The following afternoon, when the sun went behind clouds and it started to rain, Burton guided Elizabeth behind one of the faux sets. There, one of the grips spotted Burton masturbating Elizabeth.

In about twenty minutes, when her hairdresser, Sidney Guilaroff, located her, she was adjusting her costume. The rain had stopped. She looked back at Burton and was heard to say, "You are a horrible, horrible wretch of a bloke."

"If I were twice as horrible, I'd be perfect for you," he shot back, licking his fingers seductively.

At Cinecittà one morning, after working with Elizabeth for five days, Burton appeared on the set. In front of Chris Mankiewicz and other members of the crew, he said, "Gents," in his most impressive stentorian voice. "Last night I nailed Elizabeth in the back seat of my Cadillac."

The day following Burton's seduction of her in the Cadillac, she stood nude before her dressing room mirror in front of Guilaroff and ordered him to get her a large bath towel. She then requested he pick up a blonde Marlene Dietrich type wig from wardrobe, which he did.

Returning, he fitted the wig perfectly onto her head. She told him goodbye, as she headed toward Burton's dressing room, where she found the door unlocked.

Once inside, she heard him taking a shower. She came into the bathroom and pulled the plastic shower curtain back.

At first, he didn't recognize her. Then she dropped the towel, standing completely nude in front of him.

"How much do you charge, luv?" he asked.

During the making of Cleopatra, Elizabeth adopted a little German girl. She had been born with a crippling hip defect.

"I think Elizabeth would have left Fisher sooner, but with the arrival of those adoption papers, she stuck it out a little longer," Roddy claimed.

When Elizabeth was first shown the child, she remembered, "Her legs were so twisted that one was practically facing around the other way."

The nine-month-old girl, Petra Heisis, was renamed Maria in honor of actress Maria Schell, who had guided the Fishers to the deformed baby.

The girl had large saucer-shaped eyes and lots of curls. But she required extremely expensive operations on her legs, which her Bavarian parents could ill afford.

After seeing a specialist, Elizabeth was told that Maria had a malformation of the pelvis. If not surgically altered, she would be crippled for life.

Although the recovery after surgery would require two years in a full body cast, Elizabeth ordered the surgery, which she insisted be performed in London.

For two years, the baby girl was known as Maria Taylor before her last name was changed to Burton when she was adopted by him as well. As Elizabeth recalled, "I fell in love with Maria the first day she was shown to me. I knew how much she needed me to give her a proper, happy, and fulfilling life."

The adoption, which was legally finalized in Catholic Bavaria, would later enrage the Vatican. Pope John XXIII was said to have privately denounced Elizabeth as an unfit mother.

Elizabeth got on reasonably well with Rex Harrison during her scenes with him. He was involved in his own romantic entanglements, and didn't want to get embroiled in what he called "the onrushing affair that Richard is having with Elizabeth."

He was sensitive to his billing on Cleopatra and didn't want her to have too many star advantages over him. As a special bonus, Harrison was offered ongoing access to a chauffeur-driven Cadillac to take him to the studio from his Roman house along Via Antigua. One morning, he emerged from his house to encounter a Mercedes-Benz.



HOLLYWOOD ON THE TIBER (aka **ROMAN HOLIDAY**) Denouncing Elizabeth as an unfit mother: **Pope John XXIII**



REDEFINING FAMILY
Maria Heisig Taylor Burton (left figure in photo above); her adoptive mother (**Elizabeth Taylor**); and her stepsister **Lisa Todd** (right figure in photo above)

At the studio, in front of Mankiewicz, he threw a fit, claiming that he'd been promised a Cadillac, not a

Mercedes-Benz.

He also learned that Elizabeth's chauffeur was being paid more than his driver. He threatened to walk off the picture if his chauffeur wasn't paid an equivalent wage. "Why the bloody hell should her driver get more than mine just because she's got a bigger chest?"

On March 22, 1962, Harrison in Genoa would marry Rachel Roberts, a friend of Sybil Burton's since their days as novice actresses in Stratford-upon-Avon.

On the set one afternoon, when Elizabeth and Burton weren't needed in front of the camera, she sat talking to him. She wanted to know anything he cared to tell her about his life, because all she knew was that he had been born in Wales. He liked talking about himself and filled her in on his early life, perhaps exaggerating to make a better story.

"Olivier, Noël Coward, John Gielgud, all the sods, criticized me in 1952 when I gave up my acting career on the London stage to go to Hollywood," Burton said. "They said I sold out. But I have this driving need to blot out all my years of living in humiliating poverty as a kid."

"I was the twelfth of thirteen children. We lived in a broken-down shanty with no running water. I never knew my mother. She died giving birth to her last child. My father was a rotter, a coalminer who was too drunk to work. We had to borrow ten pounds to pay for my mother's funeral."

Richard Burton's original name was Richard Walter Jenkins, Jr., named after his father, of course. His coalminer dad was more widely known as "Dic Bach," who took home the equivalent of \$1.25 a week. Once, Elizabeth asked Burton why his father had such an unusual name. "I haven't a bloody clue," he told her.

Young Burton later learned four languages, but spoke only Welsh until the age of ten.

It was Philip Burton who took the seventeen-year-old into his home and taught him drama and literature, as well as details associated with homosexual sex. Burton always hated his biological father, Dic Bach, who died in 1957. Burton did not attend the funeral and proudly took the name of his mentor and older lover, Philip Burton.



How Green Was My Valley? Welsh schoolmaster **Philip Burton** (right) with his most brilliant pupil and adopted son, Richard Walter Jenkins, Jr. (aka, **Richard Burton**)

Philip was a preparatory school drama teacher and an authority on Shakespeare. He was immediately attracted to Richard, who was a stunning male beauty in his late teens and early twenties.

A homosexual, Philip invited the teenager to come and live with him in comfort, removing him from the poverty-ridden town of Pontrhydfen.

"I always considered Philip as my true father. I met him in high school. He was the most wonderful schoolmaster. He taught me to speak English and lose my Welsh accent. He taught me drama, literature, Shakespeare. The sad thing is that he's madly in love with me. I'm his entire life. Of course, as a young boy, I had only sex to offer him in exchange for all the wonderful things he was doing for me. Without Philip, I would probably be dead now after a brief life as a coal miner suffering from tuberculosis and malnutrition."

"I just pretend I attended Oxford," he told Elizabeth. "I only got so far as high school. However, while based for six months in a Royal Air Force camp near the Oxford campus, I attended some lectures at the university."

"When I broke into the London theatre, there were so many established actors willing to give me a tumble on their casting couches—John Gielgud, Noël Coward, Larry Olivier, Emlyn Williams, you name him."

"My wife, Sybil Williams, gave up her acting career for me. She's a great woman, and also a mother to me.

She reads my scripts, studies my contracts, picks out my clothes, worries about my whoring around, warning me, 'Don't pick up something with these whores you can't get rid of.'"

By his own admission, Burton was not strictly a heterosexual, although this didn't seem to bother Elizabeth a bit. She was used to bisexual men.

When Dick asked her about "the size" of Burton, she deliberately misinterpreted his question. "Oh, he's five feet, nine inches, the right size for me." Because of his large on-screen appearance, people who met him were astonished by how short he was.

One night, Elizabeth decided to invite the occupants of the "Villa Burton" to the Villa Pappa for dinner. Burton was living in the villa with Sybil, and also with Roddy McDowall and his lover, John Valva. As a favor to Roddy, Mankiewicz had cast Valva as "Valvus," a Roman soldier.

After dinner, Elizabeth and Burton got drunk on "Ivan the Terribles," a mind-bending blend of Grappa, Ouzo, and Russian vodka.

At one point over drinks, Fisher asked Burton, "Does a man really have to give a woman jewelry? Isn't that like buying a piece of ass?"

Burton lived up to his reputation as a marathon drinker. He gave a slob-bering Shakespearean monologue that lasted for nearly an hour until Sybil ordered him to sit down. Once seated, he asked for more liquor and became more provocative than ever. He turned to Fisher. "Noël Coward told me you have the most delectable ass. Remind me to sample it before I finish this bloody picture."

"Mr. Burton, my ass is only for shitting and sucking by a beautiful woman like Elizabeth here. You will never experience its pleasures. I am not a homosexual."

"Actually, I think all straight men should experience at least one good plugging up their arse so they'll know what it's like," Elizabeth said.

"I couldn't agree with you more," Burton said.

She turned to him and said, "I absolutely adore you in spite of that acne-pitted face of yours."

"And I think you're ravishing in spite of all that whale blubber," he countered.

"With that voice of yours, you are a prince among men," she said.

"Actually, I'm more of a frog than a prince," he told her.

Sitting at the head of the table, Elizabeth would bark orders at her Italian waiters, who spoke no English. "Pass around the roast suckling pig, you moth-erfucker. We're ready for the spaghetti, asshole."

The party ended disastrously when a bored Fisher, a major musical star in his own right, walked over and started playing the piano and singing. "Shut up!" Elizabeth shouted at him. "We're trying to talk."

He slammed down the piano top and stormed out of the room.

"Time I took my drunken old sod home," Sybil said, rising and reaching for Burton's arm. "Elizabeth, you're a delight. The dinner was spectacular. What was that unusual appetizer, by the way?"

"The tongues of flamingos," she said.

"That was the creamiest custard I've ever tasted," Burton said.

"I asked all members of my male staff to whack off in a bowl," Elizabeth said. "Their combined semen was whipped into the egg custard mix and also used to make the whipped cream extra thick."

"Oh, I think I'm going to be sick," Sybil said.

"Male semen," Dick Hanley said. "No wonder it tasted so good. I've now discovered my favorite new dessert."

Word reached Hollywood that the filming of Cleopatra was costing millions every week with little to show for it. Walter Wanger and Joseph Mankiewicz were said to have lost control of the budget.

Armed with a "flotilla" of accountants, Spyros Skouras himself made the long journey to Rome to find out what was going on.

Costs mounted, as Mankiewicz made outrageously bad decisions, including shooting scenes that would not be used and ordering sets constructed at exorbitant overtime costs that would sit idle for months—or else not be

used at all.

Mankiewicz hovered on the verge of a nervous breakdown, as he took amphetamine shots to keep working on his uncompleted script, getting by on three hours of sleep most nights.

Everything from outraged Fox stockholders and rampaging elephants plagued him, as did the “epic” battles between the Italian and American crews. He constantly gnawed his knuckles and finally came down with a nervous skin disease on his hands, forcing him to wear gloves.

In Rome to confront the mounting problems of filming Cleopatra, Skouras met first with Wanger. “I told you Burton was trash. Remember I didn’t want to hire him. It’s your god damn fault.”

“Actually, all this worldwide publicity about Cleopatra will make Burton a bigger star than ever, and Elizabeth a living legend,” Wanger said.

“OK, I grant that about Miss Taylor, our resident whore, but Burton will never be a star,” Skouras said. “Mark my words.”

The next day, after watching the rushes of Cleopatra, Skouras changed his mind. He invited Burton for lunch and offered him contracts for two more pictures. “Make-up can fill in these hideous pockmarks,” he told the actor.

Back in Hollywood, someone had tipped off Skouras about some romantic entanglement between Burton and Elizabeth.

It had been a peaceful luncheon. Actually, Elizabeth’s name never came up. That’s why Burton was shocked when he received a hot-tempered memo which was delivered to him in his dressing room later that day. The letter to Burton instructed him to “clean up your act.”

On receiving it, the Welshman flew into a rage. He had learned that an equivalent letter was on its way to Elizabeth’s villa. He called her and warned her to expect it.

She then flew into her own rage, calling Skouras’ office and threatening to walk off the picture if such a letter arrived at her villa. Skouras was able to contact the delivery boy just in time to intercept and retrieve the accusatory memo he’d sent.



Cleopatra
An Über-Diva checks her make-up.

Still saddled with unhappy memories about his star role in Alexander the Great (1956), which had been panned by critics, and now faced with studio disapproval about his involvement in Cleopatra, Burton ripped his copy of Skouras’ memo into shreds.

Soonafter, he accidentally ran into a reporter from Variety who had been sent to Rome. He answered no personal questions about his private life, but he apologized for appearing in another “sex and scandal” epic. He announced to the reporter that his next picture would be a screen adaptation of Shakespeare’s The Taming of the Shrew opposite Marilyn Monroe. When he’d had an affair with Monroe in Hollywood, she’d told him that her great dream involved appearing in a Shakespeare drama, although she had not yet read one of his plays or seen one performed on the stage.

Ironically, he would film The Taming of the Shrew (1967), but with Elizabeth as his co-star, as Monroe had

been murdered in 1962.

Over dinner that night, Roddy discovered that Burton had never seen one of Elizabeth's movies. "I really can't judge her as an actress," he said. "All I know about her is she gets sick and she gets married."

When the first rushes of *Cleopatra* came in, Roddy invited Burton to come and look at them.

As he witnessed the magic relationship she had with the camera, he began to change his mind about her as an actress. "She surprised the devil out of me. She seemed to sleepwalk through our rehearsals. She doesn't come alive until the camera focuses on her. She sure knows how to turn it on then."

Back at the Villa Pappa, the talk was not of Elizabeth as an actress, but of Burton. Earlier in the day, she'd received a call from Monty, who had seen three of Burton's movies. "I'm not impressed," he told her. "He's self-indulgent. I feel that when he speaks, he is merely listening to the sound of his own voice—and getting off on that. To me, that is not acting. It's masturbation."

After the call, she was deeply disturbed. She'd come to believe that Burton was the greatest actor on the stage, even better than Olivier. But now, she feared that her romantic attachment to him was taking the place of her sound judgment. Would she, in fact, be laughed off the screen during her scenes with him?

She couldn't present any of these fears to Fisher, lest she tip him off about her growing sexual interest in Burton.

Besides, when she communicated with her husband these days, he was smoking a cigar, the kind Mike Todd always preferred, and wanted to talk about film projects subsequent to *Cleopatra*, now that she was no longer under contract to MGM. "We must decide what your next film will be after this session in hell called *Cleopatra*," he said.

"At that point in their relationship, Fisher seemed more like Elizabeth's business manager than her husband," Roddy said. "He hovered over her like a hawk. He allowed her only one glass of red wine at night. Imagine that allowance for Elizabeth, she of the hollow leg."

Personally, Elizabeth wanted to star in a movie based on the life of Isadora Duncan, the American dancer. The problem with that idea was that Elizabeth could not dance. She next told Fisher that she wanted someone to write a script for her based on the life of Sarah Bernhardt.

Fisher rejected such ideas as preposterous and beyond her range. He wanted something "sleazy and sexy" that would almost guarantee millions at the box office.

He was negotiating several movie deals for her, including *The Carpetbaggers*, based on Harold Robbin's steamy bestselling novel that was loosely based on Howard Hughes' involvements in Hollywood.

When Elizabeth rejected all of his ideas, he came up with another project that had more prestige, a vehicle that would cast her opposite Charlie Chaplin.

The film projected with Chaplin was entitled *The Gouffré Case*. It was based on a novel by German author Joachim Mass in which Elizabeth would be cast as a murderess in turn-of-the-20th-Century Paris. Chaplin was to come out of retirement to play the aging police inspector who goes after her.

Encouraged by Elizabeth, Fisher flew north to have lunch with Chaplin, who was in retirement at Vevey, Switzerland. Chaplin welcomed him with grace and listened attentively to the film proposal.

Assistant director Hank Moonjean and John Valva, Roddy's lover, accompanied Fisher to Switzerland. At Vevey, these men discovered Chaplin living in a house that looked like a miniature version of the White House in Washington, D.C. They were introduced to his pregnant and much younger wife, Oona O'Neill Chaplin, the estranged daughter of the famous playwright Eugene O'Neill, who had strenuously opposed her marriage to Chaplin.



Charles Chaplin with Oona O'Neill Chaplin in 1975.

As Moonjean later reported, the lunch was interrupted by Chaplin every fifteen minutes, rising from the table and performing "a strange little dance" for them, in which he used the cane and top hat he'd worn in all those silent films as The Little Tramp.

Finally, at the end of the luncheon, Chaplin told Fisher, "You're a good salesman, and I'm flattered by the offer, an old man like me. But I must turn it down. However, I'd love to meet Miss Taylor. I've known Marilyn Monroe intimately, as have my sons, but I never had a chance to meet Miss Taylor and introduce her to the eighth wonder of the world."

It had to be explained to Fisher later that The Little Tramp was actually referring to his legendary twelve-inch penis, which had been enjoyed by everyone from Mae West to America's most famous evangelist, Aimee Semple McPherson, plus dozens of bimbos in the countless brothels he used to frequent.

From Vevey, Fisher and his friends drove to the chic ski resort of Gstaad. He and Elizabeth had been advised to establish a residence in Switzerland as a means of avoiding painful American income tax. He had been told that a Texas oil millionaire had built the Chalet Ariel for his ballerina bride, but the marriage never survived the honeymoon.

The elegant Chalet Ariel was on the market for about \$350,000. He called Elizabeth in Rome, telling her it was idyllic for both of them and their children, although he warned that it might cost another \$100,000 in renovations.

"Buy the fucker!" she said.

Her neighbors would include the Aga Khan, Robert Wagner, Julie Andrews, and Peter Sellers.

After signing the papers, Fisher headed for Geneva for a final stopover. He liked to spend money as much as Mike Todd had done, even if it wasn't his own loot he was tossing about. In Geneva, he bought a \$50,000 diamond necklace for Elizabeth from the prestigious jeweler, Vacheron Constantin.

Valva thought Elizabeth would "adore" the necklace, and he wanted to be at the Villa Pappa to see the expression on her face when Fisher presented her with the costly gift.

In Rome, Valva later asserted that Elizabeth examined the necklace very skeptically. "How much did you pay?" she asked. When Fisher told her, she said, "There's not one god damn good stone in it. You were taken."

Nonetheless, on his birthday, she presented him with another Rolls-Royce, this one a sports coupe in emerald green. In return, he purchased for her an ivory-colored Maserati as a means of celebrating Christmas of 1961.

After inviting Dick Hanley to go for a drive with her long the Appian Way in her new Maserati, she returned disappointed and skeptical to the Villa Pappa. "I detest this junk heap," she told Fisher on her way upstairs. Dick said that Fisher looked utterly humiliated, but later got his money back by selling it to actor Anthony Quinn, who was in Rome at the time.

When Burton heard about the purchase of the chalet in Gstaad, he told Roddy that, "The best gift Eddie can give Elizabeth is the ruby-tipped snake he keeps inside his trousers."

What Burton knew, or didn't know, about Fisher's penis at that time remains something of a mystery.

Roddy was among the first to realize how serious the love affair between Elizabeth and Burton had become. "Although she still wore Eddie's wedding ring, Burton asked her to take off the wedding band that had been retrieved from the wreckage of Mike Todd's airplane in New Mexico. Her removal of Todd's ring was a symbol of the influence Burton had in her life. I feared that Eddie's day as the consort to the Queen was nearing its end."

On January 26, 1962, Mankiewicz broke the news to Wanger: "I've been sitting on a volcano for too long. Burton and Liz are not just playing Antony and Cleopatra."

His announcement was the first of what became the most public adultery in film history.

Jack Brodsky, Fox's assistant publicity manager in Rome, became, in his words, "more sought-after than the Pope, at least for a while. Every reporter was trying to get the scoop from me."

Burton was consumed with such guilt he spent sleepless nights. He was especially concerned with Sybil and his family, including his young daughter, Jessica, who had been born mentally retarded. [She was later diagnosed as an autistic schizophrenic and was placed in a mental institution at the age of six.]

At a private meeting with Wanger, the producer urged Burton to go back to his wife, warning that "this thing with Elizabeth can ultimately harm everybody. Fuck Elizabeth on the side if you must, but don't destroy Sybil and bring harm to your family."

At least for the moment, Burton seemed to agree with this assessment.

Within his villa, Burton had a long talk with Roddy, who, while still one of Elizabeth's closest friends, was also extremely friendly with Sybil and wanted Burton to save his marriage and be a father to his two daughters.

Although he knew that Elizabeth would turn on him, feeling that he had betrayed her, Roddy nonetheless urged Burton to drive over to the Villa Pappa—"and put an end to this whole thing. It can only cause pain for everybody."

Burton finally agreed and, without warning Elizabeth, got into his car and drove to confront her.

On February 16, 1962, at 10pm, Burton walked into Villa Pappa. Elizabeth must have known something was wrong because he did not rush to take her in his arms, as he usually did. He had a stern look on his face. As he'd tell Roddy, "I wanted to make it short and sweet and get it over with."

To her stunned face, he said, "Our love affair was just one of those things that often happens between a leading man and a leading lady when they make a film together. It was fun, luv, while it lasted." Then he turned his back and headed for the front door. All he heard in the background were her sobs.

As Elizabeth confessed in a memoir, "I had to be with Richard. I knew it was wrong. I knew it would hurt people. I knew. I knew. But I also knew what I had to do. God help me. I had to be with Richard."

She became so upset that she raged through the villa breaking glass. Dick had to restrain her and called her doctor, Rex Kennamer, to give her a sedative. He phoned Mankiewicz that Elizabeth would not be able to report to work.

At around noon of the following day, Wanger went to the Villa Pappa to check on Elizabeth's condition. He found her in bed but barely awake. She told him she'd taken a sleeping pill and hadn't eaten in twenty-four hours.

He went downstairs to ask the chef to prepare her a sandwich and pour her a glass of milk.

Suddenly, her upstairs maid came running downstairs and into the kitchen, holding up an empty bottle. "Miss Taylor...Miss Taylor. She's taken these pills."

Wanger ordered Dick to call an ambulance as he rushed upstairs and pulled a nude Elizabeth from bed. He practically walked her, dragged her, around the room until the ambulance arrived.

Someone in her household tipped off the newspapers. When the ambulance pulled up at the emergency entrance of the Salvator Mundi Hospital, at least thirty paparazzi were there.

Wanger put out a story that she'd consumed some "bad oysters and was suffering an acute case of food poisoning."

Roman newspaper editors were too savvy to fall for that line. That night, the entire world, it seemed, learned that LIZ TAYLOR ATTEMPTS SUICIDE OVER BURTON AFFAIR.

Sybil had already flown out of Rome heading for New York to tend to an ailing Philip Burton, her father-in-law. She faced reporters demanding to know when she was filing for a divorce. She dismissed such claims. "Elizabeth is one of my best friends. I absolutely adore her. There is no romance between Richard and her—no divorce coming up."

Burton was stunned at the newspaper coverage of their affair. "I've had affairs before," he said. "But how did I know she was so bloody famous? She knocks Khrushchev off the fucking front page."

After Burton's rejection, Elizabeth, in the words of publicist Jack Brodsky, "went coconuts. She wanted to junk the whole picture and bankrupt Fox. Imagine any guy turning her down."

Brodsky was asked if Burton were merely a beard for the Mankiewicz/Taylor affair. Jokingly, Brodsky asserted that the real story was "I'm the one in love with Richard Burton. Elizabeth is the cover-up for us. Send it out!"

Believe it or not, that comment from Brodsky went out on the Associated Press wire services.

Mankiewicz added to the gay rumors by standing in full view of a stunned journalist. Mankiewicz then grabbed Burton, placing his hand firmly on his crotch and tongue-kissed him for about a minute. He then turned to the journalist and said, "There you are. I'm the one having the affair with Richard here."

Time magazine reported that Elizabeth was merely using a rumored affair with Burton to conceal the real truth. "She is mad, mad, mad for her personable director, Joseph L. Mankiewicz, who is fifty-three years old."

Wanger greeted Burton when he returned to the set. In his journal, the producer wrote: "The romance is front page all over the world. Reporters are flocking like vultures to Rome from all over the continent. Burton on the set today—very gay, cocky, with a glass of beer in his hand. When he came to this picture some months ago, he was a well-known star but not famous. His salary was good but not huge. Suddenly, his name has become a household word. His salary for his next movie has skyrocketed. The romance has changed his life, but I don't think he realizes how deeply involved he is."

In New York, Monty told Marlon Brando at the Actors Studio, "Poor Bessie Mae. She's hooked up with a hustler. She's the most famous woman in the world, and he's using her to promote his own career. I am told that Burton wants fame at any price."

Hundreds of newspeople wanted interviews, but Burton rarely granted them. He did tell a reporter in Rome, "I will never leave Sybil. She loves and understands me."

The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1960 may have brought the United States and the Soviet Union to the brink of nuclear disaster, but the illicit love affair of Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor seemingly generated more headlines.

An extracurricular affair between two world famous stars would hardly merit such attention today—in fact, would be commonplace. But in a different time and place, "Liz & Dick," as they were called, were accused of sparking the sexual revolution that grew to fruition before the end of the decade of "free love."

When Truman Capote came to Rome for a visit and saw the affair up close, he was skeptical. "Elizabeth loved Burton. He didn't love her. He wanted her because he wanted to be an international movie star, far bigger than the picture actor he was. That was the career he wanted—money, money, and more money."

Sometimes, Elizabeth was enraged at the press coverage, screaming about how unfair it was. "The most famous man on the planet, John F. Kennedy, is fucking the second most famous woman on earth, Marilyn Monroe, and not a word gets into the press. But let me screw around with some Welsh actor and the media goes apeshit."

Distressed about his diminished importance within Elizabeth's emotional landscapes, Fisher didn't know what to do. He went and purchased a revolver which he carried with him at all times, planning at some point to assassinate Burton, perhaps even to shoot Elizabeth, too. He told Roddy, "In Italy, the courts are easy on crimes of passion."

When Elizabeth showed up on the set to film a love scene with Burton, "The tension was so great that you could cut it with a knife," Mankiewicz said. "I told Burton he'd better go to her dressing room and work things out. He was in there for three hours, and I just assumed they'd made love. He later told me, 'I now know the truth: I can't live without her. We're back together again.'"

In the meantime, Sara and Francis Taylor had flown to Rome from California, although Elizabeth didn't really want them.

Throughout the filming of Cleopatra, a sleek white Roman ambulance was seen parked day after day outside

the studio. Wanger had ordered it "in case Elizabeth tries suicide again." The crew referred to it as "the suicide mobile." A gleaming silver-colored stomach pump had been installed as part of its equipment.

The next day, Burton was accompanied to Bulgari, according to publicist Jack Brodsky, by a procession "of parents" (Sara and Francis), a hairdresser (Guilaroff), and other members of Elizabeth's court to purchase an emerald necklace for her for \$150,000. Francis actually made the final selection.

"I introduced her to beer," Burton later said. "She introduced me to Bulgari."

When Fisher showed up on the set of *Cleopatra*, he went first to seek Burton instead of heading directly for Elizabeth's dressing room. He discovered Burton discussing a scene with Mankiewicz. Before Fisher could say anything, Burton moved menacingly close to the singer.

"You don't need her any more," Burton said to Fisher, standing so close to his face he was peppering the singer with his saliva. "You're already a star. I'm not, but she's going to make me one. I'm going to use her, that no-talent Hollywood nothing." Burton made this astonishing statement in front of Mankiewicz, who later revealed it in an interview long after *Cleopatra* had been released to theaters.

That night, over a private dinner with Roddy, Elizabeth shared her own feelings about Burton. She was surprisingly articulate: "He's a devious snakepit of contradictions. If a prefrontal lobotomy was performed on him, like what Katharine Hepburn wanted to have done on me, out of Richard's skull would emerge poisonous snakes, tadpoles, frogs, worms, and bats from hell. What a man! I get an orgasm just listening to his voice."

The next day, on the set of *Cleopatra*, Burton proved Elizabeth's point that he was a man of contradictions, coming up with a completely different set of feelings about her.

While Fisher was talking to a seated Elizabeth, Burton walked over and reached to fondle one of her breasts. "You know, old thing, I'm in love with your girl."

"She's not my girl." Fisher snapped. "She's my wife and she's going to remain my wife."

"Okay, Dummkopf, I'm in love with your bloody wife then."

Elizabeth sat silently through this exchange and made no attempt to remove Burton's hand from her breast.

At around five o'clock that afternoon, Dick and Roddy arrived at Burton's dressing room before Elizabeth and the entourage came to patronize what had become known as "Burton's Bar."

Sitting in the nude in front of his vanity mirror, removing his makeup, Burton told Elizabeth's two friends, "The woman who brings out the best in a man—who is good in bed—is very rare. In my entire life, I've enjoyed only four such women—Elizabeth Taylor, Marilyn Monroe, Jackie Kennedy, and an almost toothless middle age maid in Jamaica."

Although she didn't exactly announce it to the world, Elizabeth was attracted sexually to Burton as she had been to no other man, not even the aging Mike Todd, who had been her greatest lover before Burton.

Biographer Kitty Kelley wrote: "In this one man seemed to be all the men she had ever loved. As rich as Nicky Hilton, Richard Burton possessed Michael Wilding's quicksilver humor and Mike Todd's energy and command. He was as physical as Ingemar Johansson, as intellectual as Max Lerner, as mellifluous as Frank Sinatra and Eddie Fisher."

Elizabeth also wasn't satisfied just acting out dramatic scenes on the screen. She wanted a daily drama going on in her private life, too—and Burton was the man to do that.

A drunken Burton showed up unexpectedly at a dinner party at Villa Pappa at which Elizabeth and Fisher were entertaining twelve guests. Dick knew better than to turn him away, and therefore ushered him into the dining room. Burton immediately got into an altercation with Fisher.



The Ruin of Ptolmaic Egypt Starring **Cleopatra** and **Marc Antony**

"Why don't you go back to your own home, you bastard?" Fisher said. "Go back to Sybil. She's your woman, not Elizabeth. Elizabeth is mine."

"Fuck you, you little faggot," Burton said. "They're both my women." He looked over at Elizabeth. "Are you my woman?" His voice grew louder. "Well, are you? If you are, get your fat ass over her and stick your tongue down my throat."

Elizabeth stood up and staggered toward Burton. In front of her other guests, she lip locked with him.

Fisher rose from his chair, staring in amazement and humiliation.

When Burton broke from Elizabeth's lips, he turned to Fisher. "Keep her warm for me, okay?"

Aided by Dick, Burton staggered toward the door, where Dick helped him into his car to drive him back to his villa.

"He was a total basket case," Dick later claimed. "He told me that Sybil was in London."

At his villa, Burton asked Dick to put him to bed. In his elegantly decorated boudoir, Burton told Dick that he had to "take an urgent piss" and asked him to "take me to the bathroom." Dick led him into the bathroom and directed him to the bowl. "I can't do it," Burton said. "Take it out for me."

Dick unzipped Burton's trousers, reached in, and removed his uncut cock, which he aimed toward the bowl. "After he took a horse piss, I shook it for him."

"He then ordered me to undress him and put him to bed. I did as I was told. Before I left, he grabbed me and held my face close to his and stuck his tongue in my mouth. The next morning, when I saw him, I don't think he even remembered my taking him home. I had never seen a man as wasted as he could get."

An even more intense drama was unleashed the following Sunday night when Burton once again arrived unannounced at the Villa Pappa.

On that occasion, Fisher was as intoxicated as Elizabeth and Burton. "It was the strangest and most unexpected night I ever spent at the Villa Pappa," Dick recalled.

On that particular evening, Burton seemed in a confessional mood. "I've heard that Elizabeth's friends, faggots, like that Capote and Monty Clift, even that cocksucker Marlon Brando, are claiming that I'm just a hustler, using Elizabeth here as a stepping stone to stardom."

"Are you?" she asked him.

In front of her guests, Burton admitted to her, "You're a good piece of ass, but I'm also becoming a household word around the world—and I was never that before."

"She burst into tears and ran from the villa," Dick said. "Two of her security guards chased after her."

Watching her leave, Burton said, "You know I don't give a fuck where she's going."

A drunken Fisher looked at him. "Neither do I. For the first time in my life, I don't give a hot damn."

"Eddie, tonight I'm going to do what had been my original intention," Burton told him. "When I got to Rome, I always planned to fuck your ass. I wasn't even thinking of Elizabeth's honeypot. Tonight, I'm going to fuck you. You can take it willingly, like a man, or else I'm going to rape you. Either way, you're going to get it. Your choice."

Dick searched Fisher's face, expecting him to put up massive resistance. He found none. If anything, Fisher looked like an abused, defeated man who might surrender to anything. "I always knew that's what you really wanted to do," Fisher said to Burton. "I knew it was going to happen sometime. I might as well endure it and get it over with. Let's go upstairs."

As Dick stood in semi-shock, watching Fisher head up the stairs with Burton, Fisher called back to him. "If word of this gets out, I'll claim that Richard raped me when I was drunk."

Roddy was a late arrival at Villa Pappa that night. When he came into the living room, Dick told him what was going on upstairs between Fisher and Burton.

"I'm not at all surprised," Roddy said.

"Eddie is always denying he's a homosexual," Dick said. "But he's one of us."

"He's bi," Roddy said. "I think Elizabeth likes bisexual men. Look at her track record. I've known about Eddie for a long time."

Roddy claimed that once, after Fisher had left Debbie Reynolds during their marriage, that he'd rented an apartment on Sunset Boulevard. "While he was there, his most frequent sleepover was that gorgeous little hunk, Ricky Nelson. Ricky is bi himself, and most of inside Hollywood knows that. Ricky has had two big crushes in his life—Eddie Fisher and Elvis Presley."

"That explains why Eddie went so willingly upstairs to his fate," Dick said. "The little shit is probably enjoying it."

Two hours passed before Burton emerged from upstairs. Fisher remained in the master bedroom.

Glenys Roberts, writing in London's Daily Mail, on the 20th anniversary of Burton's death in 2004, wrote: "Some claim Burton first tried to seduce Liz's then husband, Eddie Fisher, and turned to her only when he was rebuffed."

That was not exactly what Dick reported.

Outside, Burton got into a vehicle driven by his chauffeur and presumably headed home.

After telling Roddy good night, Dick drove to his own apartment. When he got there, he found Elizabeth sitting up in his bed having a drink. She had let herself into his apartment with a passkey he'd given her.

She told him that she'd called her bedroom telephone at Villa Pappa and was shocked when Burton picked up the receiver.

"When he heard who it was, he said, 'Hello, luv, I'm fucking your husband right now. One tight ass on our little Jew boy, a perfect bottom, and he's loving it.' Then the jerk slammed down the phone on me."

About fifteen minutes later, there was a pounding on Dick's apartment door. Burton was shouting, demanding to be let in.

Elizabeth ordered Dick to keep him out, but he disobeyed her, because he knew that Burton would break down the apartment's rather thin door.

"He came into my living room like a madman," Dick said. "He was calling her every name he could—some in Welsh. I recognized the word 'cunt' repeated endlessly. Like a caveman, he headed for the bedroom."

There, Burton discovered Elizabeth in bed by herself. In front of Dick, he ripped off her bedcovers. "You fucking sagging-titted, no-talent Hollywood cunt!" he shouted at her. "Eddie loves you so much, and you treat him like shit. From now on, I'll be fucking him instead of you!"

Of course, that drunken threat was never realized. Far from being offended, she seemed excited by this abuse.

As she told Life magazine in December of 1964, "I adore fighting with Richard. It's rather like a small atom bomb going off. Sparks fly, walls shake, floors reverberate!"

"He practically dragged her out the door," Dick said. "She seemed to love it. I knew she'd gotten off on Mike Todd beating the shit out of her. The pattern was being repeated with Burton. They disappeared for two days,

and no one knew where they went. I was the poor sucker who had to call Mankiewicz the following morning. Did I ever get hell!"

Mankiewicz was asked what it was like to work with such temperamental stars. "When you're in a cage with tigers, you never let them know you're afraid of them—or they'll eat you." The director responded. "The one thing I could expect from them was the unexpected. If Elizabeth and Sybil weren't enough for Richard to handle, he showed up one day with a bimbo."

During his appearance on Broadway in Camelot, Burton had launched a torrid affair with Pat Tunder, a beautiful showgirl from the Copacabana.

From Rome, he'd sent her a ticket to join him during the filming of Cleopatra. "I'm importing a piece of ass," he told Roddy.

On the day after Tunder's arrival, Burton did not show up on the set until eleven the following morning. He arrived with a hangover and one arm protectively around Tunder. Elizabeth was forty feet away, surveying his arrival with the showgirl.

Publicist Brodsky later said, "Elizabeth just stood there, looking daggers at both Burton and the Copa-cutie. Ironically, those daggers were mixed with steamy, passionate stares. After make-up, Burton walked over to her. An angry Elizabeth confronted him. 'You kept us waiting.'"

"What a switch," he said. "It's about time someone kept you waiting for a change."

After being confronted with Elizabeth's anger, fueled by jealousy, Wanger ordered Tunder off the set. Two days later, he arranged for his office to provide her with a one-way ticket back to New York.

In addition to everything else, I didn't need three females battling over who was going to get Dick Burton's cock," he said. "I'm under constant attack from the offices of Fox in Hollywood and New York. They claim that the Taylor/Burton affair is like a cancer growing on us. If this budget keeps ballooning, I've been warned that there may be no 21st Century Fox."

With Tunder safely out of the way, Burton somehow got Elizabeth to forgive him for this indiscretion with a showgirl. It would become a pattern repeated often during the two times they would marry in the future.

Just as Elizabeth began to feel secure that Burton might divorce Sybil and marry her, an unforeseen event happened: Richard was summoned to Paris to appear in a cameo for Darryl F. Zanuck in his production of *The Longest Day*, a big-budget film epic detailing the D-Day invasion of Normandy during June of 1944.

From London, Sybil flew to Paris to rejoin her errant husband. Reporters spotted them having dinner at Maxim's. That night, Burton downed three stiff drinks of vodka and three bottles of champagne.

As he was leaving the restaurant, reporters crowded around him. "Are you going to marry Elizabeth Taylor?" one of them shouted at him.

"I'm already married to Sybil here," Burton said. "And I'm staying married."

This interchange was reported in the Paris newspapers the following morning, and Dick relayed the news to a disappointed Elizabeth.



Richard Burton: Re-enacting the Allied Invasion of Normandy was less stressful than filming Cleopatra in Rome.

Back in Rome after completing his assignment on *The Longest Day*, Burton claimed that the rumors of an affair with Elizabeth were “bloody nonsense.”

Fisher seemed to realize that Elizabeth was still pining for Burton, and he volunteered to go to Switzerland to spend time there, allowing her to sort out her dilemma of which man to love.

“At that time, poor Eddie was grasping for straws,” said Roddy.

“Oh, no Eddie,” Elizabeth pleaded. “Don’t leave me...ever!”

“I talked with Richard when he got back from Paris,” Roddy said. “He just couldn’t make up his mind...Sybil or Elizabeth.”

On the set the next day, Burton was hung over and so was Elizabeth. They’d spent the night together in Dick Hanley’s apartment. At least for that one night, the choice had been Elizabeth. Burton tried to explain it to Roddy. “I need Sybil for emotional support and Elizabeth for sex.”

For lunch, Burton and Elizabeth agreed to meet with scriptwriter Philip Dunne, who urged Burton to agree to accept the role of Michelangelo in *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, with Spencer Tracy playing the Pope. Burton promised to get back to him with a decision about that offer.

“They spent all their time with me fighting with each other, and I knew that Burton wasn’t really interested in playing the difficult role of Michelangelo,” Dunne said. “Of course, Charlton Heston was only too eager.”

As the Burton/Taylor love affair heated up, the members of Burton’s entourage who were loyal to Sybil, mostly those from England and Wales, bonded together to defend her.

Burton had hired Ifor Jenkins, his brother from Wales, as his bodyguard. Jenkins became so enraged at Burton for what he was doing to Sybil “that he beat the shit out of him,” Roddy claimed. “Richard had a black eye, a cut lip, and a rip on his cheek. He missed several days of work until his face healed.”

His fellow Welshman, the respected playwright and actor Emyln Williams, a former lover of Burton’s and a great admirer of Sybil’s, flew to Rome to chastise him. Williams and Burton got into a shouting match. “Elizabeth Taylor is just a third-rate chorus girl,” Williams claimed.

Unfortunately, Williams delivered that assessment just as Elizabeth walked into the room. Consequently, he faced a stream of obscenities worse than any lorry driver could have delivered in any of the seedy pubs of Wales.

After confronting one attack after another, Burton became fed up with people telling him what to do. “So I said to Liz, ‘Fuck it! Let’s go out to fucking Alfredo’s and have some fucking fettuccine.’”

When Burton complained about being hounded day and night by the press, Brodsky reminded him: “You can’t deny an affair with Elizabeth and then be seen alone with her on the Via Veneto at three in the morning.”

Burton referred to the relentless paparazzi who followed them day and night as “ravenous jackals.” Their affair was viewed as an event of such international importance that it was written about by journalists who usually covered only politics.

Walter Lippmann, America’s most respected journalist and winner of two Pulitzer Prizes, arrived in Rome to record his own impression of “the Liz & Dick saga.” Elizabeth and Richard were friendly with the noted journalist, but gave him no insight into their private life.

He noted that the Nubian slaves who were hired as part of Cleopatra’s grand entourage into Rome had to be painted black because Mankiewicz had decided that “they weren’t black enough.” Also, this costly scene had to be reshot for \$155,000 because one member of the public had not been chased away. He was filmed in modern dress, among hundreds of extras, sitting on a stone eating an ice cream cone.

Elizabeth trusted her butler, Fred Oates, until he gave an interview to Photoplay. In it, he called her “a dictatorial empress, a true-to-life Queen of the Nile who treated her husband like a virtual slave, rejected telephone calls from her parents, invited guests for supper and then refused to dine with them.” He referred to Fisher as “a submissive man” in the article. Needless to say, Elizabeth hired a new butler.

Max Lerner more or less agreed with Oates about Fisher. He wrote, “Elizabeth Taylor devoured men like

Eddie Fisher for breakfast and spat them out at lunch. She couldn't stomach weakness in a male. Vulnerability, yes; sappiness, no."

Meanwhile, Fisher had flown to New York for recording sessions. He tried to put up a brave front.

In New York on March 30, 1962, Fisher held a press conference, denouncing claims of his wife's romantic involvement with Burton as "preposterous, ridiculous, absolutely false."



Congress Reacts as Cleo Goes Global:

German-language poster for "Kleopatra." Inset photo: Crusading Georgia Congresswoman **Iris Blitch**

In front of reporters, he placed a call to Elizabeth in Rome. He said he wanted her to announce that there was no foundation to the Taylor/Burton romantic rumors.

"Well, Eddie," she said, as they listened in. "I can't do that because there is some truth in the story."

"Thanks a lot," he snapped at her before slamming down the phone. In full public view, in front of a coterie of journalists, he had been humiliated.

Le scandale, as it came to be called, drew fire from around the world. On the floor of Congress, Iris Blitch, a Democrat from Georgia, called for the revocation of Elizabeth's passport.

Ironically, Blitch sent her protests to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, not knowing that he found Elizabeth "desirable" and not "undesirable," based on his own sexual trysts with her in Hollywood. Of course, RFK took no action on Blitch's demand.

"Blitch?" he asked his staff. "Now what does that rhyme with?"

At the dedication ceremony of his library in Abilene, Kansas, Dwight D. Eisenhower denounced "the vulgarity, the sensuality, and, indeed, the downright garbage that Hollywood uses to promote its latest assault on morality and decency." He did not mention Burton and Elizabeth by name.

The world press began to denounce Elizabeth, Rome's *Il Tempo* calling her "this vamp who destroys families and shucks husbands like a praying mantis."

Vatican Radio claimed the Taylor/Burton affair endangered the "moral health of society." *L'Osservatore della Domenica* called Elizabeth an "erotic vagrant."

Pope John XXIII himself, or so it was said, when reading the draft of the Vatican attack on Elizabeth, had personally written in the phrase "erotic vagrancy."

"Elizabeth didn't give a cup of rat's piss what the Pope or the Vatican had to say about her morals," said Roddy. "In fact, Richard and Elizabeth basked in their notoriety, heading off together for a weekend of romance and primal screams."

Elizabeth and Richard slipped away to the small coastal resort of Porto Santo Stefano, positioned some one-hundred miles north of Rome.

That night, Elizabeth and Burton got into a violent fight over his refusal to divorce Sybil.

In the bathroom, she grabbed a bottle of Seconal and swallowed all of them.

When he realized what she'd done, he plunged his fingers down her throat, making her vomit. "She was foaming at the mouth," he later said.

The reception desk was able to summon a local doctor to check her out, and the incident, at least for the moment, was kept out of the press.

According to Burton, the next day, a Sunday, "We drank ourselves to the point of stupefaction and idiocy."

Another fight erupted. As it was later revealed, he beat her brutally, evocative of her fistfights with Mike Todd.

She suffered a black eye and facial contusions before he tossed her battered body into a Fiat and drove her back to Rome at the speed of one hundred miles an hour. One Italian patrolman pursued them, but Burton outran him as Elizabeth screamed for him to go faster.

She later confessed to Roddy, "I really wanted him to speed up and rush to our deaths. If he couldn't be mine, I didn't want Sybil to have him."

Back at Villa Pappa, Fisher discovered a badly bruised Elizabeth recovering from her weekend getaway north of Rome with Burton. Nothing had changed. If anything, she was more withdrawn from him than ever, and he reported, "We often ate our meals without saying a word to each other."

Fisher read in the tabloids the next day that he "looked as gaunt as a second-hand scarecrow." The tension over losing his wife was destroying his health, and he had been unsuccessful in New York in securing any singing engagements worth his while.

In response to Elizabeth's weekend getaway, Mankiewicz had to announce another costly delay in the filming of Cleopatra until her face healed.

It all became too much for Fox in Hollywood. "The heads rolled that weekend," said Roddy. "Elizabeth and Richard had to put their personal problems aside and deal with a major shakeup at Fox."

Millions were being spent on Cleopatra, and Fox was going bankrupt. Enraged stockholders fired Spyros Skouras as president. Walter Wanger was fired as Cleopatra's producer, and Mankiewicz was fired as its director.

[Although Mankiewicz had been ousted, he was later re-hired because no one else could piece together the extraordinarily long film during post-production.]

The enormous cost of completing Cleopatra more or less brought an end to the "sword and sandals" epics that had flourished during the 1950s, one of which had been Burton's own Alexander the Great (1956).

Mistress-collecting Darryl F. Zanuck, who had been ousted from the studio and had been temporarily living in Paris and planning a career as an independent producer, was reinstated as President of Fox. It was the company's stockholders who asked him to come back, believing that he might be the only executive who could save Fox from bankruptcy.

Zanuck's first move involved selling off Fox's back lot to real estate developers, who transformed it into Century City, a sprawling commercial and residential complex on Los Angeles' west side.

When Zanuck saw the rushes of Cleopatra, he was enraged, referring to it as "total chaos. The performers act like inmates in an asylum. The dialogue is overwrought."

Later, when he viewed a preliminary version of the film, which had been cut to a running length of five hours, he delivered a malapropism more suited to Samuel Goldwyn, who was famous for uttering them. Zanuck claimed, "If any woman behaved toward me the way Cleopatra treated Antony, I would cut her balls off."

A reporter asked him what were his regrets about his former role as the "chief honcho at Fox."

"I've got only two regrets," he said. "I didn't fuck Shirley Temple, although I tried, and I never got around to Elizabeth Taylor. I guess I never will because Fox is now suing Burton and the spoiled viper."

In Fox's lawsuit, Elizabeth was cited "for suffering herself to be held up to scorn, ridicule, and unfavorable

publicity as a result of her conduct and deportment.”

Zanuck was asking for fifty million dollars compensation from both Burton and Elizabeth, accusing them of “willfully and deliberately delaying production.”

In time, Elizabeth settled with Fox for \$2 million. In the final tally, she made \$4 million from the picture, not the original, much-touted \$1 million that she had originally asked for.

The Battle for Burton was also raging. On April 23, 1962, Sybil returned to Rome to deal with her marital situation directly.

Every day, Wanger pressured an increasingly unstable Fisher to abandon Rome and to not return to the set, especially when it was learned that he carried a loaded pistol. Before his final departure from the scene, Fisher decided to visit Sybil at Burton’s villa, where she was in residence again. Roddy and Burton were at Cinecittà, but Roddy’s companion, John Valva, was in the villa with Sybil at the time.

Fisher confronted her and told her the truth: “Burton’s not coming back this time. Elizabeth is not like his other women. She’s got her claws in him. He might come back for a brief reconciliation here and there, but you’ve got to face facts—it’s over!”

Roddy later found out that Fisher spent about an hour with Sybil, who chose not to reveal the exact nature of their talk.

When Roddy returned to the villa, he found Sybil in tears.

“Fisher made me face what I had not wanted to face, what I could not even admit to myself—and that was that Richard loves Elizabeth more than me.”

“He should not have done that,” Roddy said, “but no one ever accused Eddie of being a gentleman. How did you respond?”

“After he made his case, I gave him the hardest slap in the face I was capable of giving and ordered him out of the house.”

That same night, Fisher chose the moment to announce that he was driving north to Florence and Milan for no particular reason before returning to New York. “I’m leaving, perhaps for good,” he told Elizabeth.

She yelled at him, “No one walks out on me, faggot. I’m more famous than the Pope, and the Queen of England, who always walks around like she’s got a poker stuck up her ass. I’m even more famous than General Eisenhower.”

But in spite of her fame, Fisher drove north the next morning in one of the Rolls-Royces she’d given him. He would later leave the Rolls at the Milan airport and would never see it again. Thieves made off with it.

From Florence, Fisher called the Villa Pappa in Rome, where Burton picked up the receiver. “What in hell are you doing there with my wife?” he asked.

“What in the bloody hell do you think I’m doing?” Burton said. “Fucking your wife—that’s what! The only thing you’re good at, Fisher, is sucking cock or taking it up the ass. You’re not a man. I’m going to come to Florence and kill you.”

“Stay where you are,” Fisher ordered him. “I’m heading back to Rome to kill you, you mother-fucker.”

Of course, these turned out to be two idle threats from two ego-driven performers.

Although Burton was with Elizabeth and making love to her at the time of Fisher’s call from Florence, the next day found him with Sybil again.

Sybil convinced her husband, during a break in filming when he wasn’t needed, to leave Elizabeth and travel to meet her and their two daughters at their home in Céligny, Switzerland.

Burton left that afternoon to join Sybil and their daughters, taking a train north from Rome. He made a decision not to confront Elizabeth with the news of where he was going. “It’s all over,” he told Roddy before heading out. “Sorry, old pal, but I’m leaving it up to you to pass the word along to our Liz gal. God damn it! At times I feel every fucking bitch wants my dick and all the cock-suckers, too. That includes you, my friend.”

Both Dick and Roddy knew to be with Elizabeth when she comprehended the news that both her husband and her lover had deserted her.

“You can’t go on being tossed around like a ball by Richard,” Roddy said. “Let Sybil have him.”

Dick urged her to send him an urgent letter to his villa in Céligny. In a drunken state, she agreed to do that. “I want him to know that I’m the one dumping him. I was hopelessly in love with him, but the affair is over.”

Dick claimed that he mailed the letter, but he doesn't know if it was ever received.

Both Dick and Roddy slept over at Villa Pappa that night. At three o'clock in the morning, Dick decided to enter Elizabeth's room to check on her. He'd already removed all dangerous drugs, including her inventory of Seconal, from her suite. To his horror, he discovered a bottle, emptied of its contents, labeled as a container for that potent and dangerous barbiturate and sedative. He immediately summoned Roddy, who called an ambulance.

Once again, she was rushed to Salvator Mundi Hospital, where her stomach was pumped. An informant at the hospital called the newspapers, and word of Elizabeth's most recent suicide attempt was flashed around the world.

Her doctor told Roddy and Dick that, "Miss Taylor nearly died tonight. If she keeps doing this, she will succeed one night. That I predict."

When Fisher heard the news of Elizabeth's suicide attempt, he rushed back to Rome. She refused to allow him into her hospital room for an entire week. She only relented when he promised to bring her some cold beer.

Once inside her room, he made some attempt to kiss her, but she brushed him aside. "Open that beer can and get me a cigarette," she ordered him.

Burton, meanwhile, was with Sybil and their daughters at Céligny when he heard the news of Elizabeth's latest suicide attempt. He told his wife that he, too, was returning to Rome, even though she pleaded with him to stay.

Only hours after he drove away, Sybil attempted suicide. Mike Nichols later visited her and confirmed the report. He said, "I saw the scars. Two red razor blade scars on her left wrist."

When Burton arrived in Rome, she agreed to see him right away. She never told anyone what the two of them talked about, other than to say, "We have reached some understanding."

When reporters crowded around Burton as he was leaving the hospital, he said, "I have nothing to say."

When Roddy and Dick confronted Burton that night, each of them found him "wavering."

"He still hasn't made up his God damn mind yet," Dick said.

"The next morning, Burton told Roddy, "Elizabeth and I will be on the French Riviera together. We're also going to Gstaad. Our future is uncertain."

"My God, if you cut Sybil loose, she might take John (a reference to John Valva) away from me. They spend a lot of time together and seem to adore each other."

Roddy said that as a joke, but it eventually came true.

After her release from the hospital in the wake of her most recent suicide attempt, Elizabeth lived uneasily with Fisher at Villa Pappa. He tried to look after her, but mostly she attacked him, finding fault with almost anything he did, especially when he tried to control her drinking and pill-popping.

He knew that it was time to leave. But before going, he decided he would spend a final night with her. Even though she'd been hostile to him, she did not kick him out of her bed.

As he would partially relate in his memoirs, he planned to give her a "farewell fuck." When he moved on top of her, she did not resist him, but didn't reciprocate in his love-making. "I got off," he later claimed, "but she didn't. She was like a bored housewife having to endure an assault from her old spouse."

The next morning, he rose nude from her bed and stood looking down at her when she slowly opened her eyes. "Her face was a total blank. I looked for some kind of love or recognition. But I found nothing registered on her face. I could have been some waiter she'd brought back from a Roman restaurant for the night. I knew it was over."

"Just to let you know, I'm flying to New York this morning," he told her.

"If you go, you'll never see me again," she said.

"I'm going." He headed for the door.

Dick Hanley drove him to the airport at ten o'clock. Fisher told him, "My humiliation has been too great. I can't take it any more."

Fisher later recalled, "Before I got on that plane at the Rome airport, I downed three stiff vodkas with Seconals. I knew it was all over, except for the fight over money, which was likely to drag on for years."

He left for New York on March 19, 1962, and wouldn't see Elizabeth again for two whole years.

In June of 1962, after 225 days of filming at various locations in Italy, Spain, and Egypt, Cleopatra was wrapped. A mountain of film had been exposed, and the first rough cut ran for eight hours.

At the time of his departure from Rome, ten months after his arrival there, Burton said, "I never want to see this bloody place again—flashbulbs in the dead of night, lies in the press, Vespas racing after us, interference from the Vatican...To hell with it!"

At the time of Elizabeth's departure from the Rome airport, she turned to Roddy, who recalled her words to him: "I've won!"

"You mean he's promised to divorce Sybil and marry you?" Roddy asked.

"It's not that simple," she responded. "But I now hold the winning card. Dozens of offers for starring roles in films, as you know, are coming in. In the immediate future, I'm going to insist that Richard be my leading man in all of my upcoming films."

"My God!" Roddy said, "Sybil can't compete with that. Let me put it this way: You're making Richard an offer he can't refuse."

"You got that right, sweetheart," she said, before bidding him au revoir.

Aboard the jet plane, the captain came out to greet her personally and to tell her she was his favorite movie star and "the most beautiful woman in the world."

"Of course I am," she said to him, maybe only half in jest. "One question: Why do they call Rome 'The Eternal City?' There's nothing eternal about it."

POSTSCRIPTS TO CHAPTER 19

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO EDDIE FISHER?

Although the press was still on Fisher's trail, he managed to slip in an affair after leaving Elizabeth that reporters didn't discover. Checking into the Hotel Pierre in Manhattan, he occupied the room next to Audrey Hepburn's.

Along with Elizabeth, he had entertained her and her husband, Mel Ferrer, in Rome.

At the Pierre, they had rooms with connecting doors. Ferrer was out of town on business.

One night over dinner, Fisher admitted to Hepburn that Elizabeth had urged him to try to get the Eliza Doolittle role for her in *My Fair Lady*. "Audrey burst into tears and clung to me," Fisher later confessed to Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, and others. "She felt terribly betrayed by Elizabeth. When you've got the delicate, lovely Audrey in your arms, something happens," Fisher said.

"I didn't feel all that sorry for him," Martin later said. "Here he was, shackled up with the most beautiful woman in the world, Elizabeth Taylor. He goes to New York and bangs Audrey, who some consider even more beautiful than Elizabeth. I'll shed no crocodile tears for Eddie."

In his memoirs, Fisher confessed, "There was never anything physical between Audrey and me, but I was in love with her." He was obviously sparing her reputation, since she was a married woman. At the time, he was still married, too.

Roddy McDowall, who later hooked up with Fisher in New York to talk about Elizabeth, later claimed he knew about his brief fling with Hepburn. "It was love on the rebound, a common occurrence."

Back in New York, Fisher was seen dating Maria Schell and getting endless shots of speed from Dr. Feelgood (Max Jacobson).

The gangster, Frank Costello, called him with an offer to have his henchmen in Rome break Burton's legs. "They'll even cut off his dick if you want that done, too," Costello said. Fisher declined this offer.

Fisher's sudden notoriety led to a series of nightclub appearances. He opened his act singing "Arrivederci, Roma."

At the Winter Garden in Manhattan, he was both appearing with and "fucking Frankie's girl friend," Fisher claimed. He was referring to Juliet Prowse, the French chanteuse, who had been engaged for a brief, dysfunctional period to Sinatra. She appeared at the Winter Garden with Fisher, singing, "I'm Cleo, the Nympho of the Nile."

From the law firm of Louis Nizer in New York, a terse, coolly worded memo was released to the press on April 2, 1962: "Elizabeth Taylor and Eddie Fisher announced that they have mutually agreed to part. Divorce proceedings will be instituted soon."

After his divorce from Elizabeth, Fisher for a while dated voice coach Angela Sweeney. To author C. David Heymann, she praised the size of his penis, and also his ability to "have sex as often as a dozen times a night. It was unreal. He would reach climax and immediately he would have another erection. I attributed his sexual prowess to his speed addiction."

After his divorce from Elizabeth, he admitted in his memoirs to "taking Meth and drinking straight vodka all day. Life became blurred....Elizabeth was the one great love of my life," Fisher recalled. "but she treated me like a slave, and I spent most of my time attending to her various illnesses and ailments— that is, when not cleaning up dog poop."

Fisher blamed Elizabeth for destroying his career. In 1970, he filed for bankruptcy in Puerto Rico, listing debts of \$916,000 and assets of \$40,000. Actually, he could have blamed Elvis Presley. Fisher's style of crooning went out of fashion with the end of the Eisenhower administration.

As the years deepened, Elizabeth's contact with Fisher faded, except for an occasional call of desperation:

FISHER: "The boys in Vegas are after me. If I don't come up with \$225,000 by tomorrow night, it's all over for me."

ELIZABETH: "I'll wire you the money in the morning."

After Elizabeth dumped him, Fisher would marry three more times.

In 1969, he wed the singer, Connie Stevens, and fathered two children with her, Joely and Tricia.

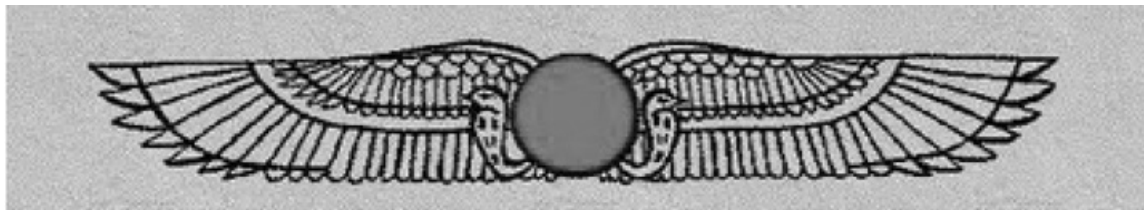
In 1976, he married beauty queen Terry Richard but the marriage lasted only ten months.

In 1993, he hit the jackpot, wedding a rich San Francisco night club owner, Betty Lin, who left him millions when she died of lung cancer in 2001.

Fisher himself died at the age of 82, based on complications associated with a broken hip, in September of 2010.



Three views of **Eddie Fisher** that prove that there was, indeed, life after Elizabeth: Left photo, with singer **Connie Stevens**; middle photo: with **Terry Richard** (Miss Louisiana, 1973); and right photo: with millionaire **Betty Lin**



THE LONG-AWAITED CLEOPATRA FINALLY OPENS

In London, after Elizabeth sat anxiously through a private screening of Cleopatra, she later claimed "I rushed back to my hotel suite and vomited."

Cleopatra, at the time the costliest movie ever made, opened at the Rivoli Theater in New York City in June of 1963. It was also the longest, running four hours.

Critics had a field day, John Coleman of The New Statesman asserting, "Miss Taylor is monotony in a slit skirt, a pre-Christian Elizabeth Arden with sequined eyelids."

Judith Crist, writing in The New York Herald Tribune, said that "The mountain of notoriety has produced a mouse."

Not all critics agreed that Taylor and Burton had produced electricity on the screen. "Elizabeth showed greater passion for Lassie than she did for Burton's Marc Antony," wrote one critic in Rome.

In Hollywood, Elizabeth read daily reviews of the film. She called Peter Lawford. "How could the shits do this to me? This is the best work I've ever done."

"Then why did you vomit?" he asked.

She slammed down the phone.

David Susskind, a popular TV host of the day, saw Cleopatra and went on the air, claiming that Elizabeth was "overweight, overbosed, overpaid, and undertalented. She sets the acting profession back a decade."

Time magazine was hardly kinder, claiming that "her screeching is like a ward healer's wife at a block party."

Ironically, the usually very critical Bosley Crowther of The New York Times liked it, defining it as "a surpassing entertainment, one of the great epic films of our day."

Referred to as a "Hollywood Edsel," Cleopatra, according to some sources, cost \$45 million to make. Other accountants calculated the actual figure at \$65 million. It would take years to recover the film's initial cost.

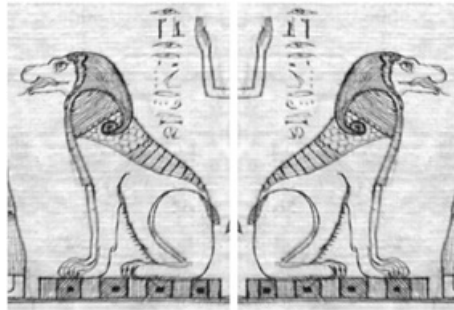
Even so, producers from all over the world wanted to immediately sign Elizabeth, with Burton, as the stars in other films.

"We are the King and Queen of Hollywood," Elizabeth told Burton.

"I know, luv," he said.

"All you have to do is make up your mind: Do you want to sit on a throne with the Queen of Hollywood or bury yourself on some Swiss mountain with a devoted housewife?"

"I truly understand the dilemma of to be or not to be," he answered. "I know the question. But alas, what is the answer?"



CHAPTER TWENTY

The Elusive Pursuit of Love

After finishing Cleopatra, Elizabeth, with Burton, would embark on an illicit two-year relationship that lasted from 1962 to 1964, followed by a tumultuous marriage filled with grand passion and betrayal.

"I am not prepared to go forward with just the armor of my love to protect me," she told Burton.

"Armor of love?" he asked. "Did I hear right? You've been around me for too long. That sounds like something I would say."

Before there was any possibility of marriage between them, they headed for a "honeymoon" on the Côte d'Azur, a favorite stamping ground for both of them.

For one week, Burton and Elizabeth "disappeared from the radar screen," according to Dick Hanley. "Of course, I knew where they were." The romantic couple, pursued by the world press, was hiding out in a villa near Nice on the French Riviera. The German actor, Curt Jurgens, had lent them his vacation home.

But after days of isolation, Burton got bored and seemed to miss the media attention. He asked Elizabeth to put on her diamonds and a black mink coat and go with him to Monte Carlo. She agreed, and called Princess Grace at the Grimaldi Palace to alert her of her coming. The Princess invited Burton and Elizabeth for five o'clock tea.

That night at the Monte Carlo casino, Elizabeth made a spectacular entrance in a scarlet-colored Dior gown, mink, and diamonds. Suddenly the paparazzi knew where she and Burton were. When they left in the early morning hours, they caused a near riot, as all the press and photographers along the Riviera, and nearly half of the local citizenry, turned out to stare at them.

After leaving Nice, Elizabeth and Burton headed northeast to Switzerland. She invited him to spend as much time as he could alone with her in her new home in Gstaad before he rendezvoused with Sybil.

Elizabeth was all too aware that the Burtons' alpine cottage at Céligny, with Sybil living there, was only eighty-five miles from Gstaad. At the speed he drove, he could be there in an hour.

Even in seclusion in Switzerland, with no news coming out, Elizabeth and Burton were still a media event, their love affair being hailed as "the romance of the century."

Dick was put in charge of her mail, which arrived in bags from the local post office. "During that awful period," he said, "she got only a few fan letters. Most of it fell into two categories—either hate mail or else solicitations for money. A mother from Wyoming, or some place, would write, 'I have eight children and no husband and no money to feed them. Help me! Help me!' A number of aspiring actors wrote to her with requests for dates when she returned to Hollywood. The really eager ones enclosed nudes of themselves, some of which were quite impressive."

Before their return to America, Elizabeth invited John Valva and Roddy to visit with her. During her first days in Gstaad, she was living with Burton before he returned to his own home in Switzerland, where Sybil and his two daughters were waiting for him.

"Richard felt embarrassed to see us," Roddy recalled. "We'd lived in Rome in that villa with Sybil and him. Now we were in Switzerland, and we were seeing him as a husband to Elizabeth. Richard knew how close John and I were to Sybil. He was so uncomfortable that he left the next day and drove to his own home for a family reunion. I think Elizabeth was sorry she'd invited us because it threatened her love nest."

At one point, Elizabeth became convinced that Burton would never get a divorce. When he drove to Gstaad to have lunch with her, five days later, followed by a session in bed, she made him an astounding offer. "If you won't make me your wife, I'll be your mistress."

After Roddy and John Valva concluded their long visit with Elizabeth in Gstaad, Roddy thanked her for her hospitality, with the understanding that the two lovers were returning to New York via Geneva.

Later, she learned from Burton that Roddy and Valva had driven to his home at Céligny to stay with Sybil. "Those turncoats," Elizabeth said. "I thought that at least Roddy was loyal to me."

"He loves both of you fine ladies," Burton said.

"I'll never speak to the rat again."

Later, back in America, she heard that Valva had left Roddy and gone to live with Sybil as her lover on Staten Island. On hearing that, she called Roddy and made up with him because she had new common ground she shared with him. "Sybil turns out to have been competition for both of us," Elizabeth said.

[Sybil and Valva lived together for a while. When he grew tired of the relationship, he called Roddy and asked to be reinstated as his lover. Roddy refused to accept him back into his life, and Valva attempted suicide.]

During her stay in Gstaad, Elizabeth invited Peter Lawford to visit her for a vacation. Burton was fond of Lawford and often "popped in," in Elizabeth's words, without an invitation from his base in Céligny. During such visits, he never spoke either of Sybil or of his daughters.

One day, Elizabeth was checking out the designer boutiques in the center of Gstaad when she learned that Burton had arrived unexpectedly and unannounced at her house. When she returned home, she discovered a drunken Lawford giving a drunken Burton a blow-job. "Carry on, boys," she said.

But she got her revenge at dinner that night in the formal and very elegant dining room of the Gstaad Palace Hotel. She and Burton were already at table when Lawford entered the dining room. Raising her glass, she shouted, "Here's to the cocksucker!"

The next day, Burton left early to drive back home, and Lawford was still sleeping off his drunk of the night before at around eleven o'clock when Elizabeth received a surprise visitor. It was Princess Grace, who also maintained a vacation home nearby at Gstaad. To Elizabeth's amazement, she dropped in unannounced.

Elizabeth later told Dick Hanley, "The bitch did it deliberately. I didn't have make-up on, and she looked like she'd come straight from the hairdresser and a session with two make-up artists."

Years later, when Tennessee Williams came to visit Burton in Mexico, Burton reflected on his period of indecision and said, "I was trying to resist leaving my family for Elizabeth. I still loved Sybil. Yet I wasn't trying all that hard. I was less than a man should be. But Elizabeth proved too great a temptation to turn my back on. Perhaps I was fooling myself, but I became convinced that she would commit suicide if I left her."

The weather was cold and foggy on the English Channel as a night ferry crossed over from France. Two of its passengers, arriving at Victoria Station, were the most famous couple since Romeo and Juliet.

An armada of reporters and photographers had been alerted to their arrival. In separate cars and booked into separate suites, both of them headed for The Dorchester. They were to be married, but only on the screen in their upcoming movie, *The V.I.P.s* (1963).

Although she, like Burton, had been born in Britain, he took delight in introducing her to "my England." They attended rugby matches, drank at his favorite pubs, and watched the Oxford/Cambridge soccer match at Twickenham.

He met with the acerbic literary critic, Kenneth Tynan, who told him about his dysfunctional romance with Marlon Brando. Burton also talked of his own romance. "You must not use sex alone as a lever, as a kind of moral, intellectual, psychic crutch to get away from your wife. You can't say to her, 'I'm terribly sorry, but I can't sleep in the same bed with you any more because I simply have to run off with this infinitely fascinating girl.'"

Elizabeth knew that by Christmas, Sybil would be back in residence in Hampstead, and she wouldn't get to see Burton as much.

When he dined alone with his long-time friend, Vivien Leigh, Burton confessed, "I love both of them and want both of them, but I know in time I must choose between them."

There were mishaps along the way. When Burton left for Wales to try to mend strained relationships with his family, he was attacked. While hailing a taxi in Cardiff, he was set upon by a group of bully "Teddy Boys," one of whom stomped his boot into Burton's eye. It was black for days. "Thank God that boot was not a winklepicker—or else I might be wearing a black patch for the rest of my days."

For Elizabeth's thirty-first birthday, he gave her a \$200,000 diamond necklace.

She purchased Van Gogh's *Lunatic Asylum, St.-Rémy* for 92,000 British pounds through the intervention of her father, Francis, who bid for it at a Sotheby's auction. For some reason, thirty years later, she was in possession

of the painting herself and failed to sell it at another auction. Her asking price was \$20 million, a price higher than the market at the time would bear.

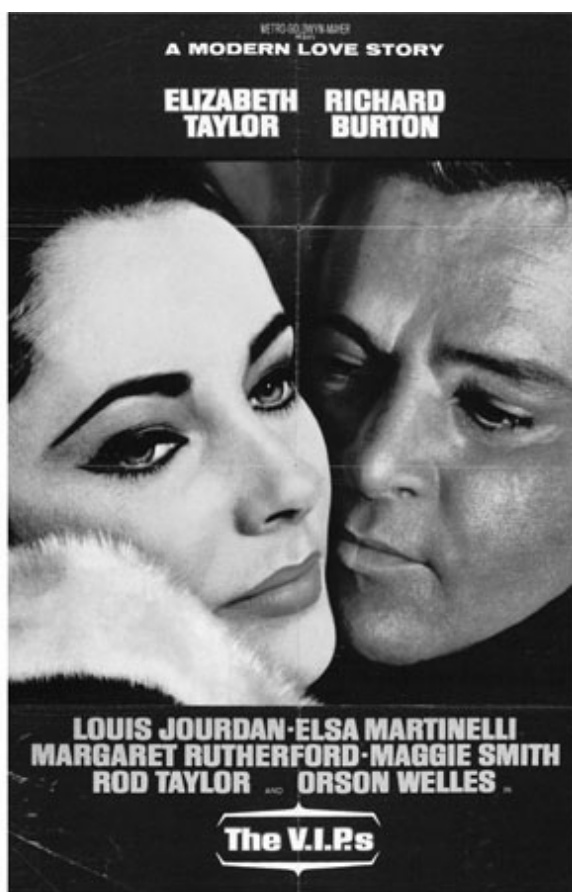
Originally, Burton was to co-star with Sophia Loren in *The V.I.P.s*. Director Anthony Asquith had selected Loren for the female lead, as he remembered the box office success of her 1960 film, *The Millionairess*.

However, when Elizabeth heard of his choice, she became enraged. "Burton is a tit man," she told Roddy McDowall. "Loren has tits the size of mine, and I fear she'll lure him away from me." She went to Asquith and persuaded him to give her the role instead. "Let Sophia stay in Rome," she said.

The film was based on Vivien Leigh's attempt to leave her husband, Laurence Olivier, for the Australian actor, Peter Finch. During the peak of the affair's passion, Leigh and Finch made it as far as the London airport, which was fogged in, giving Olivier time to get there and talk Leigh out of leaving.

Unlike *Cleopatra*, shooting of *The V.I.P.s* was modestly budgeted at only \$3 million.

Elizabeth was determined to complete the shooting of *The V.I.P.s* in just eight weeks. She claimed she was "pissed off" at Lloyds of London, which had refused to insure her.



V.I.P.s outgrosses **Cleopatra**

Top photo: **Elizabeth** with **Burton** middle photo: Oscar-winning **Margaret Rutherford** lower photo: **Louis Jourdan** with **Elizabeth**

In London, filming of *The V.I.P.s* had already begun, and producer Anatole de Grunwald lived in constant dread that Elizabeth would get ill. But except for a knee problem, she made it on schedule through a movie that featured Louis Jourdan as her illicit lover. Orson Welles, Rod Taylor, Margaret Rutherford, and Maggie Smith were also among the illustrious cast. In smaller roles were the sexy bombshell Elsa Martinelli, TV broadcaster David Frost, and Linda Christian, who'd married Tyrone Power.

The press still covered their every move, *Time* magazine writing that, "If Burton marries Taylor, he will become the fifth husband of the wife of Bath."

The British press became bored with the Taylor/Burton affair, and began writing of a torrid sexual tryst between Louis Jourdan and herself.

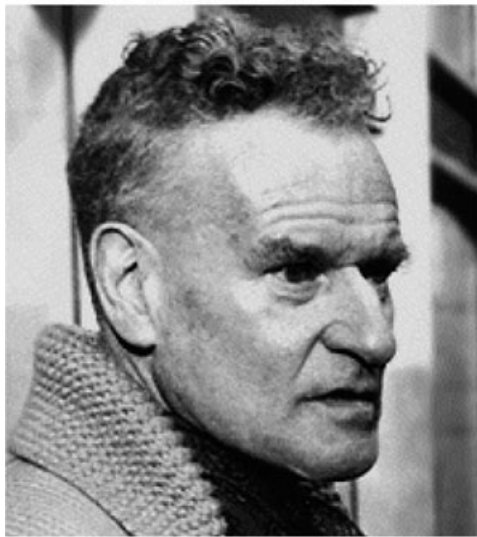
At the time, Elizabeth denied this, "I hate having to do love scenes with Louis," she told Asquith. "He always has bad breath." Later, she was enigmatic about a supposed affair. "My diary will tell the complete story," she said. "If anything is published, it will be only after both of us are dead. It's less embarrassing that way."

The V.I.P.s was the second of many films in which Elizabeth would co-star with Burton: *The Sandpiper* (1965); *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966); *The Taming of the Shrew* (1966); *Doctor Faustus* (1967); *The Comedians* (1967); *Boom!* (1968); *Anne of a Thousand Days* (1969); *Under Milkwood* (1971); and *Hammersmith Is Out* (1972).

Ironically, her last project with Burton would be entitled *Divorce His, Divorce Hers* (1973), which was made for ABC-TV as a two-part made-for-TV drama about the breakup of a 20-year-marriage.

In time, Asquith became one of the most successful of British directors, ranking alongside Sir David Lean and Sir Carol Reed.

One day at around noon, Burton asked Asquith to join Elizabeth and him for one of their "wet lunches." Burton was already aware that Asquith had had a brief fling with Laurence Olivier during his 1934-35 filming of *Moscow Nights*.



Glorious and profligate icons of the
British Theatre:

top photo: **Laurence Olivier** lower photo:
Anthony Asquith

Burton seemed to enjoy teasing Asquith. In front of Elizabeth, he said, "I understand that Larry has a nickname for you: Puffin."

"He calls me that," Asquith said. "But the nickname actually came from my mother. She said I looked like a puffin to her."

"Larry also told me something else," Burton said. "Forgive me for bringing this up, but he claimed I was better in bed than you were."

There was an awkward silence at the table until Elizabeth quickly changed the subject. "I've got a bone to pick with you. You need to make Jourdan act more masculine. I've seen the rushes. Many of his movements are effeminate. Please look into that. In contrast, Rod Taylor comes off as totally macho."

When it first opened, *The V.I.P.s* out-grossed *Cleopatra*, and Burton and Elizabeth took home a combined total of \$3.5 million for their performances.

Actually, it would be the rotund and double-chinned Margaret Rutherford who would walk off with an Oscar for her portrayal of the "eccentric and poor" Duchess of Brighton.

Between films, Elizabeth made a TV special, *Elizabeth Taylor in London*, a tour of the British capital's cultural

landmarks. She was given \$250,000, the highest salary ever paid up until then to a TV performer.

One critic wrote, "Miss Taylor throughout the documentary was in competition with London—and she won!"

Back at The Dorch, Burton was getting more lucrative movie offers than she was.

Laurence Olivier had lobbied to play the lead in the film, *Becket*, but Burton eventually snared the role for himself.

Peter O'Toole and Burton filmed *Becket* at the Shepperton Studios in Middlesex, outside London. On most days, unless she was too hung over, Elizabeth ordered her chauffeur to drive her to the studio for lunch with Burton.

A heavy drinker himself, O'Toole often joined them.

"When O'Toole and Burton returned from lunch, they were often too drunk to appear on camera," Dick Hanley said.

Burton was said to have driven through the countryside of England and sometimes walked alone in its meadows. He slept at a bed and breakfast in the Cotswolds, where he woke up hearing the sounds of a meadow lark.

By the time he'd driven back to London, he'd made up his mind. He was going to divorce Sybil. Whether he'd eventually marry Elizabeth remained an unanswered question.



Hellraisers Acting Holy and establishing Burton's precedent for roles as a frocked (or de-frocked) ecclesiastic

Left photo: **Richard Burton** as Becket, and Right photo: **Peter O'Toole** as Henry II

For several weeks, Burton had not visited Sybil and his daughters. In January of 1963, he was seen entering the Savoy Hotel in London and going upstairs to one of the suites. A room service waiter noticed him entering the quarters of Zsa Zsa Gabor.

Three hours later, as he was making his way once again through the Savoy's lobby, he had one of those chance encounters that happens too often in life. He encountered Sybil leaving the Savoy Grill. During their brief dialogue, he bluntly "bit the bullet," as he later defined it, and asked her for a divorce.

"We'll let our attorneys handle it," she said, before rushing out and into a taxi. He was prepared to be generous, offering a proposed settlement of around a million dollars, which was all the cash he had.

After Burton left her, Sybil proved amazingly popular with tout London, and was seen dining with Princess Margaret and her husband, Lord Snowdon. Rex Harrison, although married, took her out dancing, as did gay actor Dirk Bogarde. Emlyn Williams was a frequent escort, as was actor Stanley Baker.

For the rest of her days, Sybil would have only one additional conversation with Burton, a two-minute dialogue about their children.

Tiring of London, she moved to New York. After her divorce, and after a brief involvement with John Valva, Sybil opened Arthur, "the mother of all discos," on 54th Street in New York. It quickly became "the disco" of the 1960s, attracting everybody from Bette Davis to Sophia Loren. Jackie Kennedy was seen dancing with Robert

Kennedy, who was later caught in a phone booth lip-locked with dancer Rudolf Nureyev. Truman Capote danced with Bette Davis, Princess Margaret, and Andy Warhol.

Sybil later shocked her fans by marrying Jordan Christopher, the handsome, sexy singer of the house band, "The Wild Ones." Most of her friends predicted that the marriage would not last. They were wrong. She was still married to the singer at the time of his death in 1996.

At The Dorch, Elizabeth constantly complained to Burton about Eddie Fisher's latest demands during their divorce proceedings. Fisher wanted all the jewelry he'd given to Elizabeth returned, even though he'd bought most of it with her own money.

When she wasn't complaining about Fisher, or making love to Burton, she read over film scripts that arrived. To her amazement, she was getting no really good film offers. In contrast, Burton had achieved the international stardom he coveted.

During one of their fights, she screamed at him in front of Dick, "I made you a star, and I can break you!"

Of course, that was an idle threat.

As a bankable movie star, Burton became increasingly demanding about the salary he'd expect for his acting performances. Time declared, "He is a kind of folk hero out of nowhere, with an odd name like Richard instead of Rock, or Rip, or Tab. He has outtabbed, outrocked, and outstripped the lot of them. He is the new Mr. Box Office."

It was time to return to America when Burton discovered a script he liked. It was the role of a defrocked priest in Tennessee Williams' The Night of the Iguana. It had been a Broadway play starring Bette Davis in an orange wig.

Elizabeth read the script and was intrigued by the role of the female lead, although the character who ran a small beachfront hotel in Mexico was "little more than a whore."

"I objected to playing a whore in Butterfield 8," she told Burton, "but I'm ready to do so now."

She called her friend Tennessee in Key West only to learn that the role had already been assigned to Ava Gardner.

"Talk about a whore playing a whore," Elizabeth said sarcastically.

"Ava's not all that bad," Burton later told her.

"If I hear you're fucking her, I'll tie you up and remove each egg of your testicles...very slowly and very painfully."

"Oh, luv, what do I need with a grandmother like Ava when I've got fresh quail like you?"

"Just to make sure, I'm hanging out with you to protect my investment."

"The arrival of the "scandalous" Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton in Mexico City occurred on September 22, 1963. As mobs descended on the airport, it became an international media event. Elizabeth was accompanying Burton to Mexico, where he'd be filming Tennessee Williams' The Night of the Iguana.

Losing her purse, part of her wardrobe, and even her shoes, Elizabeth made it through the crowd with the help of strong-armed security guards. "Fuck this!" she shouted at Burton. "They think we're the Beatles!"

Even before they left the airport, "The Liz & Dick" show entertained the masses by staging a big fight over a missing case of jewelry, each blaming the other for its disappearance. The box later turned up in a packed suitcase.

A press conference had been scheduled, but Burton refused to attend. However, he did issue a statement. "This is my first visit to Mexico. I hope it will be my last."

In a short time he would change his mind and buy a vacation home there.

Elizabeth had a different opinion. She told the press, "I have always wanted to come back to fucking Mexico. I like fucking Mexico." The Mexican reporters printed her remarks but left out the two adjectives.

Initially, there was a lot of misunderstanding in the press, headlines claiming that Elizabeth, not Ava Gardner, would be the female star of the movie.

John Huston, the project's director, had wanted Marlon Brando to play the defrocked priest, but Ray Stark, the producer, favored either Richard Harris or William Holden. Finally, they settled on Burton. Ava Gardner had been their first choice as the notorious innkeeper, but Melina Mercouri was also held out as a replacement.

For the role of Deborah Kerr's grandfather, Nonno, Huston wanted Carl Sandburg, America's most famous playwright, but he was in failing health. The role instead went to Cyril Delevanti.

According to Dick Hanley, who accompanied the famous pair, Elizabeth arrived "pissed off" at director John Huston. In fact, by the second day, she was already lambasting him as "an ugly, old, mean, withering fart," charging that he had mentally abused her friend Monty Clift during the filming of both *The Misfits* (1961) and *Freud* (1962).

In retribution, the director rather ungallantly chose to bring up the subject of how Elizabeth was "shameless" in stealing Mike Todd from Huston's former wife, Evelyn Keyes.

Zoe Sallis showed up in Puerto Vallarta. It was common knowledge that she was Huston's mistress.

In 1963, Puerto Vallarta was a seedy little fishing village lying three hundred miles north of Acapulco. Tacky and not very well known, it became instantly famous when Elizabeth and Burton arrived and put it on the international tourist map.

The actual shooting of *Iguana* took place on the isolated peninsula of Mismaloya, which had no road access to the mainland and could be reached only by boat. The only inhabitants on Mismaloya were Indians who lived in thatched huts and survived on fishing.

Elizabeth and Burton and all their massive amounts of luggage were taken to Puerto Vallarta and delivered to "Gringo Gulch," an upmarket section where Americans had purchased a number of vacation homes. Locals had another name for it, referring to it as La Casa de Zoplotés (the House of the Buzzards) because it lay near a garbage dump.

Whereas Burton had an actual part in the filming, Elizabeth was on site to see that he didn't go astray in the arms of any of his female co-stars, who included man-eating Ava Gardner, Deborah Kerr, and Sue Lyon.

Elizabeth also had to keep her eye out for at least fifty whores, some of them diseased, who had arrived from Mexico City to service the film crew. At least half of that number of male hustlers had also come to Puerto Vallarta to service homosexual members of the crew.

Arriving at the port, Elizabeth feared she'd be assigned to some shack, but was delighted by Casa Kimberley, the villa provided for her. In fact, she liked it so much she bought it for \$40,000.

Burton liked the ramshackle port, too, and he eventually built a villa across the street, connecting the two properties with a footbridge that linked the two buildings. It was inspired by the Bridge of Sighs in Venice. "I can run across the bridge and escape from Liz when she becomes a raging harridan," Burton told Michael Wilding, who was all too familiar with her rages.

It would take almost a novel to untangle the past and present romantic entanglements that whirled around the cast and crew of *Iguana*. Before it was over, Kerr told the press, "I'm the only one here not shackled up with somebody."

She left out the fact that she was accompanied by her husband, Peter Viertel, the scriptwriter who had previously worked with Huston on *The African Queen* (1951) with Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn. Viertel had also been the former lover of Ava Gardner.

There were other sexual embarrassments unfolding. Huston had a reunion with Gardner, with whom he'd once had a torrid affair. Huston had also once pursued Kerr.

Elizabeth knew the Kerr had had a sexual tryst years before with Stewart Granger, but she was not certain if Burton had had an affair with her in Britain.

Elizabeth experienced her own walks down memory lane when Michael Wilding arrived in Puerto Vallarta. Her former husband was now the assistant to Burton's agent, Hugh French. Relationships between Burton and Wilding were still friendly, and Elizabeth had no animosity toward him. It had not been a bitter divorce. They were both involved in the rearing of their two sons, and both of them loved their boys very much, even though neither of them would ever win any awards for parenting.



Puerto Vallarta: The Burton villas and their
interconnecting bridge

Wilding was no longer lusting for Elizabeth. He showed up with a beautiful Swedish actress, Karen von Unge. She recalled, "Michael was a dear, sensitive man who should have been a great painter. Here he was, carrying suitcases of chili for Elizabeth from Chasen's in Los Angeles because she asked for them. She simply asked, and men did—it was that simple."

Huston looked upon Wilding as "a pathetic figure. He was once a big star in England, but he gave it up for Elizabeth. What did it get him? Now he serves her drinks and picks up dog poop for her. He's like the Erich von Stroheim character in *Sunset Blvd.*. Formerly married to Gloria Swanson in the movie, he becomes her butler."

Anticipating feuds, Huston passed out derringers to key members of his cast. These were the kind of small pistols that card sharps used to wear up their sleeves. With the pistols, he gave each person a silver bullet with a name etched onto it. Even though she was not a member of the cast, the derringer he gave Elizabeth was gold-plated.

Unlike the others, Elizabeth received five bullets, each with a name on it— Richard Burton, Sue Lyon, Ava Gardner, and Deborah Kerr. The director also included one with the name of John Huston.

On seeing Elizabeth again over drinks, Gardner said, "Dear heart, you and Richard are the Frank and Ava of the 1960s."

Evelyn Keyes, though not in Mexico, was present at least in memory. Elizabeth had stolen Mike Todd from her following her divorce from John Huston. Keyes was now married to Artie Shaw, who had been Gardner's former husband.

The plot thickened when Budd Schulberg, author of the Hollywood novel, *What Makes Sammy Run?* and the screenplay for *On the Waterfront*, arrived to seduce Gardner. Viertel had once been married to Schulberg's former wife, Virginia Ray.

In a talk one day at the beach with Elizabeth and Dick Hanley, Viertel confessed that he had abandoned his pregnant wife to run away with Bettina, arguably the most famous French model of the 1950s. "She later dumped me for Aly Khan."

"I know Bettina," Elizabeth said. "I know Aly Khan, too. Oh do I know Aly Khan!"



Deborah Kerr with Peter Viertel

"Huston tried to console me when I lost Bettina, Viertel said. "He told me 'Aly Khan is one swell guy.' Then, when Aly Khan fucked Huston's wife, Evelyn Keyes, I told him, 'It's okay, John, Aly is one swell guy.' He punched me in the mouth. I love John, though. He's fucked everybody from Marilyn Monroe on the set of *The Asphalt Jungle* to Truman Capote on the set of *Beat the Devil* when they shared a double bed. He even screwed a neo-Nazi woman in London who gave him syphilis—something he later referred to as 'the Hitler clap.'"

When Viertel left to return to the set, he, as a man of the world, kissed both Elizabeth and Dick on the lips before departing.

When he'd gone, Elizabeth turned to Dick: "Put some suntan lotion on my back, honey love." She watched Viertel head to the waterfront to board a small ferry. "If he weren't married to Deborah, and if I wasn't messing up my mouth with Richard, I could go for that. Ava told me he's great in bed. I still might go for him if Richard ever gets out of line. Mark Peter down on that list I'm compiling—MEN I PLAN TO SEDUCE BEFORE I DIE."

Tennessee arrived in the small town with Frederick Nicklaus, a young recent graduate of Ohio State University. Tennessee told Huston, "Frederick is the world's greatest living poet, though not discovered as of yet."

Tom Shaw, Huston's assistant director, detested the volatile personality of Tennessee. In his bulldog manner, he said, "I hated the mean son of a bitch. I was having a drink at the bar, and he was berating the shit out of this poor Mexican bartender. At the time, I didn't recognize who he was. I said to myself, 'Who is this asshole?' He was a vicious kind of faggot."

One night over drinks, the key players were asked by Herb Caen, the San Francisco columnist, what they most wanted in life. Huston said, "Interest." Gardner wished for "Health." Burton opted for "Adventure," Viertel for "Success," and Deborah Kerr "Happiness." Elizabeth chose "Wealth."

James Bacon, the veteran Hollywood reporter who'd once seduced Marilyn Monroe, arrived on the scene. "I'm from Hollywood, and I knew John Barrymore and Errol Flynn, but I'd never seen such heavy drinking. One night in a tavern, Burton downed twenty-five straight shots of tequila, using Carta Blanca beer as a chaser."

The cast and crew were constantly besieged by reporters, Elizabeth claiming, "There are more press guys and paparazzi here than fucking iguanas."

Reporters from California relished writing about the heavy drinking and the behind-the-scenes romances, but the Mexican newspaper *Siempre* denounced the entire cast and crew of *The Night of the Iguana*. It attacked the "sex, drinking, drugs, vice, and carnal bestiality of this gringo garbage that has descended on our country." *Siempre* also cited "gangsters, nymphomaniacs, and heroin-taking blondes."

The local Catholic priest attacked Elizabeth as a "wanton Jezebel" and called on the President of Mexico to deport her as an undesirable alien.

A drunken Elizabeth was asked by a reporter one night how she'd describe the three women in the cast. She obliged: "Gardner is lushly ripe for a middle-aged woman; Kerr is refined and ladylike until you get her in bed, or so I'm told; and Lyon is...well, let's just say nubile. No wonder James Mason had the hots for her. When making *Lolita*, he temporarily gave up his interest in boys."

The reporter sent her remarks back to The Hollywood Reporter, whose editor chose not to print them.

When Tennessee, in a Puerto Vallarta tavern known as the Casablanca Bar, was asked for his opinion of the Taylor/Burton romance, he said, "They are artists on a special pedestal and therefore the rules of bourgeois morality do not apply to them."

Burton was sitting with Tennessee when he made that pronouncement. When Burton himself was asked for a comment, he said, "I am bewitched by the cunt of Elizabeth Taylor and her cunning ways. Cunt and cunning—that's what the attraction is."

Graham Jenkins, Burton's brother, was also in Puerto Vallarta, and he had a more sensitive view of the Taylor/Burton affair. "Richard discovered how much he really needed Elizabeth, and his surrender to her was total. Of course, they still fought like cats and dogs. Each of them was mercurial. But they truly loved each other, and that was so evident. That did not mean that each of them could no longer see with their roving eye. Rich especially would always have that."



Iguana Games: Two views of **Ava Gardner** lower photo: with **Richard Burton**

For the most part, Burton was pleased with his role, telling Huston, "After this film is released, those boys in the press will stop calling me Mr. Cleopatra."

The one thing Elizabeth liked about the script of Iguana was the dialogue. "It contained some of the most bitch wit ever recorded."

Over a private drink she had with Huston, she told him, "Believe me, no one adores Ava Gardner more than I do. Such a fine actress, if the role isn't too challenging. I think you'll make a good picture. Regrettably, if you'd chosen me for the role of Maxine, it would have been a great picture, and I would win another Oscar to give the one I have company."

"I'm sure you're right, my dear," Huston said. "Right on target. Forgive my mistake in casting."

In October, Tennessee kissed both Burton and Elizabeth goodbye before returning to New York. He told

Elizabeth, "Please show up on the set every day, take Richard his lunch, and look after him. We don't want him to get so drunk he can't remember his lines."

She left her villa in late morning to go to the set, wading through chickens, naked children, and mange-encrusted mongrel dogs. Carrying a picnic basket with bottles of wine, Dick Hanley accompanied her. Both of them boarded a barge to take them to the remote peninsula where filming was occurring. Once there, reaching the set involved a sweaty and difficult climb up a steep hill.

One morning, Huston launched his day with five Bloody Marys. A reporter asked what he thought of having Elizabeth on the set, even though she wasn't in the movie. He said, "It's understandable. She and Burton are infamously cohabiting."

Elizabeth made it a point to show up on any day that Burton was shooting a steamy scene with Gardner. On those days, Elizabeth looked as sexy as possible, wearing form-fitting slacks in rainbow-hued colors, blouses that exposed at least three-quarters of her still firm breasts, and plenty of diamonds.

Her outfits on the set looked outrageous to Burton. He told Gardner, "She resembles a French tart working Place Clichy."

Huston's secretary, Thelma Victor, kept a diary relating details about the shooting of *Iguana*. In it, she claimed that Elizabeth arrived in Mexico with forty designer bikinis from Paris. "She was packing on the pounds around her middle and spent many an afternoon on the beach. She often was seen picking at her navel with her fingernail."

Thelma's entry for October 24, 1963 read:

"Elizabeth arrived on the set wearing a loose top and a bikini bottom of sheer white batiste trimmed with red embroidery. She had no bra on and you literally could see the complete upper structure of her tits. Imposing. She was also wearing a magnificent gold ring loaded with pearls and what looked like either pink diamonds or rubies. She said the King of Indonesia gave it to her. Richard said, 'She's seducing me again.'

"She turned to Burton, kissing him on the lips. 'I was dead when I encountered Richard again on the set of *Cleopatra*. It was a case of Prince Charming kissing the Sleeping Princess who'd slept through four years of marriage to that fucking schmuck, Eddie Fisher.'"

On the night of November 10, Burton's birthday, Elizabeth presented him with a library of calfskin-bound classics, priced at \$35,000.

He thanked her by kissing her profusely. But later he got so drunk, he denounced her as a "scurrilous low creature," charging that she'd had sex on the beach with a lot of those Mexican beach boy hustlers. Actually, she had done nothing of the sort. From the fog of his intoxication, Burton blamed Elizabeth for what Gardner was doing.

The entire cast was shocked on November 22, 1963, when news reached them that John F. Kennedy had been assassinated. Elizabeth had known JFK intimately, and "she cried for two days," according to Dick.

The next day, Gardner got drunk long before noon and entertained the crew with tales of "my brief but memorable fling with Jack."

Burton was perhaps the first to connect the slain president to Camelot, wherein he'd interpreted the role of King Arthur. "Camelot symbolized for President Kennedy where America wanted to be. In a Kingdom of Grace and Righteousness, surrounded by monsters and dark enemies, but triumphing over them all, the Democracy of Good over the Empire of Evil, with a big sword and song."

In one of the most bizarre show-biz stories to emerge from the immediate aftermath of JFK's assassination, the following day, Kirk Douglas and his publicist visited Jackie Kennedy at the White House to express their sympathies. "Kirk," she asked. "Do you think Elizabeth Taylor will marry Richard Burton?"

Gardner learned that Burton had celebrated a birthday, and she'd been unaware of it. When she first heard of it around November 30, she presented him with a fifth of bourbon, a delayed birthday present.

"That's not all Ava gave him!" Huston told his cronies. "I couldn't get either of my two stars to emerge from her dressing room until the sun was high in the sky, and the heat was crushing. When they did emerge, they weren't really in condition to appear on camera that day."

As author Nancy Schoenberger wrote: "Ava seemed to come alive in Richard's presence. The press were not

just covering a congregation of some of the world's greatest talents and personalities in a remote Mexican village, they were waiting—hoping?—that Burton and Taylor's vaunted love affair might founder on Ava Gardner's dangerous shoulders."

The coming together of the drunken, poetry-spouting, lust-filled Welsh actor and the Tarheel femme fatale and sex symbol had sparked "meaningful eye contact," as Huston described it.

One day before noon, both Gardner and Burton got drunk on a local moonshine known as raicilla. It was made from the agave plant. Gardner called it "cactus piss."

Huston defined it as "a cactus brandy stronger than tequila." Burton said the way to drink raicilla was straight down. That way you can feel it going into each individual intestine." When Elizabeth tried it, she said, "I hear it's made from cactus. Tell the fuckers who brewed it that they left the god damn needles in it."

One evening when Elizabeth was suffering from "turista," Dick Hanley drove Burton to the Casablanca Bar. To Dick's surprise, a sultry Ava Gardner was waiting there for him. Burton turned to Dick, "I can always count on you for being discreet around Her Ladyship."

Actually, Burton was wrong about that.

"After Ava and Richard consumed enough alcohol to resink the Titanic, they retired to one of the hot-bed shanties out back, where they disappeared," Dick said. "I wondered if Richard could get it up in his condition. I sat in the bar with this beach boy hustler waiting for their return. They were gone for about three hours. Both of them came back into the bar hardly able to stand up. I literally had to toss them into the back of our car."

The next day, Elizabeth suspected that something had happened. Since Dick was loyal to her and not necessarily to Burton, she cornered him and pressed him for details about Burton's dalliance with Gardner.

She told Dick, "I won't say a god damn thing to the whoremonger. But when my first chance comes along, I'm going to get even. Be on the lookout for a handsome, well-hung charmer who'd like to fuck Elizabeth Taylor."

That day on the beach, her feet were attacked by chigoes, tropical fleas that burrow into the skin. If left untreated, they can invade a host's bloodstream. She had to have them removed with a surgical knife.

Knives were certainly not on her mind when she went with her two sons and daughter to the town square to watch a performance of the circus which had come to town. When one of the entertainers, Alejandro Fuentes, nicknamed "The Dagger Man," called for volunteers from the audience, Elizabeth, who had already consumed three Bloody Marys, cheerfully volunteered.

She stood before a wooden backdrop as the Mexican circus performer prepared to throw scimitars at her. The audience screamed when the first scimitar came within two inches of her face. Fuentes hurled three more, narrowly missing her. She stood almost fearless against the onslaught, later telling the press, "I've had daggers thrown at me before."

Fuentes later said, "Mother of God! I'm so grateful I didn't miss, because I'd had a little too much tequila that morning."

Elizabeth already had confirmation of Burton's brief fling with Gardner. But she also suspected that something might be going on between Burton and Sue Lyon, who played the rigidly chaperoned blonde nymphet in *Iguana*. In some ways, her selection as the actress in that role had been influenced by her involvement, in 1962, of Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita*, an adaptation of the novel by Vladimir Nabokov (*Lolita*) about a middle-aged man's sexual obsession with a young adolescent girl.

Burton, incidentally, had seen Lyon's film interpretation of *Lolita* three times, exhibiting a keen interest of which Elizabeth was emphatically aware.

In *Iguana*, Burton was cast as an alcoholic and defrocked priest tempted by the seductive teenager, as portrayed by Lyon, whose persona was in distinct contrast to Ava Gardner's portrayal of a fully mature, man-hungry whore cavorting with her agile and shirtless Mexican cabaña boys

In reference to the script, Elizabeth had said, "My God, how times have changed. It was only yesterday that Paul Newman and I had to face all those restrictions from censors troubled by Tennessee's script of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. If this trend continues, Hollywood will be turning out homosexual love stories."

Elizabeth wasn't the only person struggling to keep Burton away from Lyon. She'd arrived in Puerto Vallarta with her boy friend, Hampton Fancher III. Huston's biographer, Lawrence Grobel, described the boy as "a tall, pale youth ravaged by love." Soon after his arrival, Fancher warned Burton, "I tend to be murderously inclined."

The circumstances which led to Burton finally being left alone with Lyon involved the fact that her boyfriend, as it turned out, was married. His young wife arrived unexpectedly on the set one day. Fancher would marry Lyon before the year ended, after his divorce became final.

As Lyon remembered it, "Richard drank so much at night that the alcohol literally oozed out of his pores the next day. It gave off a terrible odor."

Elizabeth did not learn about Burton's affair with Lyon until 1981, almost 18 years after it ended, when Eddie Fisher's first volume of memoirs was published.



Two views of **Sue Lyon**

Heating up Iguana with **Burton** as her tour guide and (inset) as **Lolita** in 1962.

In them, Fisher wrote: "I was surprised to discover that being dumped by Elizabeth had made me an extremely desirable man. I had gained a reputation for being an incredible lover—which is not a terrible reputation to have. There were many women like Sue Lyon, the very beautiful little girl who had starred in *Lolita*, who wanted to know if I was a better lover than Burton, so she slept with both of us. She was very upfront about her motives: This wasn't love, this was an experiment. Naturally, I rose to the challenge. "

Although the Burton/Lyon affair had burned out long before Elizabeth discovered that it had even happened, she flew into a rage when she learned, through Eddie's memoirs, about its existence.

"Michael Wilding was on the scene. Why didn't she fuck him, too?" If Mike Todd's corpse hadn't been incinerated, perhaps she could have dug him up, too. And I'm sure that when she returned to Hollywood, Nicky Hilton would have fucked her, too."

On December 5, 1963, Burton's divorce from Sybil was finalized, based on his "abandonment and cruel and inhumane treatment."

"At last Richard is free to marry me," Elizabeth told Dick Hanley. "This is the best Christmas present I've ever had in my life."

Simultaneous with that news, Elizabeth and Fisher were still fighting over money and possessions. He may have wanted all his jewelry back, but she wanted the second emerald green Rolls-Royce she'd given him. [The first vehicle had been stolen in Milan.] She also asked to keep the chalet in Gstaad and wanted all the profits from their jointly owned MCL Films.

His lawyers, however, finally forced her to make concessions with the understanding that Fisher would "refrain from embarrassing her publicly." Consequently Fisher's first memoir wasn't published until 1981, a delay

based partly on his fear of lawsuits from both Debbie Reynolds and Elizabeth.

Regarding his feud with Elizabeth, Fisher told the press, "Elizabeth deserves the Oscar for sheer gall. Perhaps she's being advised by Richard the Lion-Hearted, who is hustling her, trying to jump-start a film career for himself, if he can stay sober long enough."

In Puerto Vallarta, Elizabeth constantly referred to Fisher as "that fucking schmuck!" She told both Burton and Dick that, "I'll never speak to the prick again."

At a dinner party at Casa Kimberly, she denounced him in front of her guests. "I never loved him. Marrying that schmuck was the biggest mistake of my life. I was trying to keep Mike Todd's memory alive. Mike once told me that if anything happened to him, I should marry Eddie and let him take care of me. I was in a state of shock. When I married the schmuck, I thought I did it because Mike wanted me to."

Elizabeth's petition for divorce from Fisher was filed in Mexico on grounds of abandonment. Its legalities were finalized on March 6, 1964, when she was in Toronto "chaperoning" Burton, who was starring in a stage production of Hamlet. "The schmuck," she said, "is gone from life forever."

Fisher, in contrast, celebrated his divorce in New York by seducing a series of beautiful girls—"eighteen in a row for eighteen nights. On the nineteenth day, I rested."

He told the press, "Elizabeth will marry Burton, but will eventually dump him. Then she'll marry someone else, and dump him, and the pattern will go on until she's old and fat. What Elizabeth wants, she gets. She is beautiful, the queen. But she uses up men."

Before his departure from Mexico for New York, Tennessee Williams hosted a party at his rented villa near Elizabeth and Burton in Gringo Gulch. He'd invited both of them to attend, but only Elizabeth had shown up.

There, she met Jose Bolaños, a Mexican screen writer who was enjoying a certain vogue. After the murder of Marilyn Monroe on August 4, 1962, he was getting a lot of press attention and being hailed as her last and final boyfriend.

Bolaños claimed that he and Monroe had mutually committed themselves to get married, although some of her friends said that Monroe had promised to remarry Joe DiMaggio.

Bolaños was working on a TV commercial twenty-five miles to the south, but had come to Puerto Vallarta with the hope of meeting and ingratiating himself with Elizabeth as he had with Monroe.



Tennessee had been charmed by the charismatic young Mexican and had set up the meeting with Elizabeth, presumably without Burton.

She defined him as a Latin lover archetype, evocative of both Fernando Lamas and Ricardo Montalban. Bolaños was dark and handsome, with a magnetic personality. The night of their meeting, Bolaños told her that his dream involved coming to Hollywood and putting both Lamas and Montalban "out of business." Secretly, he hoped that by attaching himself to Elizabeth, she could use her influence to help him break into the American film industry.

Elizabeth might have paid scant attention to Bolaños except for two reasons: He was the only man she'd met in Puerto Vallarta who qualified for that "revenge fuck" she'd planned as a means of getting even with Burton for seducing Ava Gardner. Also, she was tempted by the idea of learning intimate secrets about Monroe's last lover, especially if the fallen star had considered Bolaños as marriage material.

At Tennessee's party, Bolaños exuded masculinity, and as Elizabeth would tell Dick Hanley, "He stood so close to me he was practically rubbing that big package up against me."

Dick didn't need to be told about that, as he, too, was at the party and could see what was obviously going on. "Bolaños was flirting with her, and Elizabeth was flirting right back."

On his own turf within Mexico's film community, Bolaños was known as a "star fucker," having previously seduced such aging screen divas as Merle Oberon and Dolores Del Rio.

On the patio of Tennessee's rented villa, lit by colored lights, Bolaños danced both the rumba and the samba with Elizabeth. Tennessee had hired a six-member band, each of the members appearing in tight white pants and shirtless, as per the playwright's request.

According to his reputation, Bolaños specialized in making a woman feel like she was the only female on earth.

The screenwriter mesmerized Elizabeth with his tales of working in the film industry in Mexico. He had been an intimate friend of the late, great modernist painter, Diego Rivera, and was also close to the Spain-born director Luís Buñuel, a towering figure in experimental cinema.

Bolaños also invited Elizabeth to see the Mexican historical epic, *La Cucaracha* (aka *The Soldiers of Pancho Villa*; 1959), whose screenplay he had written.

She pumped Bolaños for any details he could supply about Monroe's final weeks alive. Dick came over to join them. "Bolaños was very clever," he said. "He did not speak unkindly of Marilyn, but he placed Elizabeth on a higher pedestal. About three times, he told her that 'you are, of course, a far greater star than Marilyn, who possessed neither your talent nor your beauty.'"

"Your beauty is a natural beauty," Bolaños told Elizabeth in front of Dick. "Marilyn had to become Marilyn Monroe by acting the part, dressing up, and painting her face. With no make-up on, I'm sure you'd look stunning. Surely no one on the planet has eyes as beautiful as yours."

She was won over. Dick agreed to drive them from Tennessee's party back to his apartment, where he waited outside, in his car, for two hours.

When she finally came downstairs, she said, "Thanks for the use of your apartment. I hope you don't mind, but Jose wanted to stay over and not drive back to his motel along these impossible unlit roads at night."

"I don't mind at all," he said.

"All I will tell you is this: Marilyn died too soon. I understand completely why she wanted to marry Bolaños. He is God's gift to women, a great lover. Jose can be added to the list of many men Marilyn and I have shared. Richard Burton, John F. Kennedy, and Frank Sinatra come to mind. There were others."

"Peter Lawford, perhaps?" Dick asked.

"That goes without saying," she said. "Now take me home in case lover boy has straggled in."

She was, of course, referring to Burton, who had gone out that night drinking with Peter Viertel and Huston.

Back at his own apartment, Dick came into his bedroom. A nude Bolaños was asleep on his bed. Very gently, Dick slipped a sheet over him. "Lucky Marilyn, lucky Elizabeth," he later told Roddy McDowall.

"The next morning, I made breakfast for Jose," Dick said. "He also let me make love to him, but only in exchange for a big favor."

"I know you're her secretary," Bolaños said, "and you can arrange for me to have a rendezvous with her in Hollywood. I want to be in her life. She'll tire of Burton. He's an old man of failing powers, I heard. I want to be nearby when she replaces Burton."

"You've got yourself a deal, but I'll expect my pound of flesh."

He sighed. "All of you mariposas want that. So if you deliver Elizabeth Taylor to me, you can have me on occasion. After all, I'm the most sought after male in all of Mexico."

In Becket (1964), John Gielgud had played Louis VII, the effete King of France, beside Burton, who played a 12th-century archbishop in conflict with the English king. Over drinks together in a pub, both actors agreed that each of them should participate in some way to bring "the Bard to the masses."

Burton suggested that he'd like to perform Hamlet again if Gielgud would direct him. The project almost didn't get off the ground during its early stages when Gielgud informed him that, "Your first venture as Hamlet at the Old Vic offended my poetic sensitivity."

During the 1953-54 season at London's Old Vic, Burton had appeared under Michael Benthall's direction as Hamlet. Claire Bloom had been his Ophelia in more ways than one. She and Burton had one of the most torrid affairs of his career as a seducer when they starred together. His performance was viewed as successful, and even Winston Churchill came backstage to congratulate Burton as "My Lord Hamlet."

Burton had become the hottest male celebrity in the world. After his success in Becket, when he announced that he wanted to return to the stage as Hamlet, money was raised for the production in twenty-four hours.

One of Broadway's most successful producers, 43-year-old Alexander Cohen seemed only too eager to put up the cash. He didn't faint when presented with Burton's demand of \$10,000 a week, plus 15 percent of every ticket sold. That was to become the richest deal for any actor in the history of Broadway.

Elizabeth agreed to follow "my man" to Toronto for rehearsals of Hamlet. Gielgud, who had seduced Burton when he was a very young man, had finally contracted to direct him.

Burton feared Gielgud would be patronizing and condescending, partly because the aging director believed, with some justification, that he himself had executed "the definitive Hamlet" already. [Gielgud had performed in six acclaimed productions and more than 500 spectacular performances of the Danish Prince on the stage and for British radio beginning in the late 1930s. No stranger to theatrical controversy, and highly opinionated, Gielgud had famously detested Laurence Olivier's film interpretation of the same role in 1948.]

Burton, with Elizabeth, checked into their five-room lodging ("the Viceregal Suite") at Toronto's King Edward Hotel on January 28, 1964. They were charged sixty-five dollars a night. Their suite had been occupied in years past by both Presidents, Eisenhower and Kennedy.

Immediately upon entering the hotel, they passed an evangelist minister who whipped out a prominent sign whose slogan was specifically, it seemed, directed at them: DRINK NOT THE WINE OF ADULTERY.

During rehearsals at Toronto's O'Keefe Theatre, whereas Gielgud passionately wanted Shakespeare's poetry to carry the play, Burton was "more interested in discovering the Bard's meaning."

As Graham Jenkins, one of Burton's brothers, wrote: "The result was an undisciplined and unpredictable Hamlet who, at times, had the rest of the cast running around in circles."

"The one thing that surprised me about them was that Elizabeth called Richard 'Fred' and he called her 'Agatha,'" said Gielgud.

Elizabeth noted that during trial runs, Burton wasn't clicking with the audience. She placed an emergency call to Philip Burton, an authority on Shakespeare and Richard's longtime mentor, and persuaded him to come to Toronto for additional coaching.

The appearance of this "second director" on the scene infuriated Gielgud. But Philip's magic seemed to work, and Burton delivered a more dynamic performance after his coaching. Philip had previously supplied behind-the-scenes direction to his star pupil at the Old Vic in London during the 1950s.

Whereas Burton may have believed that Elizabeth's legs were too short, like Errol Flynn, he didn't like the way his own legs appeared in tights, or in doublet and hose. "In tights, my legs look like a pair of stockings idly thrown over a bed rail," he told Gielgud.

In a wry and campy mood, Gielgud responded "Yes, but they'd look great wrapped around my head."

It was therefore agreed that Hamlet was to be performed in modern dress, and Burton subsequently appeared at every performance in a black V-neck sweater and black trousers.

Of course, during the run of Hamlet, as was to be expected, some members of the audience were put off by Shakespearean characters sipping martinis and puffing on cigars.

February of 1964 was a big month for Elizabeth, who was celebrating her thirty-second birthday and expecting jewelry from Burton. The month also saw the opening of Burton's stage version of Hamlet in Toronto.

Attending opening night, an elegantly dressed Elizabeth was booed viciously by the audience. This delayed the curtain for nearly half an hour.

Taking her seat, she sat with her head erect and her back straight, refusing to be intimidated by the hostile response to her presence. To those hissing her, Elizabeth had obviously become the femme fatale of the 20th Century. She represented vamp, vixen, she-wolf man eater, slut, tart, the devil incarnate in women's clothing, the Serpent of the Nile.

"My God, they viewed me as Gloria Wandrous in Butterfield 8," she said, "the role I hated."

One night in Toronto, Burton played Hamlet as a homosexual, as Olivier had done in London on occasion. "I inserted a few lines from Marlowe, and no one noticed."

The Toronto Star called Burton "artistically impotent," but The Toronto Telegram hailed his performance as a masterpiece. During its entire run in Toronto, Hamlet sold out at every performance.

The production was interrupted when Elizabeth and Burton finally decided to fly away to get married.

Inconveniently, the province of Ontario, in which Toronto is located, did not recognize Mexican divorces as legally valid. Consequently, in the wake of her (Mexican) divorce from Fisher, Elizabeth flew with Burton to Montréal, in the more permissive French-speaking province of Québec, which did. It would be her fifth trip down the aisle of marriage.

Aboard a morning flight on a chartered Lockheed Jet, the couple was accompanied by America's most famous publicist, John Springer. En route, Burton revealed to Springer how he'd proposed to Elizabeth during the filming of Becket the previous summer.

"I proposed in front of Peter O'Toole at this pub in Berkshire near Windsor Castle. I looked straight into Elizabeth's eyes and said—I want to marry Elizabeth, and I will marry her."

She responded, "You've said it, Richard."

Before 10am, aboard the flight to Montréal, Burton was already drinking heavily. "Why are you so nervous?" she asked him in front of Dick Hanley. "After all, you've been sleeping with me for two years."

In Montréal, she was married in two separate ceremonies on the same day, first in the Consulate of Mexico, for legal reasons, and again as part of a religious ceremony within the Royal Suite at the Ritz-Carlton Montréal.

As his best man, Burton made an unusual choice in Robert Wilson, his African-American dresser.

Elizabeth wanted to be married by a rabbi, but none was available. Other members of the clergy also turned down this request from "this wanton woman and home wrecker." Finally, the Rev. Leonard Mason, from the Unitarian Church of the Messiah, agreed to perform the ceremony at the Ritz-Carlton.

Based on a costume she'd worn during her first scene with Burton in Cleopatra, Elizabeth arrived looking stunning in a canary yellow chiffon Irene Sharaff gown with lots of décolletage. Her hairdo was spectacular. Her own hair had been augmented by thirty-four falls priced collectively at \$600. Hyacinths were woven into the resulting hairdo to create the effect of an elaborate diadem, halo, or circle of light, depending on who was looking at it.



The Burton/Taylor wedding in Montréal

Harry Winston would have been proud of her jewelry, which included a diamond necklace and matching diamond-and-emerald ear drop earrings, a gift from Burton.

After the first ceremony, Burton said, "It's a fairytale. The 'Boy from Nowhere' has just married the world's most celebrated beauty."

Back at the Ritz-Carlton, Elizabeth stayed in her bedroom preparing herself again and redoing her make-up. The minister, Burton, and the other guests waited for her.

"Isn't that fat little tart here yet?" Burton asked Dick Hanley. "I swear to you she'll be late for the Last Bloody Judgment."

Partly because of its dysfunctional timing, the second segment of the wedding in Montréal was a curious anticlimax to what had been one of the 20th century's most publicized romances.

A wedding party of ten, including her parents, had been flown in, as had Burton's agent, Hugh French. The actor Hume Cronyn, who had been cast as Polonius in *Hamlet*, was also a guest.

From afar, Elizabeth's longtime friend, Oscar Levant, who was not at the wedding, delivered the best quip—"Elizabeth is always a bride, never a bridesmaid."

Other commentators tried to match Levant's humor: "Imagine!" wrote Walter Winchell. "Marrying every husband you meet." Bob Hope quipped, "Want a steady job, gals? Try out for flower girl at Liz Taylor's weddings."

Before their departure from Montréal, Burton announced, "Elizabeth is like a mirage of beauty of the ages, irresistible, like the pull of gravity. She has everything I want in a woman. She is quite unlike any woman I have ever known. She makes men not want to know any other woman, believe me, sincerely. I think of her morning, noon, and night. I dream of her. She will be my greatest happiness—forever, of course."

Back in Toronto, Burton discovered his dressing room filled with gifts, mainly kitchen utensils. He picked up two rolling pins and turned to Dick. "These might come in handy if I have to beat the wench if she gets out of hand."

On the first night after his return from Montréal, just before another Toronto performance of *Hamlet*, Burton came out on stage to make an announcement: "Some of you have come to see Alfred Drake; some have come

to see Eileen Herlie, some have come to see Hume Cronyn, and some have come to see Elizabeth Taylor.” [Elizabeth virtually had to be pushed out from the wings at this point.]

Instead of boos and hissing this time, she received deafening applause.

Burton later referred to it as “orgiastic cheering.”

At the end of that night’s performance, Burton received six curtain calls. After the first three, he stepped in front of the curtain. “I would like to quote from the play,” he said to the audience. “Act Three, Scene One. ‘We will have no more marriages.’”

That comment produced another round of standing ovations.

From Toronto, Elizabeth and Burton headed to Boston with Gielgud’s production of Hamlet. She told him that “Bostonians are more reserved than the more provincial Canadians. I don’t think we’ll attract such hysteria.”

She was wrong. Never again in their lives would they be faced with such a massive onslaught of hundreds of fans. It became impossible for them to get off the plane. After waiting an hour, the pilot got permission to steer the plane into a hangar so he could unload his passengers.

Safely in the back seat of a limousine, Burton and Elizabeth were driven to the Copley Plaza Hotel. But as they entered the lobby, a mob of some one thousand unruly fans assaulted them. The police, hotel security, and private security guards could not control the screaming throng.

At one point, Elizabeth became surrounded by the mob. Someone shouted, “See if it’s a wig!” A burly woman yanked out a hunk of Elizabeth’s hair, while another tore at her diamond earring. Not succeeding at unfastening it, she nonetheless caused Elizabeth to bleed.

Burton fought his way back to her. With the help of two policemen, he managed to clear a pathway for her to the elevator. She’d been knocked down, falling against a wall, which dislocated her shoulder. In great pain, she was put to bed, and a doctor summoned.

The next morning, Burton was seen in a gun shop in Roxbury, outside Boston, purchasing a .22 caliber pistol and ample amounts of ammunition.

Burton was so furious, he even called Ted Kennedy, complaining, “Elizabeth was almost killed. You’d better talk to the Boston police.” Kennedy obviously had some influence, especially on his “home turf” of Massachusetts. When the Burtons arrived that night at the Schubert Theater, a “police curtain” quickly materialized around them.

In Boston, Sammy Davis, Jr. came to see them and convinced her that Burton’s wardrobe was not “mod” enough. She commissioned his tailor, Cy Devore, to design an entirely new wardrobe for him. “My aim is to have him known as ‘the Sinatra of Shakespeare,’” a reference to Sinatra’s stylish way of dressing.

While Elizabeth and Burton were still in Boston, before their invasion of Broadway, there were rumblings from Washington, D.C., attacking them.

Michael Feighan, a Roman Catholic Democratic congressman from Ohio, representing Cleveland, formally demanded that the State Department revoke Burton’s visa and refuse his re-entrance into the United States. The request was denied. When Feighan learned that Burton would be bringing Hamlet to Broadway, he requested that the play be shut down because it was “immoral.” When that initiative failed, he asked that all the lights on Broadway be dimmed on the play’s opening night as a protest against its content. That final request was not honored, either.

In Manhattan, the Taylor/Burton brood was camped out in the Regency Hotel on Park Avenue at 61st Street, wrecking two separate suites.

By now, Elizabeth in particular was known for trashing every suite she occupied and paying damages. First, she allowed her dogs to run wild without being walked. The carpets ended up smelling like urine. Her children were often out of control. Draperies were ripped, and mattresses always had to be replaced because of the many drinks spilled over them. And for some reason, perhaps the result of drunken arguments, mirrors were

often broken or cracked.

At Hamlet's opening at Broadway's Lunt-Fontanne Theater in April of 1964, masses turned out to catch a glimpse of Elizabeth and her latest husband. New York's finest were summoned to block off the street, as thousands of fans and onlookers flooded the streets around Times Square in ways that evoked the crowds of New Year's Eve.

"I left Broadway as King of Camelot, and I have returned as Prince of Denmark," Burton told the press.

On opening night, the biggest insult to Burton came from the famous Broadway producer, Harold Clurman, who got up and walked out in the middle of an important scene being performed by Burton as Hamlet. In the lobby of the theater, Clurman told a reporter, "Burton is the story of an actor who has lost interest in his profession."

But Walter Kerr of The New York Herald Tribune was kinder, claiming that Burton is "one of the most magnificently equipped actors living." Others used words such as "electric" and "virile" to describe his performance.

Burton himself defined his performance to critic Kenneth Tynan with irony and a touch of self-satirization: "I played it myself—that is, Richard Burton playing Richard Burton playing Hamlet."

Elizabeth had not seen Monty Clift in many months, and invited him to Burton's opening night on Broadway. Backstage, she masked the shock on her own face when she saw his ravaged face. He'd aged at least ten years since she'd seen him. "Oh, Bessie Mae," he said, falling into her arms and weeping.

She invited him to join her at the after-the-show party that Hamlet's producer Alexander Cohen was staging in the Rainbow Room at Rockefeller Center.

Newsweek reported that the party at the Rainbow Room, sixty-five stories above Manhattan's street level, "was the scarcest ticket in New York." Among the invited guests were Michael Wilding and Margaret Leighton. Wilding presented Leighton to Elizabeth with the words, "I have found renewed happiness with her. The old pain has gone."

In the Rainbow Room, Burton was seen dancing with Princess Lee Radziwill, sister of Jacqueline Kennedy. Even the Gish sisters, Dorothy and Lillian, showed up as ghostly reminders of the vanished heyday of silent films.

The next day, Elizabeth went to have drinks with Monty at his Manhattan brownstone, a building he had recently purchased. It had been almost four years since he'd faced the cameras, because no company would insure him. She asked him what he thought of Burton's Hamlet. "He's nothing but a reciter, a total phony running around the stage."

In spite of the insult, she was eager to put him back to work. She came up with the odd suggestion that they perform *The Owl and the Pussycat* together on stage. "A comedy together," she said. "It will be a sell-out." (Ironically, although after her experience with *Butterfield 8*, Elizabeth had vowed that she'd never again appear on screen as a prostitute, the female character she wanted to play in *The Owl and the Pussycat* was that of a hooker.)

She was convinced that if Monty didn't find work, he would die. Tennessee Williams had given her a copy of a novel written by a close friend of his. It was *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, written by Carson McCullers. The producer, Ray Stark, wanted to spearhead a film version, even though it clearly defined the leading male character as a latent homosexual.

Elizabeth told Stark she'd post a million dollars to insure Monty and herself.

For two full years, they continued to discuss and plot their dreams for *Reflections*, but Monty died on July 23, 1966. In the aftermath of Monty's death, Marlon Brando agreed to interpret the role of the homosexual, opposite Elizabeth, and the movie was finally released in 1967 by Warner Brothers, with John Huston called in to direct.

Burton suggested that Elizabeth, Monty, and himself remake the 1947 *The Macomber Affair*, which had starred Gregory Peck, Joan Bennett, and Robert Preston. Although such a film could have meant good box office, no studio expressed an interest.

Frank Sinatra came to see *Hamlet* one night, although he dozed off a bit. He came backstage, too, with kisses for both Burton and Elizabeth. "Even in my heyday with the bobbysoxers during the war, I didn't get crowds like

you guys are getting. Keep wearing those sparklers, Liz."

Truman Capote also visited backstage and told them he was amazed at the masses gathering every night on Broadway at Forty-Sixth Street.

"That's because we're sex maniacs," Elizabeth said. "They're coming to see a pair of sinful freaks."

Capote put a different spin on it. He said, "It's the allure of wealth, diamonds, minks, exotic perfume—intoxicating!"

"During the run of Hamlet, Richard's drinking capacity continued to amaze," claimed Graham Jenkins in his memoirs, Richard Burton, My Brother. "When I was with him, he always managed three or four powerful martinis before going on stage, and these were just a top-up of the day's intake. Nonetheless, he was there, on time, for every performance."

Actor Stanley Baker, an old friend, came to visit them at the Regency after placing at least twenty calls, finding it impossible to get either of them on the phone. Finally, he reached Burton, who invited him to come up to their suite.

Baker had a film proposal for an upcoming movie entitled Sands of Kalahari, a drama about five men and one woman stranded in the Kalahari Desert. He told them what they already knew: They were the most gold-plated couple in the history of show business. "Now is the time to capitalize on it."

Even though Elizabeth and Burton liked the script, and wanted to be part of it, they could not agree on terms. "Liz wanted a million dollars; Richard half a million, but they also asked a higher percentage of the gross than we could afford," Baker said. "Too damn bad."

During the run of the stage performance of Hamlet, the film version of The Night of the Iguana opened in New York. Ava Gardner, that onetime barefoot Tarheel girl from Grabtown, North Carolina, received the best notices. Bosley Crowther of The New York Times attacked Burton's performance as the defrocked priest. "He is spectacularly gross, a figure of wild disarrangement, but without a shred of real sincerity."

"He was impossible to live with for a week," Elizabeth told Dick Hanley. "I went one entire week without getting fucked."

Iguana, in spite of some attacks, turned out to be a blockbuster success. "If I ever run into that Crowther, I'll stick my Welsh fist up his ass," Burton said. "I've got the Midas touch at the box office."

In June of 1964, Elizabeth agreed to make her stage debut on Broadway at the Lunt-Fontanne Theater, the site of Burton's ongoing performances of Hamlet. She and Burton, as coached and rehearsed by Philip Burton, were commissioned to read poetry-and-prose selections for the \$100-per ticket fund-raiser, World Enough and Time, a title inspired by the poetry of Andrew Marvell ("To His Coy Mistress"). It was understood that profits generated by the event would be donated to Philip Burton's nearly bankrupt school, the American Musical and Dramatic Academy.

Among the famous guests were Dina Merrill, Myrna Loy, Lee Remick, Kitty Carlisle Hart, Patricia Kennedy Lawford, Lauren Bacall, Anita Loos, Alan Jay Lerner, and Adolf Green. Drunk and drugged, Monty also showed up. Elizabeth believed that "the cream of the cream was turning out to see me fall on my face."

The event also attracted New York's handsome mayor, John Lindsay. Elizabeth told Dick Hanley, "I've always had a crush on this guy." She demonstrated that after her performance, when the Mayor came backstage to congratulate her. "She gave him a sloppy wet one," Dick said.

Burton read from a mélange of Shakespeare, D.H. Lawrence, and even "words of wisdom" from John Lennon. Also included was a rendering of the Twenty-Third Psalm, in Welsh (by Burton) and in English (by Elizabeth). Appearing in a Grecian gown with diamonds and emeralds, Elizabeth recited "Three Bushes" by William Butler Yeats, and "How Do I Love Thee? Let Me Count the Ways," by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. She fumbled several lines during her recitation of Thomas Hardy's The Ruined Maid, a poem selected as a means of poking fun at the Burtons' public image.

"And now you've gay bracelets and bright feathers three!

'Yes, that's how we dress when we're ruined,' said she."

"This is getting even funnier than Hamlet," Burton said.

Sitting behind Bea Lillie (Lady Peel), Emlyn Williams heard Lillie say to Carol Channing, "If she doesn't get

bad pretty soon, I'm leaving."

But Elizabeth recovered quickly from her fumble and finished the show with style. Later, the New York Herald Tribune said that Elizabeth "giggled her way through a series of bungled lines."

One night, she had the flu and remained in her suite at The Regency. That night, as Burton was delivering one of Hamlet's soliloquies, a heckler booed him, the first time that had ever occurred to him as a performer. He was furious. By the time the curtain went down, he was enraged. That led him to join two cast members in a heavy round of drinking. By the time he returned to his suite at The Regency, he was totally intoxicated and very belligerent.

When he walked into the living room, he found Elizabeth entranced by a Peter Sellers movie, *I'm All Right, Jack* (1959), the first one she'd ever seen with the actor.

"Cut off that fucking TV," Burton yelled at her. "I was booed tonight."

"It happens to all stage actors," she said. "Get over it."

"I said cut off that bloody TV!" he said.

He stormed into the bedroom and came out about fifteen minutes later, barefoot and clad only in his jockey shorts. He was infuriated to discover that she was still watching that Sellers movie. He gave the TV a kick, knocking it over, but cut his foot on the broken glass. Elizabeth was horrified when he couldn't stop bleeding.

That's when he revealed to her that he suffered from hemophilia. "It is the disease of kings," he told her, referring to the many inbred royal families of Europe who suffered from the same disease.

An ambulance rushed him to the hospital where he told her that he came from a family of "bleeders." Four of his brothers also suffered from the same disease.

At the hospital, Burton received a dozen stitches to stop the bleeding and he was forced to limp through Hamlet for the next two weeks.

Five nights after his hospital emergency, Burton encountered Eddie Fisher in a Manhattan restaurant, and graciously invited him to The Regency for a drink.

Fisher later wrote, "I arrived in the middle of an argument. Elizabeth's make-up was smeared, her voice loud and shrill. She was furious about something, and I thought, 'I was married to that woman, this wild thing,' Burton was trying to soothe her, as I watched him walk around their suite, apologizing, straightening up, retrieving things she dropped. I said to myself, 'There once went I.'"

"We agreed to bury the hatchet," Fisher said, "but there was no love lost." He was eager to let Elizabeth know that he had a new "high-class girlfriend" in Pamela Turnure, who was at the time press secretary to Jacqueline Kennedy. "But Pamela has made one big mistake in our affair. She's fallen in love with me. As for Jackie, I've met her several times. She's told the world that the public would lose respect for her if she ran off with Eddie Fisher. She may not run off with me, but I can tell she has the hots for me. The last time Pamela, Jackie, and I had dinner together, Jackie couldn't keep her hands off me."

Five nights later, the Burtons came together with Fisher and Turnure in Manhattan at the Copacabana for the nightclub act of Sammy Davis, Jr. Fisher's party included the Chicago gangster, Sam Giancana; producer Walter Wanger of *Cleopatra*; Mike Todd, Jr., and Jennie Grossinger. Fisher was still romantically linked to Turnure.

That night, Burton told Elizabeth, "Hamlet is coming to an end, and we should return to making films for big money. We'll co-star together in a movie called *The Sandpiper*."

Burton's New York run of Hamlet was the most successful run of that play in theatrical history, with 136 performances. Ironically, it surpassed the previous Broadway record of performances, 132 in all, that Gielgud had chalked up in any of his single runs.

Burton became so carried away with the Bard that he contemplated directing Elizabeth as Lady Macbeth in some vaguely defined future enterprise.

His Hamlet played to standing room only for every performance for seventeen weeks on Broadway, grossing more than \$6 million, of which he received fifteen percent.

"Deodorants come and go, but there's only one deodorant that works in this town. It's called Success." Elizabeth said.

The Sandpiper (1965), some of which would be shot at Big Sur along the coast of central California at the end of 1964, would be the third film to star Elizabeth and Richard Burton, who was now her husband.

For the film, Elizabeth demanded her usual million dollars. "I always call it my 'giggly million' because I always giggle when I get a check with all those zeroes. It makes Richard happy, too, because he says he wants to be 'rich, rich, rich.'"

Burton drew a salary of \$750,000, which he told director Vincente Minnelli "pisses me off. I want a cool million like Liz. After all, my dick is bigger than hers. Besides, let the record speak for itself. I am the world's leading box office attraction."

He exaggerated. Although listed among the top ten, he was not number one.

Elizabeth's contract had granted her director approval and she had chosen Minnelli, who had helmed her in Father of the Bride and Father's Little Dividend, Burton wasn't thrilled with the choice of Minnelli. "Maybe he'll turn The Sandpiper into a musical and insist I do a soft-shoe."

She had known Minnelli during the course of his marriage to Judy Garland, and she also knew his young daughter, Liza Minnelli. But she immediately clashed with him by demanding that Sammy Davis, Jr., play her other love interest in the movie.

"I'm about the most liberal guy in Hollywood, but there was no way I could cast a black guy in 1964 to play love scenes with Elizabeth," Minnelli said. "She staged a bitter battle, but we had to give the role to Charles Bronson."

In his memoir, Hollywood in a Suitcase, Davis claimed that he had signed a contract to do the film, but had to withdraw because of an early opening of Golden Boy on Broadway. This does not appear to be the case. "The racial issue was paramount," Minnelli claimed.



Vincente Minnelli with his infant daughter, Liza Minnelli

The Sandpiper had actually been conceived as a vehicle for Kim Novak, who in many ways would have been far better suited to the role than Elizabeth.

Originally, the producer and the scriptwriter, Martin Ransohoff, had wanted to film The Sandpiper eight months earlier, based on a screenplay that would have starred Elizabeth with Marlon Brando. [Ransohoff was the producer who had given the world The Beverly Hillbillies beginning in 1962.] Production was delayed, he claimed, "because Elizabeth wanted to hold Burton's hand during Hamlet and during the filming of Iguana in Mexico."

Minnelli privately told his friends that casting Brando and Novak might have generated more on-screen chemistry than Elizabeth and Burton. "If Sammy Davis, Jr., had also been cast as the second lover, that ebony-on-porcelain chemistry of the lavender blonde and the little boy from Harlem would have been something to see. After all, Sammy and Kim were rumored to have been lovers off the screen."

Minnelli also said he found the story "ludicrous and dated" and compared it to a watered-down version of W. Somerset Maugham's Rain which introduced the character of prostitute Sadie Thompson.

Dalton Trumbo, one of the original members of the Hollywood Ten accused of spreading communist propaganda to the American populace through the entertainment industry, worked on the script but didn't bring his usual magic to it. He said, "I didn't want to add an interracial romance to an already over-burdened story," referring, of course, to Elizabeth's original insistence on casting Sammy Davis, Jr.

Exterior shots were filmed at Big Sur along the central California coast, but Burton and Elizabeth, for tax reasons, insisted that the rest of the film be shot outside Paris.

Frocked in Becket, defrocked in *The Night of the Iguana*, Burton was playing yet another ecclesiastic in *The Sandpiper*. He's willing to remove his "dog collar" with fewer reservations this time around as he surrenders to Elizabeth, a nature-loving unmarried mother living in a sea-fronting house near a coven of Bohemian artists at Big Sur.

In the film, the character of Elizabeth's illegitimate nine-year-old son, Danny Reynolds, was played by Morgan Mason, who was actually the son of James Mason. Minnelli had wanted to cast one of the Wilding teenagers [i.e., one of Elizabeth's sons] in the role, but Elizabeth, perhaps for artistic reasons, refused.

Eva Marie Saint played the third lead. Cast as Burton's castoff wife in the film, "she was the stand-in for Sybil Burton," according to Minnelli. "The screenplay in some way and in some lines paralleled the real life drama of Burton and Taylor."

Burton and Minnelli did not get along and conflicted over the interpretation of several scenes. "The film was a bore," Burton said. "Minnelli had once been a good director, but he was past his prime. I didn't like the part, and it bored me, but as I told Minnelli, who wore lipstick every day, 'For the money, Liz and I will dance.'"

In the script, Charles Bronson portrays a bohemian sculptor who carves a life-sized nude of Elizabeth au naturel. Edmund Kara was commissioned to produce a voluptuous and anatomically correct nude of Elizabeth, but she refused to pose for it. He found a model whose body resembled Elizabeth's. As a means of replicating Elizabeth's face, Kara used a life mask. It took three months to transform a block of redwood into a nude replica of Elizabeth.

"I don't know what Elizabeth thought of my statue," Kara said, "but Burton had praise for it."

"Bravo!" Burton said. "Kara, you've even captured the dimples on her ass."

"I think nude scenes are absurd," Elizabeth said, "and I think it's really strange the way women, respectable women, will strip for magazines. The ones who don't need the money—it can only be a narcissistic complex, a vanity of the body so profound that they must show it."

When the filming was over, Kara got his sculpture returned from the prop room of MGM, although they demanded half the proceeds if he ever sold it. Instead of selling it, he decapitated the head to display as a work of art in its own right.

He then planned to use the block of redwood as the raw material for other sculptures. As he told author C. David Heymann, "I brought in a friend with a saw to decapitate it. He took off the head straight across the shoulders and then cut away the arms. He was holding the chain saw rather suggestively in front of his crotch. The blade protruded like a giant phallus. So I said to him, 'Go ahead, give it to her!' He plunged the blade deep into her vagina and ripped her. When he completed the cut, thousands of big army ants came marching out. They had been living inside the wooden love goddess's uterus for months."



"THE SANDPIPER"



It was the 60s, and everyone went to Big Sur... Two views of **Elizabeth Taylor** as a bohemian precursor of the hippies

Graham Jenkins, Burton's brother, said, "Allowed a free choice, I believe Rich would have turned down *The Sandpiper*. He knew from the beginning that it was a bad film."

Elizabeth got along with Minnelli much better than Burton, and she noted he still had a sexual interest in Tom Drake, who had a supporting role in the movie.

In *Raintree County*, Drake had played her brother. "To get a job in films, poor Tom is still having to drop trou for Vincente, just like he did when he played *The Boy Next Door*," Elizabeth said. "For god's sake, Tom was born in 1918."

The *Boy Next Door* reference was to his role opposite Judy Garland in the 1944 *Meet Me in St. Louis*. Minnelli had directed him in that, and had become sexually involved with the handsome young boy.

Elizabeth also confessed to Dick Hanley that "Tom and I were both in love with Peter Lawford at the same time."

Although Elizabeth and Burton had recently married, they had previously lived together for two years, which caused him to refer to her as "my old lady." Sometimes, in the British fashion, he referred to her as "old girl."

"I may be married," he told Minnelli, "but I'm not dead. I don't see much chance for me to knock off an extra piece. On this picture, I hear that Eva Marie Saint lives up to her last name."

At that point in his life, Elizabeth seemed to be fulfilling his heterosexual needs. But, as a bisexual, he had an eye out for a handsome, charismatic male. He found such a person in a talented architect, interior designer and decorator, Edward (Eduardo) Tirella, who had been hired to work on the movie's sets at Big Sur.

Born in Dover, New Jersey, Tirella was tall, charming, smart, athletic, and very good-looking. Growing up in an Italian family, he secretly wanted to be a singer. When he sang in clubs, his velvety voice evoked Mel Tormé.

Ransohoff had hired Tirella to design the bohemian artist's "shack" which Elizabeth's character would occupy as her oceanfront home in the movie. Tirella also made a brief appearance onscreen in a beach setting with Elizabeth and Bronson.

Ransohoff praised Tirella's artistic talent, claiming that "anything he touches can turn into something beautiful. He has hands of gold."

Like Burton, Tirella was a bisexual, and had lent both his professional and private talents to both Peggy Lee and the very closeted Alan Ladd.

As a hat designer at Saks Fifth Avenue, he had sold some of his more extravagant creations to Hedda Hopper, Elizabeth's friend and sometimes ally of long ago, and Mae West.

Soon after his work on *The Sandpiper*, he would begin a destructive and eventually fatal relationship with Doris Duke, the richest woman in the world.

Duke's biographer, Stephanie Mansfield, wrote: "A striking figure in his turtlenecks and in his sporty convertible car, Tirella was known as promiscuous in the homosexual world. But he never had any lasting relationships. They were only one-night stands."

Tirella got a weekend singing gig in San Francisco, and he invited Burton to drive with him there for the weekend, not only to hear him sing, but to see more of the city, of which he had only a passing acquaintance.

Technically, Elizabeth had been invited, too, but she told Dick Hanley, "I really think Tirella, and Richard, too, views me as so much extra baggage."

Actually, Elizabeth had a very good reason for not wanting to go. Deborah Kerr's husband, the sophisticated scriptwriter and novelist, Peter Viertel, was slipping into Monterey, close to the set of *Sandpiper*, and he wanted Elizabeth to come and visit him at his hotel suite.

"I adore the man," she told Dick. "We had such a grand time in your apartment in Puerto Vallarta...I'd like to see him again. Of course, we'll be very discreet."

While Tirella was away in San Francisco with Burton, Elizabeth had a secret rendezvous with Viertel.

During their short time together at Big Sur filming *The Sandpiper*, Tirella and Burton became "bonded at the hip."

This caused some jealous tension between Burton and Minnelli," Dick later said. "Minnelli soon tired of Tom Drake and wanted Tirella for himself. When Burton went off for a second weekend with Tirella to San Francisco, Minnelli seemed furious, but repressed his anger."

Dick later emphasized that during Burton's time away from her, Elizabeth did not embrace a self-image as an abandoned wife or lonely widow. During the second weekend that Burton was in San Francisco with Tirella, Jose Balaños showed up for a dalliance with her at a hotel/resort outside Monterey.

"He was still hoping that Elizabeth might jump-start a film career for him," Dick said, "but she was more interested in replicating the pleasures that Jose had managed to provide for Marilyn Monroe. She also wanted to gossip about the circumstances associated with the weeks prior to her death."

"In the end, Jose was very disappointed that Elizabeth did nothing for him in the film industry," Dick said. "After Richard and Elizabeth left for Paris, she told me not to put through any more of his calls or answer any of his letters. I felt a little sorry for the kid, as he had lost both Marilyn, because she died, and then Elizabeth, because she dropped him."

When his involvement with the filming of *The Sandpiper* was concluded, in early October of 1966, Tirella returned to the East Coast and began a "creative collaboration" with Doris Duke. He moved with her into Rough Point, one of the largest mansions in Newport, Rhode Island, where he was commissioned as her interior decorator during some of its renovations. But after growing tired of being both companion and nursemaid to the notoriously imperious heiress within her gloomy white elephant of an estate, Tirella became argumentative and consequently met a much worse fate than Bolaños.

In Big Sur, producer Martin Ransohoff had been so impressed with Tirella's contribution to *The Sandpiper* that he made him an offer for work on the set of *Don't Make Waves*, an ode to the go-go southern California beach culture of the 60s. Eventually released in 1967, with advertising slogans that included "It fills up the screen like she fills out a bikini," it starred Tony Curtis and Sharon Tate, the actress who would confront her own grisly death at the murderous hands of Charles Manson's gang.

Confronted with the reality of Tirella's upcoming abandonment, Duke argued violently, jockeying and maneuvering to convince him to stay by her side, but he remained firm in his resolve to depart from Rough Point.

At around five o'clock on the afternoon of October 7, 1966, in an event that would horrify local residents for years, Duke asked Tirella to accompany her on an errand in her white station wagon. Before they could drive away from the gardens surrounding the Duke mansion, she ordered him to exit from the driver's seat of the car and open the heavy iron gates separating her estate from the neighborhood that surrounded it.



How to Get Away with Murder: Two views of **Doris Duke** upper photo: With **Elizabeth Taylor** in 1981 lower photo: with **Eduardo Tirella** in the mid-1960s

As he was opening the gates, the station wagon roared forward at high speed, hit Tirella, and then crashed his body into the gate, breaking its heavy latch with its impact. The car then shot across the wide expanse of Bellevue Avenue, stopping only after it crashed into a tree on the avenue's distant side. Trapped under the car, and dragged for many yards at high speed under its chassis, the body of Tirella lay in a tangled bloody mess of torn flesh and broken bones. His head had been smashed open like a melon.

Duke was almost immediately sedated and confined to her room, with only invited visitors allowed, by her doctors as a bevy of attorneys debated how best to handle the legal implications of this disaster. When she became available, many hours later, for interviews from the Newport police, the press was advised that Duke had "accidentally gunned the accelerator" from her position in the front passenger's seat. The police then ruled the incident as "an unfortunate accident," and dropped all semblance of a prosecution.

The resulting cries of foul play caused such a furor that the local police chief, Joseph Radice, was eventually forced to resign. Duke later settled out of court with Tirella's family when they brought civil charges against her.

When he heard about the accident, Burton told Elizabeth and Dick Hanley, "Doris Duke murdered Eduardo, and of that I have no doubt. When you have all the money in the world, you can get away with murder."

"Obviously, we can't go to the funeral," Elizabeth told Dick. "Send flowers."

Perhaps Elizabeth had many motives for not attending the funeral. First, she hardly knew Tirella, and resented his presence in Burton's life. Had she gone to the funeral, it might have caused speculation about those wild weekends Burton had spent with Tirella in San Francisco. Also, the appearance of either Burton or

Elizabeth in Newport would have alienated Duke and focused even more light on embarrassments that the heiress wanted buried in more ways than one.

With the intention of filming the interior scenes of *The Sandpiper* in Paris, Elizabeth and Burton sailed aboard the Queen Elizabeth 2, booking all six first-class cabins except one. Ironically, that one was occupied by Debbie Reynolds, who had married Harry Karl, a shoe manufacturer.

Elizabeth and Reynolds met onboard for a Dom Pérignon toast, both of them agreeing, "Who in the fuck cares about Eddie Fisher?"

Regrettably, Reynolds' marriage to Karl ended in 1975 after she discovered him to be a serial adulterer who also gambled away all her money, forcing her at one point in her life to vacate her home and to live in her car.

Elizabeth, Burton, staff, and children checked into the Hotel Lancaster on rue de Berri, off the Champs-Élysées in Paris, renting twenty-one rooms for a combined fee of \$10,000 a week.

From their digs at the Lancaster, Burton and Elizabeth were entertained by tout Paris, especially by the Baron Guy de Rothschild.

All of the interior scenes of *The Sandpiper* were shot at the Boulogne-Billancourt Studios in Paris's western suburbs. Wherever Burton and Elizabeth went, they were mobbed by thousands of fans.

Burton claimed that he was thoroughly mauled by the paparazzi at The Lido night club. "They were trying to get pictures of my wife's tits," he complained to his fellow guests, Aristotle Onassis and his mistress, the operatic superstar, Maria Callas.

A French reporter asked Elizabeth about her beauty and about Burton's sex appeal. "I am not a great beauty. I'm too short of leg, too big in the arms, one too many chins, big feet, big hands, too fat. For Richard, it's not about muscles. It is what he says and thinks."

Graham Jenkins, Burton's brother, claimed, "The couple lived in luxury. Outside Paris, they had a dressing caravan the size of a small hotel, and they were hauled around in a chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royce with a Welsh dragon engraved on it. The booze flowed from a ruptured brewery, and the parties were open-ended."

In Paris, Elizabeth shocked many of her most ardent fans by renouncing her American citizenship to become British. "It isn't that all of a sudden, I love America less. It's just that I love my husband more. Besides, I was born in England."

Most of the press viewed her statement as dishonest and self-serving. "It was done for tax reasons," said *Paris-Match*. At the time, British subjects who lived abroad had a far better tax deal than American expatriates in similar situations.

In Paris between takes, Elizabeth often entertained the crew. "She did the best Mae West and Marilyn Monroe impersonations known to mankind," Minnelli said. "When Burton was away one afternoon, she did an impersonation of him. But suddenly, he walked onto the set and heard it. For her trouble, he slapped her face, really hard."

"My eardrum did not function properly for one entire month," she said.

As Elizabeth and Burton were already painfully aware, one of the dangers associated with being rich and famous is that ghosts from one's past might suddenly appear.

Their adopted Bavarian-born daughter, Maria, had been assigned her own full-time nurse and governess. Born with birth defects, she was able to walk only after a large fortune had been spent on various orthopedic surgeries. Elizabeth had paid handsomely for the privilege of adopting Maria.

Unexpectedly, with fanfare, her biological parents, the Heisigs, flew in from Germany. Backed up with a lawyer in Paris, they claimed that Elizabeth owed them more money for the "sale" of Maria. Instead of defending the adoption in court, Elizabeth gave in to the extortion and settled more money on this German couple, the exact amount undisclosed.

Elizabeth, in a memoir, denied that she transferred additional funds to the Heisigs. She blamed the incident on a French tabloid whose editors had organized the Heisigs' visit to Paris. "The photographer wanted to take a picture of the mother standing near the opulence of my Rolls-Royce, her tattered coat contrasting with my fur

coat—you know, a little woman standing out in the cold, waiting for days on end to get a look at her child.”

That experience with the parents of Maria blighted their stay in Paris, and both Elizabeth and Burton were anxious to move on.

On the final day of filming, Burton completed his last scene and walked off the set. He said, “I’m bloody tired of playing fornicating clerics.”

On viewing the lackluster *The Sandpiper* today, its best element is its theme song, “The Shadow of Your Smile,” which quickly became a standard in almost any Tony Bennett concert.

The Sandpiper, because of the notoriety of its stars, made money, but garnered attack reviews. Elizabeth read one good review in a Los Angeles newspaper and threatened to sue for libel. “How dare this god damn writer falsely claim *The Sandpiper* is anything but total shit!”

After finishing *The Sandpiper* in that studio outside Paris, Elizabeth and Burton flew to Naples where a long limousine took them south to the coastal resort of Amalfi, perched on a cliff hundreds of feet above the sea.

Here, according to a story that appeared in *The New York Post*, Burton and Elizabeth staged one of their epic battles. Guests seated on the main terrace of their hotel heard Elizabeth’s screams of rage, and witnessed a most unusual sight.

In Paris, she had purchased thirty-seven exquisite tailor-made suits for Burton. While still on their hangers, each of them was thrown from her cliff-hanging terrace into the sea. She also tossed a box of his jewelry, including two very valuable watches, some rings, and other items. The loss of the jewelry alone was estimated at \$75,000.

What had sparked her rage was a report that Burton had been seen leaving the hotel bar shortly before noon with a big-busted Neapolitan girl who was, at least according to the manager, “a dead-ringer for Sophia Loren.”

That night, when Burton returned to Elizabeth in her suite, she physically attacked him. According to Dick Hanley, “Burton fought back. There were cuts and bruises. The hotel doctor had to be summoned from his bed at around two o’clock in the morning.”

“Believe it or not, when I was overseeing their breakfast service the following morning, I heard the sounds of their love-making through the bedroom door,” Dick claimed.

After Amalfi, Elizabeth and Burton returned to Naples, where they caught a flight to Dublin. For \$750,000, he’d been assigned the role of Alec Leamas,

John Le Carré’s disillusioned and joyless pawn in a Machiavellian game of Cold War espionage as laid out in Le Carré’s bestselling 1963 novel, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*.



Cold War Espionage and the Comforts
of the Damned

top photo: **Richard Burton** middle photo:
Claire Bloom bottom photos: left **Rod**
Steiger right: **Elizabeth Taylor**

Burton got Le Carré on the phone, claiming that the screenplay's dialogue "lacked balls." Consequently, the British novelist flew into Dublin to "punch up" the script.

Elizabeth had met with the director, Martin Ritt, and urged him to cast her in the female lead, that of an innocuous and bureaucratic communist librarian. "I had to turn her down," Ritt said. "A star of Elizabeth's magnitude and brilliant glare would have totally unbalanced the stark tone of this film noir."

The role went instead to Claire Bloom, with whom Burton had had a torrid affair as recently as when he'd filmed *Look Back in Anger* with her in 1959. Their love had first blossomed when she had been Burton's Ophelia during his portrayal of Hamlet at the Old Vic in London.

Elizabeth was on the set every day to ensure that those old flames of passion weren't ignited again. "It was obvious that she was very uncomfortable in my presence," Bloom said.

Actually, Elizabeth need not have bothered, as those flames had been smothered years ago. Bloom was married at the time to actor Rod Steiger.

The columnist Sheilah Graham visited the set and interviewed Bloom, who was quite frank. "These days I find Burton boring," Bloom said. "A man is often boring when he's got what he wants—a beautiful wife, money, a

great career. Burton is still drinking, still boasting, still reciting the same old poems and telling the same old stories.”

When a written version of Bloom’s comment was shown to Burton, he said, “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. I dumped the wench, you know.”

Burton clashed several times with director Martin Ritt over his heavy drinking. “I can play any role with a big bottle of Irish whiskey in me,” Burton boasted.

Ritt said, “I wasn’t sympathetic to Burton’s lifestyle. Nor to that of Elizabeth. She was there much of the time as an onlooker, constantly drinking from a champagne bottle which she’d open at eleven in the morning. Richard was fine until lunchtime, and then he’d join her in drinking. By the time he was back on the job, he had a buzz on.”

When not consuming alcohol, the Burtons dined on such Irish game birds as widgeon, quail, and green-winged teal. On a few occasions, at Peter Parry’s Soup Bowl Restaurant, Elizabeth dined with either Frank Sinatra or Laurence Harvey during their visits to Dublin.

Once, a fight broke out there between Harvey and Burton until the manager asked Harvey to leave.



top photo: Director **Martin Ritt** lower photo: **Richard Burton**

The following week, Burton himself became persona non grata when he got completely intoxicated and tried to insert his index finger up a comely waitress’s dress “to plug” her vagina.

A drunken Burton was just one of many problems Elizabeth had to confront in Ireland, even though she was not in the film. “Richard drank heavily, but Elizabeth was also sloshing around on brandy and champagne,” Dick said.

During her time in Dublin, Elizabeth received a call from her mother. Sara told her that father, Francis, had suffered a stroke. “He may hang on for a week, or even a month or so, but I think it is the end.”

Although she’d never been that close to her father, she flew all the way back to Los Angeles for a farewell visit.

When she returned to Dublin, she found that Burton had seemingly developed a sexual interest in Marya Mannes, a tall, statuesque beauty who had flown over from the United States to interview him for McCall’s magazine. She also learned that Mannes and Burton had headed off together into the Irish countryside on a pub

crawl...or whatever.

Shortly after her return from the deathbed of her father, as Elizabeth was being driven in a Rolls-Royce by Burton's French chauffeur, Gaston Sanz, a pedestrian ran in front of the car and was struck, dying in four days.

Another tragedy followed soon after that. In St.-Jean-de-Luz on the Atlantic coast of southwestern France, Sanz's son had died in a shooting accident at a rifle range. Elizabeth flew with Sanz to Biarritz, where she was taken to the funeral parlor to identify the body. A grief-stricken Sanz could not bear to look at his son because half of his head had been blown off.

When Elizabeth returned to Ireland, she learned that a bandit had broken into her hotel suite and made off with \$50,000 of her jewelry.

When *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* was released, it was a big success at the box office, and critics hailed it as "the best Burton film ever." That critical acclaim manifested itself at Oscar time, when he received a nomination for Best Actor.

Although he didn't expect to win, he was still very disappointed when the Oscar went to Lee Marvin for his role in *Cat Ballou*.

Burton had chosen not to fly into Hollywood to attend the Academy Award presentations. In a hotel suite in Paris, he became drunk and belligerent waiting for an announcement of the winner. When he learned that he'd lost, he attacked Elizabeth, as if blaming her for his defeat. "The bloody fucking prize went to one of your lovers, Lee Marvin." He'd apparently heard about Elizabeth's brief fling with Marvin during their filming together of *Raintree County*.

"Did you also fuck my three other competitors?" Burton asked her, referring to Laurence Olivier, nominated for *Othello*; Rod Steiger for *The Pawn-broker*; and Oskar Werner for *Ship of Fools*.

"Did I fuck one of the nominees?" Elizabeth asked sarcastically. "Ask the same question of yourself." She was no doubt referring to Burton's long-ago affair with Olivier.

Before returning to America, Elizabeth wanted a vacation, and Burton booked her a luxurious villa at Cap d'Antibes on the French Riviera. They arrived together in Nice, where they were greeted by the paparazzi and reporters.

While in their villa, Ernest Lehman sent them a film script. The Burtons had met Lehman during their filming of *The Sandpiper*. Previously, he'd written the screenplays for some excellent films, including *Somebody Up There Likes Me* (1956), *Sweet Smell of Success* (1957), and *North By Northwest* (1959). At the time he contacted the Burtons, he'd just completed the screenplay for *The Sound of Music* (1965).

Burton was out on the beach that day, drinking far too much beer in the hot sun, and Elizabeth was suffering from a cold, and wanted to stay in bed.

Dick brought her Lehman's screenplay.

"I have to tell you," he said. "You're far too young and beautiful to play the lead in this."

"That's a switch," she said. "An actress is usually told she's too old." She took the script from him. "I need a refill on that champagne."

She picked up the manuscript and was surprised to see that it was a screen adaptation of Edward Albee's gritty three-hour award-winning play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, which had played to sold-out crowds on Broadway beginning in October of 1962.

"They're offering this to me?" she asked in astonishment. "I read two days ago that Albee said the parts are going to Bette Davis and James Mason."

"Perhaps not," Dick said. "Why not Elizabeth Taylor and her consort, Richard Burton?"

Both Elizabeth and Burton wanted Mike Nichols to direct *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. He'd been a cabaret entertainer and had directed plays on Broadway, but never a movie. Even so, Burton and Elizabeth insisted on

him, and Jack Warner, who was releasing the movie, finally agreed.

Whereas Edward Albee's raw and raunchy dialogues had been acceptable as part of a live performance on Broadway, Warner feared that its obscenities would antagonize the Hollywood censors. He pointed out "thirteen god damns, three bastards, seven buggers, four screws, four sons-of-bitches or SOBs, and twelve variations of Christ's name taken in vain, as in 'Jesus H. Christ.' There were also references to scrotums and one reference to 'a right ball.'"

Ultimately, Warners decided to defy the censorship code and released the film with much of the original dialogue intact. Writing in *The New York Times*, Stanley Kauffman noted that when Burton delivered the line about "hump the hostess," old-fashioned Hollywood censorship came to an end.

When Albee's play had opened on Broadway, many critics claimed that it was really about two gay couples masquerading as straight. One critic wrote, "The dialogue should have been uttered by two gay queens, but Warner Brothers changed it to male/female relationship for the sake of the box office."

Elizabeth and Burton were offered a combined \$4 million for their involvement in the shooting, which lasted from July to December of 1965. The first scenes were shot on location on the leafy campus of Smith College at Northampton, Massachusetts.

At first, the college's president did not want such a racy screenplay associated with his college, as he feared it would hold Smith up to ridicule. But after he received a \$150,000 gift from Warner, and perhaps after realizing the literary and theatrical merit of the project, he changed his mind.

Initially, Jack Warner had thought that Elizabeth was far too young to play Martha and that Burton was much too strong to play such a spineless professor.

Ingrid Bergman was considered for the role of Martha, as were Rosalind Russell and Patricia Neal. "I got my hopes up," Neal later said, "but once again, I lost a choice role to Taylor, and I was still furious over losing *Suddenly, Last Summer*."

Cary Grant was considered for the role of George, even Henry Fonda. Arthur Hill had created the role effectively on Broadway, and he was a candidate "for a day." Peter O'Toole agreed to do it, but Warner preferred Jack Lemmon, who refused. "This gutless creature would destroy my male image," Lemmon said.

"The fucker didn't mind dressing up like a girl with Marilyn Monroe and Tony Curtis in *Some Like It Hot*," Warner retorted.

Connie Stevens, the future wife of Eddie Fisher, wanted to play the whiny second female lead, but the role eventually went to Sandy Dennis. Robert Redford was asked to play the second male lead, but notified Warner, "I wouldn't even read the script." The part eventually went to the very talented George Segal.

In preparation for her role as the middle-aged Martha, Elizabeth enjoyed packing on twenty-five pounds, devouring all the junk food and drinking all the alcohol she wanted.

Nichols had some reservations about the deliberate transformation of Elizabeth into the stout, vulgar, embittered, and frumpy Martha. "It's like asking a chocolate milkshake to do the work of a double gin martini. Wardrobe went through eight different wigs before Elizabeth and I could decide on the right one."

After the first week of shooting, and watching Elizabeth and Burton emotionally destroying one another during rehearsals and in front of a camera, Dick Hanley finally agreed that the roles were right for his employers. "Actually, it was type casting," he told Nichols. "All they had to do was transfer their off-screen battles onto the screen."

Of the film, Elizabeth wrote: "I think Martha is a desperate woman who has the softness of the underbelly of a baby turtle. She covers it up with the toughness of the shell, which she paints red. Her veneer is bawdy; it's sloppy, it's slouchy, it's snarly. But there are moments when the façade cracks and you see the vulnerability and the infinite pain."

One scene called for Elizabeth to spit in Burton's face. Not pleased, the director ordered take after take until she got it right.

"At first, I thought it was rather lewd," Burton said to Dick. "But eventually, it was a turn-on. It gave me a hard-on. But every day after shooting, I went back to my dressing room and fondled my balls. I wanted to make sure Elizabeth hadn't castrated me."

"During the filming of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* our director, Mike Nichols, along with Burton and Elizabeth, privately entertained some super A-list guests," Dick said. "It was pure gossip, but members of the

crew claimed that Nichols was dating Gloria Steinem, but that he was merely using her as a beard to cover up his romance with Jackie Kennedy. He was crazy about the former First Lady. One day, he shut down production, leaving his superstars stranded while he flew to New York City to be with Jackie. When he returned, Nichols looked like the cat who'd just swallowed the canary."



Two views of **Elizabeth Taylor as Martha** in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Lower photo: "Castrating George"

As biographer Alexander Walker put it: "If *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* represented a coming-of-age for Elizabeth in more than one sense, the experience of playing it did not leave Burton unscathed. In him, it sowed the seed of discontent with their relationship. Playing an unfulfilled man touched a guilty dread that all the star appurtenances, all the spending in the world couldn't extirpate. He needed to succeed as himself, on his own terms, and not as someone else's husband—be it Martha's or Elizabeth's."



Marlene Dietrich to Elizabeth Taylor:
"My dear, you are brave. Imagine
having the guts to perform with real
actors."

On September 23, 1965, the crew left Northampton, Massachusetts and flew to Los Angeles to complete the film. On the sound stage at Warner Brothers, Burton celebrated his fortieth birthday, although he seemed none too happy about it. To cheer him up, Elizabeth presented him with a white Oldsmobile Toronado.



Judy Garland: "A bad moment
onstage"

He received another gift too—a surprise visit from Marlene Dietrich. She appeared on the set in time to watch a drunken scene with all four actors—Elizabeth, Segal, Burton, and Dennis.

When Nichols called "cut," Dietrich rushed over to Burton and kissed him passionately on the lips. "Oh, darling, you were vonderful, so vonderful. How marvelous. I see an Oscar in your future."

Finally, she turned to Elizabeth and gave her a very light peck on the cheek. "Elizabeth, my dear, you are brave. Imagine having the guts to perform with real actors."



What not to say or do at a drunken dinner party: **Princess Margaret** with **Anthony Armstrong-Jones**, Earl of Snowdon

"Guts I have," Elizabeth said. "When I get home, Richard and I are going to fuck like bunnies."

Back at their rented home that night, Elizabeth said to Burton, "So you've fucked Marlene Dietrich. It was obvious to everybody that you two world-class whores weren't meeting for the first time. Marlene seems to get off fucking all my husbands—Michael Wilding, Mike Todd, Eddie Fisher, Richard Burton himself. I wonder if she ever made it with Nicky Hilton."

A week later, arrangements were made for Elizabeth to dine with Lord Snowdon (Anthony Armstrong-Jones) and Princess Margaret at Le Bistro in Los Angeles, where Judy Garland was scheduled to sing.

Whereas the A-list quartet sat together at a table for four, Dick Hanley and Roddy McDowall sat at an adjoining table in case they were needed.

Dick later revealed that Elizabeth and Burton were "about the drunkest I had ever seen them."

During one of his rambling monologues, Elizabeth loudly interrupted her husband in a style that evoked something Martha might have said to her husband George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. "For Chrissakes," she shouted at him. "Shut your fucking mouth!"

"The most embarrassing point of the evening came when Burton reached in and fondled the breast of Her Royal Highness, Princess Margaret." Dick said. "I nearly fainted. The Princess got up and headed to the women's room. When she returned, Judy was singing but tripped on a microphone cord. In front of the entire bistro, Burton yelled, 'THAT JUDY—DRUNK AGAIN!'"

Princess Margaret and Lord Snowdon quickly made their excuses and left.

Burton called the next day to apologize, but the Princess would not come to the phone. Burton told Dick, "Oh shit, the next time I visit London, the Queen will banish me to the Tower."

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? cost \$7.5 million, the most expensive black-and-white movie ever released. It opened in theaters in June of 1966, challenging and changing forever the censorship standards of the industry's thirty-six year old Production Code.

Edward Albee's tense drama was both a financial and artistic success, earning Oscar nominations for both Elizabeth and Burton.

"Rarely in the history of the Academy has an actress of Elizabeth's stature faced such weak competition," claimed columnist James Bacon.

Other nominees for the Best Actress Oscar of 1966 included Anouk Aimée for her performance in *A Man and a Woman*; and Ida Kaminska for *The Shop on Main Street*. Evoking the competitiveness of two sisters, Olivia de Havilland and Joan Fontaine, two other sisters, the Redgraves (Lynn and Vanessa) were also nominated, Lynn for her role in *Georgy Girl* and Vanessa for *Morgan*.

Unlike Elizabeth, Burton faced stiff competition at the Oscars, and he knew it, predicting that Paul Scofield would win for his role in *A Man for All Seasons*. Burton resented all the adoring press reports that referred to

Scofield as "one of the giants of the British stage."

Other nominees included Alan Arkin for his role in *The Russians Are Coming*; Michael Caine in *Alfie*; and Steve McQueen for his role in *The Sand Pebbles*, but none of those other actors was a favorite.

The Academy Award presentations were scheduled for the evening of April 10, 1966 at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium.

Elizabeth and Burton were in the south of France at the time, filming *The Comedians* (1967), a politicized satire of Haiti under the repressive military regime of "Papa Doc" Duvalier. [Duvalier had refused entry into Haiti to the film crew.] Just so that she could be with Burton, she had agreed to appear in a supporting role, giving him—for the first time—top billing.

She wanted to fly back to Los Angeles for the Oscar ceremony, but he refused to let her go, despite her conviction, "I'm bound to win." She was therefore forced to call Anne Bancroft and ask her if she'd accept the Oscar in her absence.

Burton told Dick Hanley that he could not tell her the real reason he didn't want them to fly back to L.A. "I feel I'm going to lose, and I don't want to be humiliated in front of 150 million TV viewers while Elizabeth lords it over me with her Oscar. Instead, I told her that I'd had a bad dream, and that my dream was a premonition that she'd die in a plane crash like Mike Todd."

Shortly after the winners for the year's Best Actor and Actress were announced in Santa Monica, Peter Lawford put through a call to Elizabeth in France, telling her that she had won the Oscar, but that Burton had lost.

"I couldn't believe it," Dick later said to Roddy McDowall. "Instead of being overjoyed at her second Oscar, all I heard was this torrent of profanities. She was absolutely hysterically furious and in a violent rage that Burton had lost."

The majority of Academy members had been impressed with Elizabeth's bravery in abandoning her customary beauty as a vehicle for her portrayal of a sloppy, foul-mouthed, graying voluptuary like Martha. But a violent storm of criticism broke out when she didn't show up in person to receive her Oscar. Among other things, she was accused of not respecting the Academy.

The criticism was compounded when Sandy Dennis did not show up to receive her own Oscar as Best Supporting Actress either. Dennis was on the East Coast at the time, filming *Sweet November* (1968). She could have flown to Los Angeles, but confessed, "I have a fear of flying."

The evening's host, Bob Hope, quipped: "I know why Elizabeth couldn't come. Leaving Richard in Paris would be like leaving Jackie Gleason locked in a deli." The Oscar historian, Anthony Holden, said, "Burton was snubbed because he'd antagonized most of the men in Hollywood by sleeping with their wives."

Elizabeth seemed to know that with her Oscar for *Virginia Woolf*, she'd reached the apogee of her film career. More riches, more diamonds, more husbands would be in her future, but a role like Martha would never be offered again.

In their reactions to her lackluster future films, critics would often be vicious, as in the case when she appeared with Burton in *Doctor Faustus* (1967). The critic for *The New York Times* claimed, "Her eyeballs and teeth were dripping pink in what seems to be a hellish combination of conjunctivitis and trench mouth." Even more scathing attacks awaited her.

Biographer Kitty Kelley commented on Elizabeth's new persona in the years ahead: "With a raunchy laugh and double entendre lines, Elizabeth Taylor has become the cinema's quintessential shrew, cursing and castrating her way across the screen in a series of unsuccessful movies."



Two views of Elizabeth Taylor in *Boom!* as the richest woman in the world. lower photo: In Kabuki costume with **Noël Coward** as the Witch of Capri

Even in reference to many of her future roles, Rex Reed referred to her as “a hideous parody of herself—a fat, sloppy, yelling, screaming banshee,” sometimes giving the impression that he was writing about her performance as Martha.

In 1968, Burton was still married to Elizabeth, although he admitted to a friend, “I often experience the middle aged catastrophe of falling in love with some pretty little blonde for five minutes.”

The year found him cast with Elizabeth in one of their biggest mistakes, *Boom!* (1968), in which they starred with Noël Coward playing “The Witch of Capri.”

Boom! was based on the Tennessee Williams play *The Milk Train Doesn’t Stop Here Anymore*, which had starred Tallulah Bankhead and Tab Hunter, and which had closed on Broadway, an abject flop, early in 1964 after only five performances.

Actually, Bankhead had recommended Elizabeth for the role. “Who better to play Flora Goforth, the richest

woman in the world, a promiscuous, pill-ravaged, drunken slut who is the world's biggest joke than Elizabeth Taylor? She need only play herself."

Also in 1968, Burton wanted to show his continuing love for Elizabeth by purchasing the world famous 33.19 carat Krupp diamond for her for \$307,000. The diamond had a notorious association with the Krupp family, German industrialists who had been involved in the deportation and forced labor of Jews during the Nazi era.

Elizabeth, who had converted to Judaism in 1959, said, "I thought it perfect for a nice Jewish girl like me to end up owning the Krupp diamond. How ironic!"

To buy the diamond, Burton flew to New York and bid against America's most fabled jeweler, Harry Winston.

Back in London, he presented it to Elizabeth aboard their yacht, Kalizma, moored on the Thames River. She was thrilled with the diamond, later describing it as "so complete and so ravishing, like the steps leading into eternity and beyond."

But ten years later, in 1978, Elizabeth sold it to New York dealer Henry Lamberet for \$5 million, admitting to friends, "I never really liked the damn thing."

Thirty-three years later, after her death on Wednesday, March 24, 2011, at the age of 79, the Krupp Diamond was worth \$30 million. She had always regretted selling it.

Shortly after Burton's presentation to her of the diamond in 1968, she said, "I was wearing it at midnight when I had the best sex of my life. In fact, the best fuck before or after."

Aboard their yacht, Kalizma, one night in 1973, she stood with Burton and spoke what were perhaps the most melodramatic words she'd ever uttered. She sounded like Princess Alexandra del Lago, the fictional, spectacularly unfulfilled heroine of Tennessee Williams' Sweet Bird of Youth, a role she'd play on TV in 1989.

"That old enemy of time is marching in on me. I must inevitably face the final curtain, which is likely to come sooner than later." She turned to Burton. "You will always be at my side, won't you?"

"I'll never leave you," he promised.

"We will live happily ever after, won't we?" she asked.

"That we will, luv. Only problem is, what comes after they lived happily ever after?"

"Everything that I have done in my life that is a mistake, I will admit is a mistake and answer for it. But I am not going to answer for an image created by hundreds of people who do not know what's true or false. That would take me from here to Doomsday."

—Elizabeth Taylor



Elizabeth Taylor
1932 - 2011
REST IN PEACE



THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Over decades of meeting and talking with celebrities, Darwin Porter accumulated a vast trove of stories about Elizabeth Taylor. "Everyone who I came into contact with, from Mary Astor to Tallulah Bankhead, had a tale to relate about Elizabeth, either good or bad, often a combination of both," Darwin said.

Of the people sucked into the whirlpool enveloping Elizabeth, no sources were more insightful than actor **Roddy McDowall** and Elizabeth's secretary, **Dick Hanley**.

"I think these two men knew Elizabeth and her secrets better than anybody, and they were dear friends of mine," Darwin said.

As a child actor, Roddy bonded with Elizabeth on the set of the 1943 *Lassie Come Home*, and they remained "soul mates" until death.

Dick Hanley had been the private secretary of Louis B. Mayer for many years before going to work for Mike Todd. After Todd's death, Dick became Elizabeth's private secretary and "handler."

According to Darwin, "Dick and Roddy talked endlessly about Elizabeth, but not for publication. They loved her dearly, but were also aware of her vanities and foibles. Wherever they are today, I hope they forgive me for sharing their confidences about Elizabeth with her thousands of fans, though during my conversations about her at the time, they were 'off the record.'"

"For the insights of Dick and Roddy, and to countless others, including Peter Lawford and Janet Leigh, I remain deeply grateful," Darwin said.

Special mention should be made about contributions to this book by Van Johnson, Montgomery Clift, Stewart Granger, Sal Mineo, Shelley Winters, Peter Glenville, Ava Gardner, and Philip Burton, Darwin's neighbor in Key West. Also, Tom Drake, Judy Garland's "Boy Next Door" in *Meet Me in St. Louis*, shared experiences that have never before appeared in any book.

The first time Darwin ever saw "the violet-eyed goddess" was when he was a boy growing up in Miami. It was at a marina. Young and beautiful, Elizabeth was being escorted off a yacht by a handsome young man who turned out to be one of her first serious "beaus." It was William Pawley, Jr., who had hoped to marry her.

In later years, because of his world travels as a writer and researcher for *The Frommer Guides*, Darwin witnessed appearances by Elizabeth in such cities as Paris, London, Madrid, Rome, Monte Carlo, Cannes, and (most frequently) Los Angeles and New York.

His most memorable encounter with her was in Portofino, Italy, where Elizabeth and Richard arrived by yacht. As she made her way boutique shopping through the village, women came down from the hills, many holding up their bambini, hoping she'd purchase a baby boy or girl.

After surveying the hysteria she generated, Darwin, researching *Frommer's Italy* at the time, retreated to the pint-sized La Grittà American Bar along Portofino's waterfront. Author James Jones, who'd written the best-seller, *From Here to Eternity*, claimed that La Grittà was "the best waterfront bar this side of Hong Kong."

Within the hour, Elizabeth invaded the bar, accompanied by Richard Burton and Rex Harrison, each of whom had been key players in the recent filming of *Cleopatra* with her in Rome.

"My companion and I had planned to have a drink or two and then retire," Darwin said. "But we stayed until dawn and closed down the bar with the stars of *Cleopatra*. Seated only a few tables away from them, I eavesdropped on every word, although they ignored me. Much of what I learned that night, including insights into the offscreen persona of Miss Taylor, ended up in my chapter on *Cleopatra* within this book."

The only real social contact Darwin ever had with Elizabeth was in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, where she had flown with Burton while he co-starred in *The Night of the Iguana* with Ava Gardner.

Darwin was a guest at the rented villa of Tennessee Williams where Elizabeth, without Burton, arrived as the guest of honor. "She had a wicked wit and amused us with outrageous stories told in 'triple X-rated' language. She was an amazing, fascinating woman."

Her escort that night was a young Mexican screenwriter, Jose Bolaños, who at the time was infamous throughout Hollywood as Marilyn Monroe's last lover.

"Thousands of fans adored Elizabeth, of course," Darwin said. "But at certain times in her life, she had almost as many detractors. I personally adored her. Her memory will remain forever. Incidentally, she had a wonderful smell. Even when she left Tennessee's villa that night, her aroma lingered. It was intoxicating."

J. EDGAR HOOVER & CLYDE TOLSON



**INVESTIGATING
THE SEXUAL
SECRETS OF
AMERICA'S MOST
FAMOUS MEN AND WOMEN**

J. EDGAR HOOVER ELICITED OUTRAGE FROM ALMOST EVERYBODY.

HERE'S HOW HE WAS REVIEWED BY SOME OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES:

"He was a master con man, one of the greatest con men the country has ever produced, and that takes intelligence of a certain kind, an astuteness, a shrewdness."

—Hoover aide **William Sullivan**

"You don't fire God."

—Assistant FBI Director **Charles Brennan**

"I used to hear how certain senators and congressmen would get caught in cathouses over in Virginia. When the report came in, Hoover would put it in his personal safe. If there was any problem with that senator, Hoover would say, 'Don't worry, I've got those papers right in my safe. You don't have a thing to worry about.'"

—CIA Director **Richard Helms**

"If there had been a Mr. Hoover in the first half of the First Century A.D., can you imagine what he would have put into his files about a certain trouble-maker from Nazareth, his moral attitudes, and the people he consorted with?"

—**The New York Times, 1970**

"J. Edgar Hoover, head of our thought police—a martinet, a preposterous figure, but not funny."

—Poet **Theodore Roethke**

"The man who projected himself to the public as a stern moral figure, full of integrity, was a walking myth. It was so carefully crafted that he perhaps came to believe much of it himself, but it was a myth nonetheless."

—**Anthony Summers**

"J. Edgar Hoover was one twisted sister."

—Foreign Policy Advisor to FDR and Under Secretary of State **Sumner Welles**

"Jesus Christ! That old cocksucker!"

—**Richard M. Nixon** upon learning of the death of J. Edgar Hoover

"America is in the grip of two homosexual lovers, and there's not a god damn thing I can do about it. He's got us by the cojones, and he'll never let go until he kicks the bucket. Tolson is his henchman, his Goebbels. He does all the dirty deeds that that faggot doesn't want to dirty his hands with. They've got enough on me to bring down my presidency."

—**Lyndon B. Johnson** to Senator George Smathers

"J. Edgar Hoover's legend—a plausibly gay man who harassed gays, a possible descendant of an African-American who harassed civil rights leaders, a top law enforcement official who placed himself above the law, all making him out as something approaching a monster—a far cry from the young eager beaver who came to work at the Justice Department in 1917, ready to make a good impression and save the country from subversives."

—**Kenneth D. Ackerman**

"J. Edgar Hoover was not interested in just the facts: He collected every rumor, no matter how implausible. Even completely innocent people were afraid of what was in their FBI files—and in Washington, not many people were completely innocent."

—**Larry Flynt**, publisher of *Hustler Magazine*

"We want no Gestapo or Secret Police. The FBI is tending in that direction. They are dabbling in sex life scandals and

plain blackmail when they should be catching criminals.”

—**Harry S Truman**

“President Johnson has declared that he does not intend to replace J. Edgar Hoover. However, Hoover has not disclosed whether he intends to replace Johnson.”

—NBC-TV’s ***That Was the Week That Was***, 1964

“J. Edna is the kind of guy who has to squat to pee. I hear Clyde Tolson is in the hospital. What was it, a hysterectomy? Hoover has gone mad. He’s a fucking cocksucker. Any day now, I expect him to show up at work wearing one of Jackie’s Dior creations.”

—**Robert F. Kennedy**

Kid Napoleon [J. Edgar Hoover] launched a crusade against pornography and created his Obscene File. Agents around the country sent in stag movies, photographs, books, pamphlets, freehand drawings, comic strips, and playing cards decorated with girlie pictures.”

—**David Eisenbach**

“J. Edgar Hoover passed along gossip to the President. That practice certainly raised questions in the President’s mind. What did Hoover know about him? In theoretical terms, that put Hoover in the position of a veiled blackmailer.”

—Secretary of State **Dean Rusk**

“J. Edgar Hoover was like a sewer that collected dirt. I now believe he was the worst public servant in our history”

—Acting Attorney General **Laurence Silberman**

“Hoover endured too long. He ended his life embittered and isolated, his Bureau a monument to his past—and to his memories of an America that hardly existed outside its walls.”

—**Richard Gid Powers**

This book is dedicated to

James Kirkwood, Jr. and Guy Hotell

Without their inspiration and spadework
it might never have happened.



Clyde Tolson and J. Edgar Hoover at the racetrack

"There's something addicting about a secret."

—J. Edgar Hoover



"I have a philosophy. You are honored by your friends, and you are distinguished by your enemies. I have been very distinguished."

—J. Edgar Hoover

CHAPTER ONE

In the predawn hours of January 1, 1895, as revelers were returning from their New Year's parties, a cold, bitter, and windy day had been forecast for Pipetown, a residential community in the shadow of the Capitol building in Washington, D.C.

The cobble-covered streets, shaded in summer by elms, would be too heavy with snow for horse-drawn carriages. Gas lamps at the Grant-era house at 413 Seward Square witnessed the birth of a new baby who one day would strike fear throughout the city. The innocent-looking infant was John Edgar Hoover.

His older sister, Lillian Hoover, remembered that the baby boy entered the world "kicking, screaming, and crying. He was immediately hungry." In addition to Lillian, Hoover had an older brother, Dickerson Hoover, Jr.

Hoover's mother was Annie Marie Scheitlin, who had descended from Swiss mercenaries. His father, Dickerson Naylor Hoover, traced his ancestors back to Germany and England.

Although J. Edgar became a legend in modern America, in the year of his birth, Queen Victoria still presided over a vast empire and was the Empress of India. The Dalton gang still terrorized the West, and the czar ruled in Moscow. Germany still had an emperor. In North Carolina, the Wright Brothers would not fly their airplane for another eight years. In 1909, young Hoover, or so he claimed, would be the "first person in Washington to shake Orville Wright's hand."

The United States flag needed only forty-five stars to designate its member states. As J. Edgar came into the world, there was talk of waging war against Britain over Latin American territories. Only four years before Hoover was born, white men had ended their war against the Indians at Wounded Knee.

From the beginning, J. Edgar became a "mama's boy" and would remain so until her death at the age of seventy-eight in 1938. He was forty-three years old at the time and had always lived with her.

She called him a "late bloomer," or the "runt of my litter," yet remained completely devoted to him, living her life for her son.

As a boy, he was always shorter than most of his classmates, although he did grow to the height of 5'7". On documents he listed his height as "under 6 feet."

J. Edgar was devoted to his mother, but she was a strict disciplinarian. She punished wrongdoing like a military army sergeant cracking down on a young recruit. Until he was twelve years old, J. Edgar had to strip down in front of his mother to receive a bare-butt paddling. As he grew older, the shy boy tried to conceal his genitals from her.

"Mother Hoover," as she would be called by FBI agents in her future, could have posed for that portrait of Whistler's Mother.

J. Edgar grew up with the puritan ethic that characterized many of America's values at the dawn of the 20th century. Like many other boys of his day, He found inspiration in Horatio Alger stories. Actually, his favorite reading material was dime-store detective novels. For a while he wanted to be a minister, which would later earn him the appellation of "an Elmer Gantry in lawman's clothes."

As a young boy, J. Edgar never joined in the battles between the Pipetown boys and those gangs from the bordering areas of "COWTOWN" and "Foggy Bottom."

He was a loner and preferred to walk the streets of Pipetown by himself, as did a neighbor, John Philip Sousa, who would grow up to become America's militaristic "March King."

J. Edgar's father lectured him on the evils of masturbation—"it's something monkeys do in a zoo."

The boy was also taught lessons by his grandmother, Margaret Scheitlin. He'd seen "colored people," as they were called, come and go. In Pipetown a colony of white government clerks and shop owners lived. Unusual for the South, many African Americans had moved in too, although they lived by themselves on the fringe of Pipetown.



A young **Dickerson Hoover Sr.** (*upper photo*) and his bride **Annie** appeared resigned to marriage.

In the lower photo, Annie's face had become grim as Dickerson suffered from mental illness. Even their unhappy first born, **Dickerson Jr.**, seemed resigned.

Margaret told him that blacks “were drunkards and heathens and not to be trusted. Birds of a feather flock together, and whites should remain with their own kind.”

As a youth, J. Edgar developed crushes on older boys or men. Even before his fifth birthday, he seemed mesmerized by Dr. Donald Campbell MacLeod, a minister at the First Presbyterian Church. Unlike J. Edgar's often sickly father, MacLeod was good looking, charismatic, and a superb athlete, joining schoolboys on the field in ball games. MacLeod seemed to take a joy in living. Although a minister, he was not stern or regimented. He even helped the boy overcome his stutter by instilling in him more confidence.

J. Edgar later claimed that MacLeod taught him “duty, love of country, patriotism, honor, virtue, and piety.”

Under MacLeod's guidance, J. Edgar took an interest in sports, although he was far too puny and underweight for football. It was on a school playground that he earned his “prizefighter's nose” as the result of a direct hit by a fly ball.

Later J. Edgar transferred his crush from MacLeod onto Lawrence (Biff) Jones, who became a celebrated coach at West Point. For J. Edgar, it was a case of hero worship.

Classmates didn't understand why this powerhouse of an athlete, who could have any girl in the school he wanted, preferred to spend his spare time with this little boy who was about half his size.

“They were Mutt and Jeff,” Fred Acker, a classmate, recalled about forty years later. “We were innocent back then. Today we'd suspect that Edgar was giving Biff blow-jobs. Edgar's mouth came up to Biff's fly. But I'm getting vulgar. We didn't really know what gay was back in those days.”



As a toddler in the nation's capital (*top photo*), **J. Edgar** revealed his ambition: To become President of the United States.

In the lower photo, he was four years old and feared that an orange seed he'd swallowed would produce a tree growing from his belly button.

At Central High School, J. Edgar became a skilled debater, winning his greatest honors with the argument that Cuba should be annexed to the United States. At the time of the U.S. missile crisis when John F. Kennedy was president, he proposed much the same argument, claiming that a communist country only sixty miles from the United States coastline "was an unacceptable threat to the nation's security."

He also won a debate in which he complained that women did not have the maturity and wisdom to be allowed to vote. All his life he would favor capital punishment. But in a school debate, he claimed that the death penalty should also be extended to include those accused of armed robbery and bestiality.



Young J. Edgar developed his first "crush" on **Dr. David Campbell MacLeod**, a Presbyterian minister. "My ideal of manhood," J. Edgar wrote in his diary.

One day when Lillian asked her younger brother what he wanted to be when he grew up, he said, "I want to be a minister like Rev. MacLeod."

From a table in the living room, probably motivated by a wish to torment and upset him, she picked up the family bible and tossed it into the fire.

He may never have forgiven her.

His brother, Dickerson, Jr., fifteen years older than him, had already married and moved next door with his bride. His older sister, Lillian, had married in June of 1908, the ceremony performed by the Rev. MacLeod himself, whom young J. Edgar still worshipped.

The night after Lillian's wedding, J. Edgar promised his mother that he would never marry and leave her side. He would keep that promise.

"I met his sister once," Acker said, "when I came home with Edgar. That was one bitch, cold as a witch's tit."

As a widow, Lillian would eventually succumb to Parkinson's disease. J. Edgar showed up at her funeral but left in the middle of the eulogy.

The older siblings had grown up to be well adjusted, but not the head of the family, who began to deteriorate mentally as the years went by.

Dickerson Naylor Hoover, upon whom the family depended, was sent in 1913 to a psychiatric ward in Laurel, Maryland. His wife tried to suppress news of his mental illness, even from her family, but it became obvious that he had had a nervous breakdown. He was suffering from acute depression and had to undergo shock therapy. At times he had to be restrained physically by the staff after several psychotic episodes.

After months in the hospital, he returned to his government job as an engraver with the Coast and Geodetic Survey. But after some outbursts he was dismissed with no pension. Mostly he would sit silently in a corner of the family living room, brooding in a chair.

J. Edgar had loved his father dearly, but soon learned that contact or intimacy between them was impossible. “He has gone to some far and distant place,” J. Edgar later recalled.

With his father out of work, J. Edgar created a job for himself outside the Eastern City Market, which supplied most of the groceries for Washington and had done so since 1873. He carried groceries for customers at the market, sometimes toting a heavy load for two miles for a ten-cent tip. He’d then run back to the market so as not to miss another customer. For that effort, he earned the nickname of “Speed.” Ironically, this was the nickname his future lover, Clyde Tolson, would often call him in private.

Acker disputed some versions of how J. Edgar got the nickname of “Speed.”

“He talked so God damn fast, like an FBI machine gun,” Acker said. “Real staccato. That’s how he got that name, not because he ran so fast. I think James Cagney in the movies imitated Edgar’s fast talking.”

As “J.E. Hoover,” Edgar became the captain in his high school’s Cadet Corps. In March of 1913—“my all-time greatest thrill”—was when he, looking stiffly formal in his uniform, led his company in its march down Pennsylvania Avenue during the four-hour inaugural parade of President Woodrow Wilson.

In 1913, Hoover was graduated as the valedictorian of his class at Central High School.

At the age of eighteen, at the Central High Regimental Ball, J. Edgar showed up at Washington D.C.’s Cairo Hotel with his mother. He looked spiffy in his blue-and-white uniform and wore a saber. Every young man had a dance book. But in the spaces reserved for female partners, the page appears blank in J. Edgar’s book. He sat out the dance talking to his mother.



J. Edgar’s childhood home at 413 Seward Square in “Pipetown.” From its front porch, a young J. Edgar with his trusty slingshot “beaned” many

J. Edgar enrolled as a night student at George Washington University, only four blocks from the White House, whose future occupants he would one day terrorize.

During the day he worked as a file reviewer in the Order Division of the Library of Congress. He was paid \$30 a month.

At the Library of Congress, he mastered the Dewey Decimal System. That skill he learned became the organizational model for the FBI's Central Files and General Indices in the decades to come.

He earned a Bachelor of Law degree in 1916, a master's in 1917, which gained his admission to the District of Columbia Bar. He went to work in January of 1917 as a clerk in the Department of Justice for the meager salary of \$990 a year. He would remain connected in some capacity with this department for the next fifty-five years.



At the age of sixteen, J. Edgar (*left*) was a zealous commander of his high school cadet corps, which marched at the **inauguration of Woodrow Wilson** (*right photo*) in 1913. In spite of his military training, J. Edgar chose to avoid military service in World War I.

Throughout his life, J. Edgar detested clammy handshakes. Once, he got to shake President Wilson's hand and he later compared the experience to "a ten-cent pickled mackerel in brown paper." As president, Wilson shocked J. Edgar by recommending that all government agents should see D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, a film that glorified the Ku Klux Klan.

In 1917, J. Edgar was hired by John Lord O'Brian, a former lawyer from Buffalo, New York, who took charge of the War Emergency Division of the Department of Justice. J. Edgar was assigned to the Alien Enemy Bureau and given the task of tracking down the rumor that German spies had sabotaged the food supply of America by putting ground glass in flour.

He was also charged with seeking out spies and cracking down on anarchists. He not only ordered the arrest of accused or even potential saboteurs, but he wanted German seamen, marooned in U.S. ports at the outbreak of the war, sent to alien detention camps. The young and ambitious prosecutor also led a drive to register 450,000 Germans and force them to carry a government-issued ID.

According to O'Brian, J. Edgar's boss, his young protégé "saw a spy around every corner, a saboteur in any man who walked the waterfront, and a slacker under every rock." A slacker was a man who avoided the draft. There was a certain irony in J. Edgar pursuing slackers, as he fitted the bill himself.

The man who would one day prosecute Vietnam draft dodgers “dodged the bullet” himself and didn’t have to serve in the military. He later claimed that the “espionage work” he was doing on the home front prevented him from going into the army.

The claim about being essential does not ring true. The United States entered the war on April 6, 1917, but he did not join the U.S. Department of Justice until July 26, which gave him plenty of time to enlist if he had wanted to. Besides, his \$990-a-year clerkship would hardly be considered essential to the war effort.

Actually he was needed at home to help pay for his father’s confinement in that sanatorium in Maryland. His father suffered such acute depression that he repeatedly vomited throughout the day. What caused this sudden breakdown in his mental condition is not known. In later years, J. Edgar tried to erase his father’s condition from his biography.

In his war against the slackers, J. Edgar unknowingly was aided by a young man named Clyde Anderson Tolson, whom he had yet to meet. Tolson was hired as the confidential secretary to Newton D. Baker, the Secretary of War. As such, Tolson was one of the men who organized a raid on Manhattan and Brooklyn where young men who didn’t have proper identification were arrested at bayonet point on street corners and herded into a concentration camp. There was standing room only in these camps. Not enough food, water, or toilets were provided, and the young men, most of whom were innocent, were forced to live in these harsh conditions for forty-eight hours before their cases were individually heard.



Young, ambitious, and determined, **J. Edgar** viewed all Germans as suspicious in World War I and became the curse of German brewery owners. “To drink the Kaiser’s brew is treason,” he claimed.

One of J. Edgar’s first memos carried a recommendation of what to do to an eighteen-year-old boy who had been arrested on the Texan-Mexican border. He was a supporter of the German Kaiser and called President Woodrow Wilson “a cocksucker and a thief.”

J. Edgar wanted him jailed until the end of the war, although his recommendation was overruled as “too drastic.”

After the United States went to war with Germany, vigilantes indiscriminately arrested aliens, especially those with a German accent, on suspicion of being spies and saboteurs. J. Edgar came to suspect that even some church leaders were secret agents of the Kaiser. Hundreds of immigrants were not only incarcerated but beaten and, in some cases, tortured. In all cases they were threatened with deportation.

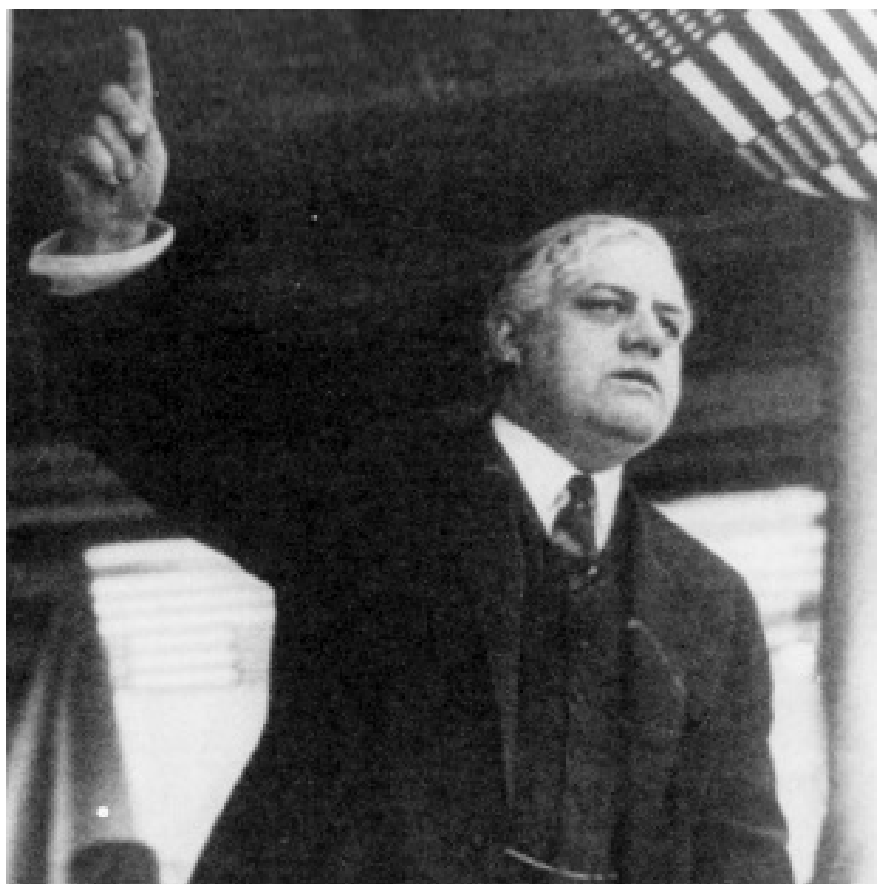
By 1917, he was participating in a drive to register all German women in the United States, fearing they may be spies or saboteurs. At the department, J. Edgar would become a vociferous advocate of “The Hun Scare.”

At the age of twenty-two, J. Edgar stated his lifetime goal to those who knew him. “I once thought I might become a minister. But I have now decided on my lifelong ambition. I will become a hunter of men, or maybe a lady or two if she’s an

anarchist.”

J. Edgar worked on a memo recommending that restaurants in America should no longer list Sauerkraut on their menu, even in Milwaukee. He preferred the name “Liberty cabbage.” He also wanted the music of Bach and Beethoven banned from concerts. Of course, German was no longer to be taught in public schools.

After the victory celebrations associated with the end of World War I, J. Edgar faced the end of his job with the War Emergency Division. He asked to join the Bureau of Immigration but was turned down. He even requested a transfer to the Bureau of Investigation (BOI). Ironically he was turned down for a job in a department he’d later rule with an iron fist for forty-eight years.



J. Edgar’s boss, U.S. Attorney General **A. Mitchell Palmer** was called “The Fighting Quaker.” In 1920, he ran for president, but his notorious wartime “Red Raids” had produced a public backlash.

In March of 1919, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer selected J. Edgar to aid his campaign of “prosecuting alien agitators. I want to get rid of every god damn ‘Red’ in this country and make it safe for democracy,” Palmer told the 24-year-old.

“Leave it to me, chief,” J. Edgar said.

Accompanied with an increase in his salary to the hefty sum of \$3,000 a year, J. Edgar was assigned to the new “Radical Division” of the Department of Justice. With the Kaiser’s spies no longer a threat, he turned to the “Red Menace” that he was convinced was enveloping the United States.

Palmer, J. Edgar’s new boss, was a Pennsylvania-born Quaker, who raised many eyebrows during World War I when he, as Alien Property Custodian, seized millions in German assets which ended up in the coffers of his Democratic cronies.

Palmer had come down particularly hard on German brewers, finding conspiracies in virtually every tankard of beer sold. He wanted to make U.S. industry free of evil German ownership. “Every time you drink a German beer, you’re putting money into the pockets of our enemy.”

Palmer was Attorney General from March 5, 1919 to March 4, 1921, with J. Edgar his chief “flunky.”

On a daily basis, J. Edgar worked with Assistant Attorney General Francis Garvan and became known in the bureau as “Garvan’s pet hound dog, snooping his bulldog nose in everybody else’s business.”

Garvan was both a chemist from Connecticut and a zealot who detested foreigners, especially Germans and Russians.

As a means of understanding the mind of his enemy, J. Edgar studied the writings of Lenin, who was calling for world revolution, as well as Marx and Engels.

Methodically, he began to accumulate dossiers on the enemy, studying arrest records. He secretly obtained Communist

Party member records, and he subscribed to every radical newspaper in America, scanning them for leads to direct him to enemy agents.

J. Edgar and his special assistant, George Ruch, whom he called “Blimp,” asserted that the writings and speech of “left wingers” should be suppressed. Ruch, a friend from high school, would later go on to hire thugs to attack labor activists at the Pittsburgh Coal Company. In honor of “my close and intimate friend,” Ruch named his son “J. Edgar.”

At a private dinner, Ruch asked J. Edgar if he had any plans to get married. He told Ruch that he was “wed” to the department and had no time “to waste on a family.”

Had it not been for what later evolved into an anti-Bolshevik “witch hunt,” J. Edgar might never have become head of the world’s largest law enforcement agency.

Long before anyone had heard of Senator Joseph McCarthy, a Red Scare prevailed under Palmer. When he directed the infamous “Palmer Red Raids,” backed up by J. Edgar, he was nicknamed “The Fighting Quaker.”

In late April of 1919, an anarchist, Luigi Galleani, made an attempt on the life of Palmer by sending a booby trap bomb to his home. The explosive was intercepted and defused.

About five weeks later, on June 2, 1919, shortly before midnight, two “alien saboteurs” planted a bomb in front of Palmer’s house. The blast destroyed half of his home. In their attempts to escape, the terrorists were blown to bits. Some of their body parts landed across the street on the porch of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Secretary of the Navy.

Before the night ended, other explosions at government buildings went off. A note was found declaring the beginning of a class war and predicting ultimate victory for the international proletariat.

In the days ahead, nearly forty bombs were sent out, arriving at the offices of John D. Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan, a Supreme Court Justice, three cabinet members, four senators, a U.S. district judge, two governors, and two members of the House of Representatives.

Fortunately, none of the bombs reached their targets, as they were each intercepted or exploded by the police. Only one injury was reported, and that was from a servant who opened a suspicious package.

J. Edgar wanted not only to arrest radicals and anarchists, but to have them deported. Although thousands of American citizens were arrested, only 500 foreigners were kicked out of the country. “These people are planting poisonous seeds of disloyalty,” J. Edgar charged. “They must be crushed out like you would a two-headed serpent about to strike you with a deadly venom.”

On November 7, in raids planned by J. Edgar himself, local police, directed by the Bureau of Investigation, launched a violent sweep of Russian workers in a dozen American cities. Many suspected Bolsheviks were badly beaten during the assault. Dozens of innocent Americans, some Irish or Swedish, were arrested but later set free. Of the 650 arrested in New York City that day, only 43 were deported.



Emma Goldman, “Queen of the Anarchists,” seen here with **Berkman** in 1917 as they are being deported.

J. Edgar defined Goldman as “My biggest red game yet.” She advocated politically motivated murder and violent revolution.

Even as a very young stalker of communists and anarchists, J. Edgar was clever enough to know he needed to capture a very high profile person if he wanted to generate favorable publicity in the press. Emma Goldman, “the Queen of the Anarchists,” emerged as his most notorious target. Her character is familiar to those who saw Warren Beatty’s film *Reds*.

“If I can get this Jew bitch deported back to Russia, it will make headlines for me across America,” J. Edgar accurately predicted. “I might even get a promotion.”

Born in the Lithuanian city of Kovno on June 27, 1869, Goldman came to the United States in 1885, settling in New York City. Throughout much of her life she was linked to Alexander Berkman, her lover and partner in anarchy. J. Edgar claimed that “beyond any doubt, these two are the most dangerous anarchists in America.” His case against Berkman was stronger, and he knew that getting Goldman deported would be an uphill fight. She had lived in the United States for more than three decades, and both her father and her former husband were U.S. citizens.

In 1892, Goldman and Berkman plotted to assassinate Henry Clay Frick, the multimillionaire industrialist and financier who was called “the most hated man in America.” Berkman was selected to enter his office and fire bullets into his heart. The anarchists had the mistaken belief that by killing Frick, they would “strike terror into the soul of his upper class and bring their teachings of anarchism before the world.”

No one represented the evils of the capitalist system more than the ruthless Frick himself. He was vilified by the public for his lack of morality in business dealings and for exploiting, even brutalizing, his underpaid workers who lived in wretched ghettos.

Chairman of Carnegie Steel, he played a major role in the formation of the giant U.S. Steel manufacturing concern, and also financed the construction of the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Reading Company. It was an exaggeration, of course, but he was said to own the city of Pittsburgh, and he had vast land holdings in the state of Pennsylvania. Some historians have named him “the single worst CEO in the history of America.”

In the Homestead Strike of 1892, workers at his steel plant in Pennsylvania were locked out of the giant plant when negotiations failed. Frick hired three hundred armed guards from the Pinkerton Detective Agency to break the union’s picket lines. On the morning of July 6, 1892, a gunfight broke out. A battle ensued, lasting twelve hours, during which time nine union workers and seven guards were killed.

Originally, with Goldman’s approval, Berkman planned to shoot Frick and then commit suicide.

On July 23, 1892, Berkman dressed up in an expensive suit he’d bought two days before. Security in the late 19th century

was not what it is today. One office seeker had only recently walked into the office of the president of the United States without any real challenge. Berkman went unchallenged past two secretaries and entered Frick's private chambers, where he sat alone at his desk. Frick did not even look up at the intruder, but muttered, "What in hell do you want?"

Berkman had arrived armed with a gun and a sharpened steel file, which he planned to stab into Frick's heart. He fired three bullets at him, but Frick jumped up and fought back. With the steel file, Berkman stabbed Frick's leg. Alarmed by the shouts, five of the plant's security guards rushed into the office to save Frick's life. They beat Berkman unconscious.

The assassination attempt was condemned by both workers and anarchists. Since Frick survived, Berkman was tried and convicted of an assassination attempt and not sentenced to the death penalty. Given a twenty-two year prison sentence, he served fourteen years. He was released on May 18, 1906.

Berkman teamed up with Goldman again and once again launched their campaign of anarchy in America. Amazingly, in spite of often violent rallies, they were not arrested until 1917, when the U.S. entered World War I and passed a Selective Service act. Goldman and Berkman opposed conscription and widely denounced it, which led to their arrest on June 15, 1917. They were charged with conspiracy, tried, and sent to jail with a two-year prison sentence.

Goldman had many friends who were angered by her arrest. She was viewed as a free-thinking rebel and a rigorous intellectual who championed free love, birth control, freedom of speech, and even homosexuality.

When Goldman was released from the Missouri State Penitentiary on September 27, 1919, J. Edgar was waiting with another court order to re-arrest her. When Berkman was released from an Atlanta penitentiary on October 1, 1919, he, too, compliments of J. Edgar, was immediately re-arrested.



Privately, J. Edgar endorsed the brutal putdown of union strikers ordered by the hated capitalist steel baron, **Henry Clay Frick** (*photo above*). J. Edgar suspected that most union strikes were communist inspired.

At a hearing, she was ordered deported, along with Berkman. As J. Edgar later confessed, "I threw the book at her." He even accused her of plotting the 1910 bombing of the offices of the *Los Angeles Examiner*, although he knew that she had had nothing to do with that act of terrorism. J. Edgar's most serious charge was that her speeches inspired the September 9, 1901

assassination of President William McKinley in Buffalo. He was shot by Leon Czolgosz, a Polish-American factory worker, who had once attended one of Goldman's speeches.

At 4:15AM, on the bitterly cold morning of December 21, 1919, in New York Harbor, J. Edgar and the bureau's chief, William Flynn, boarded a cutter which took them to Ellis Island. There they boarded the antiquated vessel, *The Burford* which was set to transport 249 "radicals" back to the Soviet Union.

J. Edgar personally confronted both Goldman and Berkman, who told J. Edgar, "We'll be back, you dirty bastard."

Later, on shore at Ellis Island, J. Edgar predicted that "other Soviet Arks will sail for Europe—we will not tolerate treason in this country." He was pleased to read an endorsement of his actions in *The New York Times*. The paper attacked the "blasphemous creatures who not only rejected America's hospitality and assailed her institutions but also sought by a campaign of assassination and terrorism to ruin her as a nation of free men."

Back at his office, J. Edgar predicted, "After today, I will be frontpage news throughout America until I go to meet my Maker. First thing up there, I'll probably demand that God give me his fingerprints."

Much to the delight of J. Edgar, another of Palmer's "Red Menace Raids" was launched on January 2, 1920. The raids took place in thirty-three American cities, and 10,000 aliens were beaten and arrested.

Most of the "deviants" seized were later released because they were *bona fide* American citizens without any record or any evidence that they had done something wrong.

J. Edgar maintained that a vast arsenal of bombs had been discovered that would have destroyed the heart of such cities as New York. Actually, all that the raiders discovered was a cache of four pistols in New York City.

Using his position, he began to investigate suspicious lawyers and other officials whom he suspected of being "disseminators of Bolshevik propaganda." The most classic case was Felix Frankfurter, a Law School professor at Harvard who would later become a justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. In a memo dated in 1921, J. Edgar defined Frankfurter as "the most dangerous man in America."

Frankfurter had been born into a Jewish family in Vienna in 1882 during the most confident chapter of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His family immigrated to the United States. While still a student, he attended political rallies advocating socialism and communism.

He had supported Theodore Roosevelt during his unsuccessful Bull Moose campaign in 1912. When Roosevelt lost, Frankfurter described himself as "politically homeless." The U.S. entered World War I in 1917, and Frankfurter became special assistant to Secretary of War Newton D. Baker.

Frankfurter and J. Edgar would clash many times in the future. Everything that the future Supreme Court Justice did during his rise to the bench infuriated J. Edgar. Frankfurter got involved in labor politics and came to be viewed, according to J. Edgar, as a "lawyer in favor of radical principles." Frankfurter was also a Zionist and helped found the American Civil Liberties Union.

Along the way, he stomped down on some of J. Edgar's favorite tactics as a law enforcement officer. Frankfurter attacked police entrapment and brutality and objected, in court, to prolonged detention and violations of due process. He frequently defended members of oppressed religious minorities and socialists.

After the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Frankfurter bonded with the new president and commissioned many bright young lawyers to promote the New Deal. They became known as "Felix's Happy Hot Dogs."

When Justice Benjamin N. Cardozo died in July of 1938, FDR appointed Frankfurter to the Supreme Court. He was confirmed without dissent, although J. Edgar worked in the background to discredit him. As a Supreme Court Justice, Frankfurter became the most outspoken advocate of judicial restraint, but in 1955, he urged desegregation of schools with "all deliberate speed."

When J. Edgar learned that his long-time enemy had died in February of 1965, he said, "Now I know there is a God in Heaven."

In the January, 1920 "red raids" that J. Edgar orchestrated, he later admitted there were "clear cases of brutality." What he meant to say, but didn't, was that many innocent people were arrested, beaten, and tortured.

But ironically, in the political firestorm that followed it was Palmer, not J. Edgar, who was attacked by hundreds of lawyers, labor leaders, and newspaper editors across the country.

Palmer's dreams of becoming president collapsed in the fallout from the raids, and nationwide, he was generally discredited. Violent anarchist bombs, however, continued to explode at targets, mainly along the East Coast of the U.S., for the next twelve years.

Palmer was also roundly condemned by Harlan Fiske Stone, dean of the Columbia University School of Law. Ironically, it was Stone who would later appoint J. Edgar as director of the FBI.

Even though he had directly designated many of the “red targets,” J. Edgar emerged unscathed throughout the backlash against Palmer.

He continued to pursue alleged “Reds.” In fact, he earned his first press mention, one editorial calling him “a slender bundle of high-charged electric wire.” It would be the beginning of many a press rave or attack.

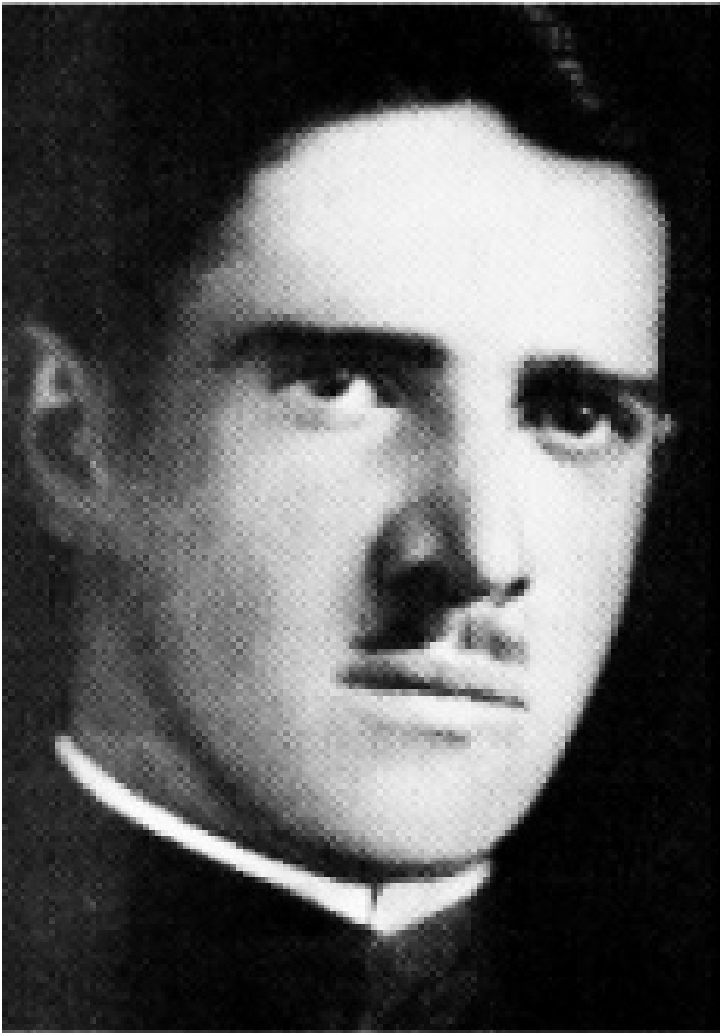
In private, J. Edgar later claimed that he virtually destroyed the Communist Party before it could overthrow the U.S. government. Before the raids, membership numbered some 80,000 party workers. After the raids, only 6,000 “diehards” continued to label themselves as communists.

One suspected communist was actor Charlie Chaplin, at that time the most famous man in the world. J. Edgar’s file on Chaplin would never be closed, as he collected more and more evidence on the comedian as the years went by.

As the Roaring Twenties dawned, and flappers ruled the night and drank bootleg gin, J. Edgar still showed no interest in women. He did become enamored of Frank Baughman, a classmate from law school. They both dressed the same in summer in immaculate white linen suits. Both of them adopted the custom of wearing a pink carnation in their lapels.

Patrons reported seeing them discreetly holding hands every Sunday night at the Fox Movie Theater in Washington. They often sat through a double feature before having a candlelit dinner in some tavern.

It is surprising that Baughman chose J. Edgar as a best friend. He was shy, Baughman extroverted, a spiffy dresser who enjoyed poker, crap games, and heavy drinking, all of which J. Edgar abhorred. But he was nonetheless attracted to the super masculine qualities of Baughman, in spite of his interest in young women, which he made abundantly clear to J. Edgar, who was not only having difficulty in his pursuit of love, but facing tragedy on his home front.



Über-macho **Frank Baughman**, spiffy dresser and ladies’ man. Was J. Edgar secretly enamored with him?

On March 30, 1921, J. Edgar’s father, Dickerson Sr., died, having wasted away from self-induced starvation. He’d once loved his father, but during his final years, he had been ashamed of him. J. Edgar did not tolerate people who suffered from mental illness, blaming it on their own weakness.

He and his mother seemed freed of a great burden and could now live alone quietly in their small house on Seward Square, where J. Edgar had been born.

After two days of mourning, J. Edgar’s beloved “Mama” went out and bought four spring outfits—sunflower yellow,

pumpkin orange, scarlet, and mint green—and charged them to her son.

J. Edgar was positioned to benefit from the direction of the political winds. On August 22, 1921, President Warren G. Harding's attorney general, Harry Daugherty, fired William J. Flynn, chief of the Bureau of Investigation. He was replaced with William J. Burns, a celebrated detective, who named J. Edgar as his assistant director.

Burns was not the first chief of the bureau. Stanley W. Finch had helmed it between its establishment in 1908 and 1912. Before Burns, the bureau was run by Alexander B. Bielaski (1912-1919), William E. Allen (1919; he served the shortest term), and William J. Flynn (1919-1921).

J. Edgar reported directly to William Burns, but soon realized that his new boss was mired in so much corruption that he couldn't last long in that top post that J. Edgar coveted.

Although he admired how Burns "became the idol of every schoolboy," he also viewed his boss as corrupt, and plotted to overthrow him. It was by privately investigating his chief that J. Edgar learned how to destroy a political figure.

As a close friend of Daugherty (William Harding's Attorney General) Burns almost daily was getting embroiled in the notorious Teapot Dome Scandal, which involved the secret leasing of naval oil reserve lands to private companies.

Burns gave J. Edgar some advice that he would heed until his last day in office. "When you have a political enemy, investigate him. Everybody's got a smelly skeleton hidden in the closet."



Detective **William J. Burns** (photo above) was called "the Sherlock Holmes of America" when he was appointed as director of the Bureau of Investigation by Thomas Daugherty, the U.S. Attorney General who was implicated in many of the scandals spearheaded by president Warren G. Harding.

A notorious womanizer, Burns became J. Edgar's new boss. He was thoroughly corrupt.

The most famous detective in America, Burns was known as the country's Sherlock Holmes and also as a notorious ladies' man. Although J. Edgar admired some of his police accomplishments, he found much about his cigar-chomping boss repulsive. But J. Edgar would nonetheless use him as a role model if the occasion suited him.

J. Edgar liked the way Burns had an instinct for publicity, which turned him into a national figure, his exploits making tabloid news. The very popular magazines of the time wrote of his "true crime stories" based on his exploits, both real and exaggerated.

A personal friend of the corrupt President Harding, Burns was allowed to simultaneously direct both the bureau as well as his Burns Detective Agency throughout his tenure with the government.

Conspiring with Attorney General Daugherty, Burns launched an investigation of Thomas J. Walsh, the congressman from

Montana. The probe was in retaliation for Walsh opposing oil leases granted by Secretary of the Interior, Albert Fall, a friend of Daugherty.

When a congressional probe demanded that Burns turn over confidential documents, he refused. The Senate retaliated by investigating the Bureau of Investigation, uncovering several mis-deeds, though none of them touched J. Edgar. "I was as clean as a hound's tooth," he later claimed.

The Burns-Daugherty scandal became tabloid fodder, and Burns was forced to resign in 1924.

On May 10, 1924, Hoover took over his boss's post, at first as a temporary appointment.

In 1923, when Burns had helmed the bureau, its number of employees shrank from 1,127 men to just 600 employees. Under J. Edgar, the FBI would eventually expand into a mighty empire,

Daugherty secretly wanted to run for president, and J. Edgar began collecting incriminating data on him, thinking that if he did become president, he might blackmail him into naming him bureau chief permanently.



Stanley W. Finch was appointed chief examiner to head a force of special investigative agents in 1908. In time, it became the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He was called the handsomest man ever to head the agency.

In contrast, bulldog-faced J. Edgar was deemed the ugliest. His tasks included the arrest of white slavers accused of transporting women across state lines for "immoral purposes."

Daugherty was the Republican Party boss, a member of the "Ohio Gang" surrounding Harding. He had virtually put Harding into office, and that's why the president had named him Attorney General. During his three years in office, he became the most notorious Attorney General in U.S. history.

He was plagued with charges and indictments and was alleged to have been involved in a kickback scam involving bootleggers. Under pressure, and with more scandals enveloping him, he resigned on March 28, 1924, his presidential dream gone forever.

J. Edgar quickly closed his secret file on him and turned to probing into the private lives of other subjects, namely, a rising

politician from New York named Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The new attorney general was Harlan Fiske Stone. J. Edgar's new boss liked him and determined that he should head the bureau permanently. He was joined in his support by Herbert Hoover who at the time functioned as Secretary of Commerce. Later, Hoover would become the ill-fated president who was at the switch at the time of, and who would eventually be blamed for, the Wall Street crash of 1929.

Confirmed for the position, J. Edgar would hold onto the post, tenaciously, for the next forty-eight years, in spite of presidents who wanted to fire him but did not dare to. He knew too much about their private lives.

During his tenure, he would accumulate blackmail evidence on all the Chief Executives, especially Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt and, in later years, a particularly massive volume on John F. Kennedy.



Warren Harding, U.S. president from 1921 to 1923, died just two years into his presidency. He didn't live to see his cabinet become embroiled in the notorious Teapot Dome scandal, which centered around the illegal leasing, with bribes, of government oil reserves. In the White House, he had two mistresses and a domineering wife, **Florence Kling De Wolfe**, who he referred to as "The Duchess."

After his landslide victory, he whined to her, "I am not fit for the office and should never have been here."

No president ever uttered more truth. In the White House, he claimed, "My god, but this is a hell of a place for a man like me to be." His lifelong obsession was poker. One night he bet the priceless White House china...and lost.

CHAPTER TWO

Pasty-faced, overweight, and growing increasingly ugly as he matured and edged toward thirty, J. Edgar was facing professional success. Privately, his social life was a disaster, and he was a very lonely man, desperately wanting companionship.

He complained to his mother that women did not find him attractive. Had he brought up the subject, he could also have claimed that that was doubly true for men. Every man he'd developed a crush on turned out to be straight, leaving him feeling abandoned when the object of his affection married.

No one could be sure, but J. Edgar appeared to be a virgin. His schoolboy crushes on men more virile than himself never seemed to have developed into any man-on-man passion. At one point he told Frank Baughman that, "My mother is the only person in the world who loves me. Unlike you, I will never get married."

The announcement that on December 22, 1924, J. Edgar had been appointed as the permanent director of the Bureau of Investigation came ten days before his thirtieth birthday.

As he told his mother, "This was the best combined birthday and Christmas present I could ever hope to receive. But as much as I want the job, I want an even bigger job. I will use the appointment to win a larger prize. No later than 1940, your son will be sitting in the Oval Office of the White House."

The press paid little attention when J. Edgar was given a permanent appointment as the head of the Bureau of Investigation. The *Washington Evening Star* even ran the news on the obituary page. J. Edgar was heralded as the head of "a new school of crime detection, the old sleuth of shadows and frame-ups gone forever."

As director of the Bureau, J. Edgar decided to celebrate, as his salary had been boosted from \$5,000 annually to \$7,500. He and "the man in his life," Frank Baughman, took their mothers to a Broadway play.

At the Liberty Theater on Forty-Second Street, the happy quartet sat through Fred and Adele Astaire starring in *Lady, Be Good!* At the end of the show by the Gershwin brothers, J. Edgar privately whispered to Baughman, "I think Fred Astaire is a homosexual. The Bureau should investigate that."

J. Edgar was friendly backstage, congratulating the Astaires. Fred would later remember his "vise-like grip as if he were putting handcuffs on me."

Later, J. Edgar noted that after the show the "flappers and sugar daddies" in the theater audience headed to illegal speakeasies throughout New York. However, the enforcement of Prohibition was the responsibility of the Treasury Department, not the Bureau.

In his new post, J. Edgar had big plans for the Bureau, most of which were implemented. But he never achieved his dream of "Universal Fingerprinting." He wanted to have a record of the fingerprints of every man and woman in America.

In World War II, he did succeed in obtaining the fingerprints of every person in the Army, Air Force, or Navy, as well as every worker in the war industries, as he feared massive sabotage.

At the end of his life, his fingerprint division had grown to the point where it occupied a six-story structure taking up a whole city block in Washington. His Crime Laboratory became the greatest in the world, and remains so to this day.

When he took over the Bureau, he called it "a cesspool, filled with graft and corruption." Many agents were living on bribes, and some men supported themselves by extortion and blackmail. J. Edgar set about to get rid of "these thieves, bandits, and perverts," returning the Bureau to the pristine vision that Theodore Roosevelt had conceived for it back in 1908.

A journalist in 1923 wrote that, "The Bureau of Investigation is a private hole in the corner goon squad for the attorney general. Its arts are devoted to snooping, bribery, and blackmail."

J. Edgar was horrified at the morality of his agents, especially when he found them hanging out in a room known as the "Buzzard's Roost." They used the room for heavy drinking, viewing pornography they'd seized in raids, and telling dirty jokes. He fired all the patrons of the room, and even threatened to fire men caught drinking after work.

Secretly, J. Edgar set about perfecting some of his major weapons—wiretapping, opening mail, bugging, and even burglary if necessary. He wanted information and didn't seem to care how he went about getting it. Some critics have called him "The Father of the Watergate" break-in during the Richard Nixon administration.

On his first day on the job, J. Edgar ordered background checks on all the men under his command. He especially wanted to know if any of them were suspected of homosexuality or if any had ever been a member of the discredited Communist Party.

After an internal probe, many agents were fired or dismissed. J. Edgar claimed they were "hacks," actually political appointees, "incapable of doing their jobs." In the wake of that, he received at least three death threats.

This would be but the beginning of a volley of death threats he could receive over the decades. On the day he died, two letters threatening his life were delivered to FBI headquarters.

He took these mailed threats seriously, but his agents almost never found the anonymous men (or in some cases, women) who wanted him dead. Most of the letters were not from psychotic killers, but from outraged citizens expressing their extreme

displeasure at the way he ran the FBI.

One agent, critical of J. Edgar after he fired him, claimed, “He walks like a woman, like mincing steps. He dresses like a dandy wearing oyster-gray spats covering patent leather shoes. He prefers snap-brimmed hats. His clothes appear tailored, not off the rack. He’s rather flamboyant and smells of lavender water. Always a white shirt and striped tie. He must spend an hour folding the stiffly starched handkerchief he wears in his lapel.”

“‘Eleanor blue,’ as it is called, is his favorite color for his matched shades of tie, handkerchief, and socks,” the agent said. “He’s on the chubby side. He always wears a star sapphire ring studded with diamonds. He has a dark complexion. There are rumors that he has a bit of the tarbush from his ancestors. I’m not sure about this, but he is said to change his underwear three times a day. Not only that, but he is thought to wear his panties in different colors. Since all men’s underwear comes only in white, he must dye his drawers himself. If I didn’t know better, I would swear that he is a homosexual, although he claims he abhors perverts and fires any agent he even suspects of being one. He once booted an agent who walks in the same mincing way he does.”

A former aide claimed that J. Edgar was “short, squat, and with the smallest feet I’ve ever seen on a man. He walks like he talks, fast. When seen from the rear, his bottom—well, it sort of bounced.”

J. Edgar did not like blacks, feeling they were “lazy bastards and unreliable—low Red Cap sorts.” When he received reports of violence against blacks in the South coming from the hooded Ku Klux Klan, J. Edgar dismissed it as “harmless intimidation—after all, someone has to keep these darkies in line.”

Earlier in his career, J. Edgar had learned that President Warren Harding had been sworn into the KKK in the Green Room of the White House. The Klan’s Imperial Wizard, William Joseph Simmons, conducted this secret ceremony.

J. Edgar in a memo attacked the “scourge of Kluxism,” yet he was a great believer in white supremacy himself. As he later told his life-long companion, Clyde Tolson, “the face you present to the world is not necessarily the bare ass you show after midnight.”

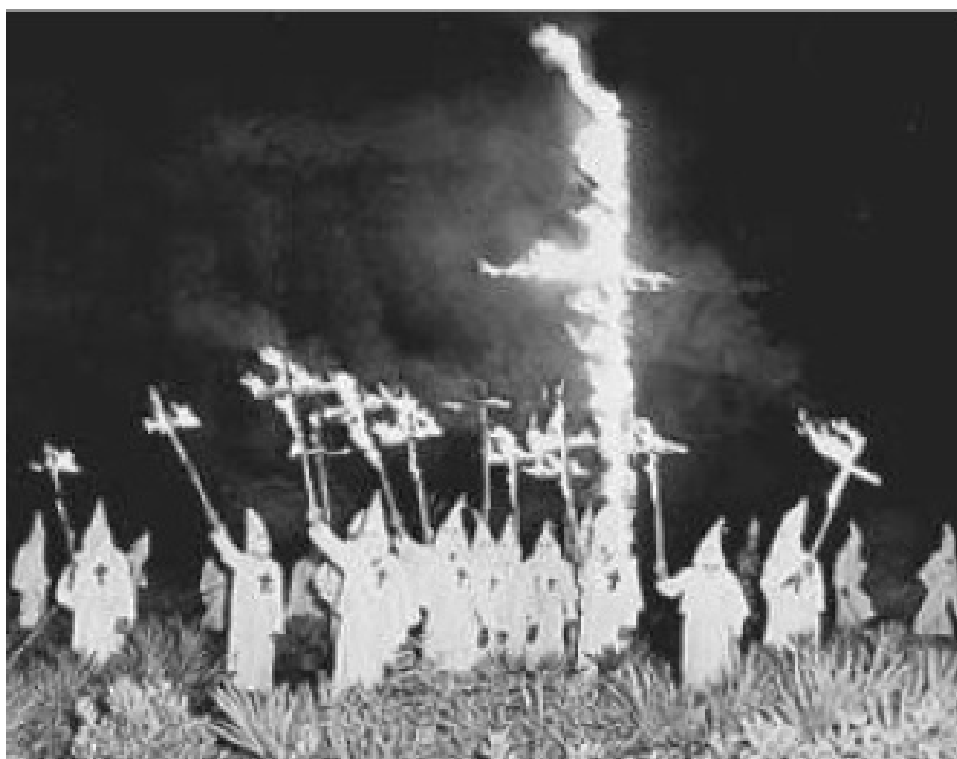
In his early days as director of the Bureau, J. Edgar “experimented” by hiring two women as special agents. But he was never pleased with their job performance. Both women lasted less than three years with the Bureau. When they resigned, he called his experiment of hiring women a dismal failure.

Actually many of his G-Men called him “a woman hater.” In investigating a case, he taught them to “look for dirty, filthy, diseased women” who might lead an agent to his prey. “Behind every crook, there’s probably a woman even more evil than the bastard himself. Many robberies, most robberies, occur because some stupid man is trying to get expensive things for some woman who is home goading him into crime, even if he gets shot trying to bring home the trophies for her.”

In later years J. Edgar liked to drink Jack Daniels, but when he took charge, Prohibition was the law of the land, and he demanded that it be rigidly enforced. Any agent indulging in intoxicants would be immediately dismissed.

When an official stopped off to visit the Denver office of the Bureau, and the chief there offered the travel-fatigued visitor a drink, that agent was fired the next day. J. Edgar seemed to have spies in every state.

Soon he was called upon to make speeches. In his first addresses, he sounded like Bobby Kennedy in the 1960s, blaming poverty as the cause of crime.



Though J. Edgar was no great advocate of civil rights for African Americans, as head of the Bureau of Investigation, he often had to investigate the activities of the KKK when it violated Federal law.

His agents uncovered evidence that certain KKK-affiliated prison officials “sold” Negro prisoners to local farmers for free labor.

To cover up, one local plantation owner in Georgia killed a dozen Negroes to conceal the evidence. But he was eventually exposed.

The cross-burning KKK rally depicted above took place in Georgia in 1922.

J. Edgar did not like his agents to engage in sex, at least the unmarried ones, which were the men he preferred to hire. When he heard that an agent had had sex with a woman in his office in Knoxville, he fired him at once. J. Edgar went so far as to break up the marriages of agents of which he didn’t approve. In several cases he sent incriminating evidence to the wives, often falsely charging their husbands with adultery, causing the women to sue for divorce.

Agents actually caught in adulterous affairs—called “double yolkers” by J. Edgar—were routinely fired without recommendations to a future employer. Such a dismissal prevented them from getting hired by any other government agency.

When he really disliked an agent, but had no charge against him, he ordered him to a different office in a different part of the country, every six weeks until he broke the man’s spirit and he resigned.

J. Edgar issued orders as to how an agent should dress and look, and he also vowed he’d never hire a man who extended him a clammy hand to shake. His mandate required that “no agent shall have protruding ears, bad posture, a pear-shaped head, or bushy eyebrows. Hair must be neatly trimmed, and shirts must always be white with no loud ties. Socks should always be black, and shoes must be shined until you can see your face reflected in them.”

J. Edgar went from “The Red Hunter” to a protector of civil liberties, assuring a Senate committee that no American citizen should be investigated because of his or her political views. Of course, what he said and what he actually did were two different things.

The stress of the job began to wear on J. Edgar. He began to look tired and haggard and went to his doctor for a thorough examination. The physician could find nothing wrong with his patient, but recommended that he take up smoking to relax. J. Edgar followed his advice and became addicted to smoking Lucky Strike cigarettes, which was a strange choice for him since the brand at that time was considered a woman’s cigarette. Lucky Strike urged women who wanted to keep their figures trim to “reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet.”



Tormented at times by his own sexual confusion, **J. Edgar Hoover** nonetheless preached stern moral sermons to America.

Secretly, he indulged in homosexuality, even transvestism.

One of his closest colleagues, FBI agent William Sullivan, called him “the master blackmailer.” Yet on rare occasions, he was the victim of blackmail himself.

Although he was power hungry, he avoided exposing the Bureau to certain activities he knew he could not control—smuggling, violations of Prohibition, drugs, forgery, and illegal immigration.

“We would never look good taking on such things, because they’re too big for us. It would be like trying to empty the

Atlantic Ocean with a cup.”

In 1928, J. Edgar’s lonely days were about to end forever. Never again would he hunger for male companionship. He was introduced to the man of his dreams, Clyde Tolson, who would never leave his side “till death do us part,” and who would keep alive his memory until his own demise.

Born in 1900, five years after J. Edgar, in Laredo, Missouri, Clyde Tolson was a “man’s man,” who would in the 1930s be called “the Gary Cooper of the FBI.” He was just as ambitious as J. Edgar and was prepared not only to work to get where he wanted to go, but to use people like stepping stones if necessary.

After Missouri, he attended Cedar Rapids Business College in Iowa. At eighteen he moved to Washington, D.C. where he worked as a clerk in the War Department. He had little intention of getting stuck there, so he attended night classes at George Washington University.

In the locker room of the gymnasium, he was admired by other men when he took a shower. One rather obvious man asked him, “Are all men from Missouri as big as you? If so, I’m taking the next train.”

“Get away from me, you queer,” Clyde shouted at him.

His big break came in 1919 when he became the confidential secretary to the Secretary of War, serving in three administrations under Newton D. Baker, John W. Weeks, and Dwight F. Davis.



The day the strapping, dark-haired **Clyde Tolson** walked into the office of J. Edgar Hoover, the director met the man of his dreams. The two G-men walked lockstep together for the rest of their lives.

Almost overnight, this agent-trainee occupied the second-highest post in the Bureau.

At George Washington University, he earned his B.A. degree in 1925, followed by his law degree in 1927.

Clyde applied for a job in the Bureau of Investigation. He’d heard wonderful things about what J. Edgar was doing at the Bureau and wanted to be a part of it.

Regrettably, he was turned down, but he was persistent. The following year he applied once again to the Bureau. This time his photograph and application were spotted by J. Edgar, who told his assistant, “Set up a meeting with this Tolson. I think he’s just the kind of man I’ve been looking for.” That statement, of course, could be interpreted in two different ways.

J. Edgar read all the references praising Clyde, including one from the former Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker, who found him to be “a boy of fine presence who pays serious attention to his duties. He has an excellent intelligence.” But the

recommendation J. Edgar found the most intriguing came from John W. Martyn who was an executive assistant in the War Department. “Clyde Tolson shows no particular interest in women, but his habits have always been of the best.”

When the handsome, masculine, soft-spoken Clyde Tolson, fresh from America’s Corn Belt, walked into the office of J. Edgar Hoover, he was to remain by his side for nearly half a century with only minor interruptions.

J. Edgar took in the way he filled out his cream-colored linen jacket, his lime-green slacks, and looked into his piercing black eyes. Finally, he focused on his alligator shoes. He said, “Our Bureau needs more men like you.”

Although J. Edgar really wanted Clyde in the office beside him, he figured, at least for appearance’s sake, that his new man should get some field training. He was transferred as a special agent to the branch office in Boston. By September, J. Edgar could stand it no more and sent for Clyde to return to Washington, where he was made supervisor of the clerical staff.

Rather impulsively, J. Edgar assigned him as a special agent in charge of the office at Buffalo, New York. But before Clyde had completely unpacked, he received a call from his boss to return to Washington at once. “I need you here with me permanently,” Clyde was told. “Forget your dream of becoming a lawyer in that hick town of Cedar Rapids. I’m making you assistant director.”

Agents speculated that J. Edgar’s decision was prompted by the recent marriage of Frank Baughman, who was no longer available for dinners, parties, and night clubbing.

Back in Washington, Clyde learned that no agent in the history of the Bureau had ever risen so high, so fast. Later, agents speculated that to get to the top it was a good idea to sleep with your boss.

J. Edgar certainly played favorites, promoting Clyde into a top position, while extinguishing the flame of yesterday, Frank Baughman. Perhaps to humiliate his former friend, J. Edgar made Baughman Clyde’s assistant. But the two men bickered constantly. Clyde stayed on, but Baughman was eventually put in charge of the Bureau’s firearms training program at Quantico, Virginia.

Clyde was put in charge of personnel and discipline, not frontline crime-fighting. He was given complete authority to hire and fire at his discretion and seemed to take special delight in firing men.

“He was one cold fish,” said one dismissed agent. “Around the office he was called the Sphinx. No one knew what he was thinking. You’d think you were doing a good job and then, like a cobra, he would strike at you and kick you out.”

“He could intimidate you by staring at you with those beady black eyes,” said another agent. “He was a first-class asshole, always scheming. But when Hoover came around, his face lit up.”

After one week, J. Edgar asked Clyde out for dinner. It was the beginning of thousands of dinners over the decades to come. No one knows exactly what happened that night, but Clyde became J. Edgar’s constant companion, although they would have their arguments and rough spots over the years. Even so, they remained lifelong lovers “until death do us part.”

After their first night together, the pair coined nicknames for each other. Clyde became “Junior.” In public, Clyde referred to J. Edgar as “Mr. Boss,” but in private he called him “Speed,” his childhood nickname. When Clyde was being particularly affectionate, J. Edgar became “Eddie.”

Around the office Clyde quickly became known as J. Edgar’s *protégé*, although that wasn’t the term most agents used. Behind their backs, agents referred to them as “J. Edna and Mother Tolson.” Years later author Truman Capote, a fellow homosexual, had another name for them—“Johnny and Clyde.”

Because J. Edgar and Clyde were seen everywhere together, it was concluded that their relationship was intimate, which it was, of course. “They virtually lived in each other’s crotches,” said one dismissed agent. “One day I said something in private to another agent, and Tolson fired me the following morning. The Gestapo probably learned their techniques from them.”



As **J. Edgar**'s affair with **Clyde Tolson** deepened, so did his cover-up of his secret desires.

Historian Dr. David Eisenbach said, "Hoover's fear of being exposed fed his determination to assemble files on other people's sex secrets. But his files were daily reminders that he, too, could be exposed. He was a pathetic, angry, little man, whose anxiety about his own sexuality spurred him to become the most obsessed, most powerful, and most dangerous sexual blackmailer on earth."

Ray Berry, a government worker, once remarked at a party. "I think they are sodomites." The next day the charge had reached J. Edgar's office. "A drunken degenerate," he said. He instructed Clyde to contact someone in the Department of Commerce and have Berry fired.

A male secretary for President Hoover spread the word that "Tolson is J. Edgar Hoover's boyfriend. They are both fairies."

J. Edgar shot back that "this foul-minded, malicious rat, this despicable, depraved psycho must not be allowed to work for the clean-minded U.S. government." He ordered Clyde to "dig up something on the son of a bitch. He probably molests thirteen-year-old boys."

Life somehow fell into a routine for them. Every day at noon, they lunched at the Mayflower Hotel to which they were driven by limousine. One afternoon while dining, J. Edgar recognized a man who was "the third most wanted" in America at a table nearby. He ordered Clyde to go over and arrest him, signaling two agents nearby to take the criminal away. After doing that, Clyde returned to table and resumed his meal.

The Mayflower was a particular favorite of J. Edgar. As the decades went by, J. Edgar and Clyde had spies staked out at the Mayflower. "They wanted to know every time a cockroach walked across the floor," said the manager. The most scandals at the hotel occurred in the late 1950s, when Senator John F. Kennedy rented a permanent suite there. Judy Garland remembered attending orgies at the hotel. And after JFK became president, his mistress, Judith Campbell Exner, was stashed here during secret sexual trysts when he couldn't bring her to the White House because Jackie was there.



Very few photographs remain among the hundreds that **J. Edgar** snapped of **Clyde Tolson**. Some agent from afar managed to snap this blurred photograph of J. Edgar taking a picture of Clyde at Miami Beach during one of their many vacations.

According to Guy Hotell, J. Edgar took pride in Clyde's body and often bragged about his friend's endowment. He was known to have taken many nudes of his friend, which may no longer exist.

Upon J. Edgar's death, Clyde was said to have destroyed this enormous cache of "forbidden photographs."

In 1999, Monica Lewinsky fought her way through throngs of the press to the presidential suite at the Mayflower to recount details of her affair (including that cigar!) to congressional impeachment managers. More recently, the then-governor of New York, Eliot Spitzer, was exposed as "Client 9" as revealed in a federal prostitution sting conducted at the Mayflower.

At night J. Edgar and Clyde dined at a restaurant called Harvey's, which charged them only \$2.50 for dinner. J. Edgar never paid, but got a "friend of the Bureau," to pick up the tab. Both Clyde and J. Edgar ordered the same items every night, green turtle soup followed by a thick medium-rare porterhouse steak. The meal was topped off by three big scoops of vanilla ice cream.

In the winter months an oyster-eating competition was held on Saturday night at the restaurant. J. Edgar always won. "Oysters make you virile," he claimed. He demanded that Clyde order them every time they appeared on the menu, whether his companion wanted them or not.

Wherever J. Edgar was, Clyde was also there. J. Edgar admitted that "he is my alter ego. He can even read my mind."

A senior agent at the Bureau, who would not allow the use of his name, said, "They fitted together like a hand in a glove. There was one big difference. Tolson was a lot smarter than Hoover. That boy from Missouri had a mind that was razor sharp. He could have been a big cheese all on his own had he not given up his life to slavishly follow Hoover's every whim. There

was no doubt as to who was the boss in the relationship. During the day, Hoover was a little Napoleon. But, from what I heard, once they went home, once those doors were locked, it was Hoover who was the slave, waiting on his top man. When they crawled into the sack, I had no doubt that it was Tolson who was on top of the pile.”

In his 1978 novel, *The Chancellor Manuscript*, a tale inspired by the duo directing the FBI, author Robert Ludlum assigned the name “Clyde” to the character based on Tolson and wrote that his “soft pampered face—struggling for masculinity—had for decades been the flower to the bristled cactus.”

Not only did J. Edgar and Clyde dine together, they went to nightclubs and parties. They even took their vacations together.

One Washington hostess, Marjorie Merriweather Post, said, “We learned never to invite Hoover without including Tolson. They were an item—called the happiest married couple in Washington society.”

J. Edgar and Clyde also developed a fondness for the race track. Saturday afternoons became their favorite time for the track. The director placed \$2 bets but that was just for show. He had his agents place his real bets at the hundred dollar window. When they vacationed in California, they headed for the Del Mar track at La Jolla. Each December they flew to Miami, for some winter sunshine, which J. Edgar preferred far more than Clyde. There they often lived in a private villa guarded by agents of the FBI. In Florida, they became especially fond of watching and betting on greyhound racing.

Back in Washington, officially, they maintained separate residences, although Clyde seemed to visit his quarters just for a change of clothing, having spent the night with his boss.

Much of what we know about the early relationship of J. Edgar and Clyde comes from Guy Hottel, a special agent in charge of the Washington, D.C. field office. For a while, Hottel shared a bachelor apartment with Clyde. “He was never at home,” Hottel later claimed. “He was out every night with Hoover. Sometimes he’d come back to the apartment at five o’clock in the morning to shave, shit, take a shower, and get dressed to meet Hoover in time for breakfast. It was obvious to me from the beginning they were having an affair. I couldn’t believe that a good-looking guy like Clyde would fall for a toad like Hoover. I think he was screwing our director only for career advancement.”

In spite of that early and negative assessment, Guy would later become a party in the intimate lives of J. Edgar and Clyde. In carrying out J. Edgar’s every wish, he, too, learned how to advance himself within the Bureau.

Their close relationship did not always escape press scrutiny. In an article in *Time*, a reporter stated, “Hoover is seldom seen without a male companion, most frequently solemn-faced Clyde Tolson.” When the story was published, that journalist found himself investigated.

Yet another journalist, Ray Tucker, hinted at J. Edgar’s homosexuality in an article for *Collier’s*. After its publication, Tucker was investigated by the FBI, and information about his private life was leaked to the media. Tucker was denounced as a “degenerate alcoholic.” That seemed to frighten other reporters from exploring the secret life of J. Edgar more thoroughly.

As a means of presenting a different image, Clyde contacted the editor of another national magazine, *Liberty*. Its reporter agreed to write that J. Edgar had “a compact body, with the shoulders of a light heavyweight boxer. He carries no ounce of extra weight—just 170 pounds of live, virile masculinity.”

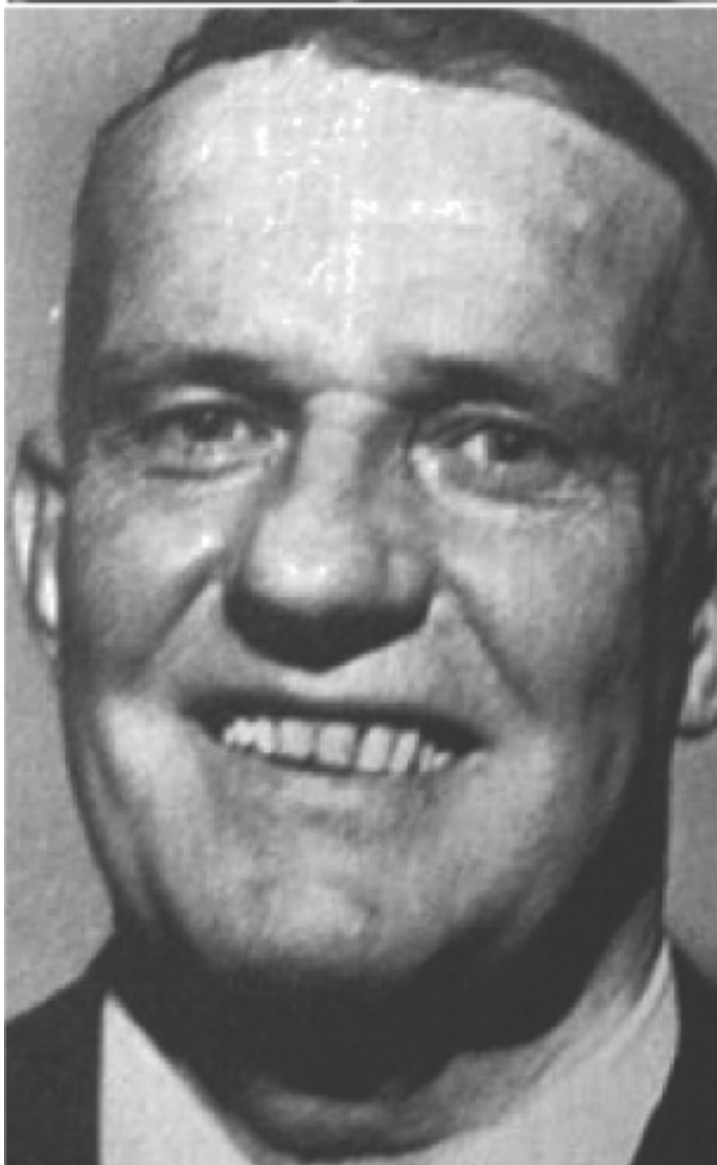
For his kind words, the editor of *Liberty* was awarded with some “scoops” from Clyde, increasing circulation of his magazine.

In Kansas City on business, Clyde and J. Edgar checked into the Muehlebach Hotel, occupying connecting suites paid for by the Bureau. The next morning, a room service waiter delivered breakfast to J. Edgar’s suite. It was Clyde who opened the door, rapidly covering his nude body with a *café au lait* colored terrycloth robe.

Later that day a reporter for *The Kansas City Star* dared asked J. Edgar if he were married. “His look was as mysterious as a Garbo smile,” the journalist wrote.

While on vacation, J. Edgar developed an obsession for taking pictures of Clyde, although most of these photographs were apparently destroyed. He snapped candid shots of his lover in a bathing suit by a swimming pool on Miami Beach, in his shirt tails and underwear getting dressed, having a cold rum drink on a tropical terrace, or sound asleep in bed. He even took a frontal nude of him in a courtyard, which he had blown up and placed at the head of his bed. At least that is what a maid reported when she pulled back a curtain that concealed the photograph during the day.

One of the Bureau’s lab technicians said that he once developed a roll of Kodak film that was a series of pictures of a large and erect male penis. J. Edgar told him it was part of an investigation he was conducting about sending pornography through the mails. “I knew better,” the technician later revealed. “I would bet my life that those were pictures taken by J. Edgar of Tolson with a hard-on.”



In the rare, out-of-focus photo above, **J. Edgar** (*right*) is seen having a gay old time with FBI agent **Guy Hotell**. Technically, he was Clyde Tolson's roommate in an apartment that Clyde maintained for appearance's sake.

Guy was only “gay for profit,” as he liked to chase after young women when not otherwise occupied by J. Edgar and Clyde, who insisted that he vacation with them.

The taking of these pornographic pictures would in time become a lifelong obsession of J. Edgar’s. He acquired a vast collection of pornography, but he didn’t want pictures of “unknowns.” He preferred secret pictures taken of some of the most famous men and women in America, ranging over the years from John F. Kennedy to Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe.

“Kid Napoleon,” as J. Edgar was called, launched a crusade against pornography, a campaign that was secretly directed by Clyde. Clyde began to accumulate a repository of so-called obscene materials, including stag movies, candid photographs snapped of couples engaged in sex when doors were kicked in, books, pamphlets, freehand drawings, and even comic strips and “dirty” playing cards.

At night, J. Edgar and Clyde brought this porno to the director’s home where they viewed it for their own amusement. While ranting against it, they became life-long devotees of pornography.

Working as a team, both Clyde and J. Edgar celebrated a victory on November 6, 1928. A Republican, Herbert Clark Hoover, had just been elected president, defeating Alfred E. Smith, a Democrat and a Catholic. J. Edgar told Clyde that “I now have an entrée into the Oval Office.” Rightly or wrongly, he credited the newly elected president with his appointment as head of the Bureau of Investigation.

Hoover named William D. Mitchell as attorney general. A Protestant, he was a “dry,” meaning he wanted to continue Prohibition across America. He would be J. Edgar’s new boss.

Although officially he spoke out against alcohol, J. Edgar had become a secret drinker. Most evenings, at Harvey’s Restaurant, he would order six or even eight bourbons before dinner. Clyde concealed the drinks for him under a big linen napkin. A son of the manager later said, “From where I stood, I’d call Hoover an alcoholic.”

On his first meeting with J. Edgar, the newly appointed Attorney General Mitchell told him that, “If you stay with us for another thirty years under different attorney generals, follow this advice: Wiretapping will be the key to your future success.”

Four years before, in 1924, then Attorney General Harlan Fiske Stone had banned wiretapping. At the time, J. Edgar had echoed his ruling, referring to the practice as “dirty, invasive, and unethical.” Subsequently, he assured Roger Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union that “the practice is now history.”

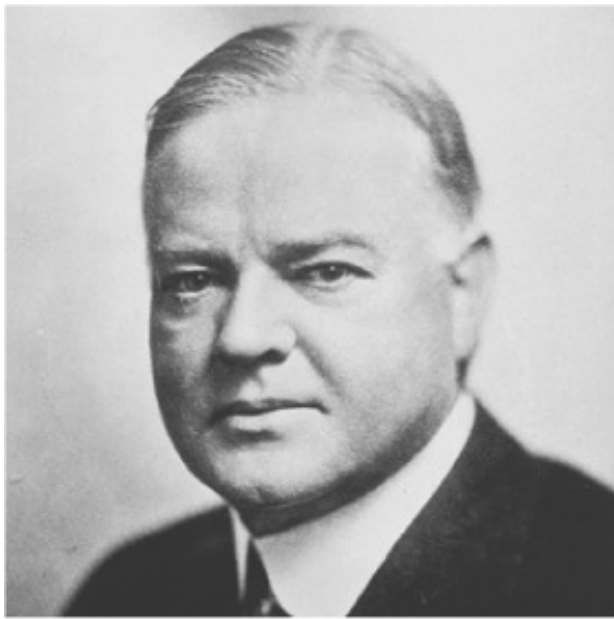
Under Mitchell, however, he secretly ordered his agents to begin tapping phones. In the beginning, J. Edgar and Clyde confined tapping mainly to kidnapping and white-slave investigations. But as the years went by, J. Edgar ordered tapping of everybody from Eleanor Roosevelt to Howard Hughes to Barbara Hutton.

Privately, J. Edgar told Clyde that President Hoover viewed them favorably, at least for the moment, but depending on circumstances, Hoover could change his opinion of them tomorrow and dismiss them. “Everybody’s got skeletons hidden in their closet,” J. Edgar said. “Let’s find out the dirt on him. That way, if he tries to fire us, we’ll blackmail him. Call it job security, my good man.”

Beginning that afternoon, and for all the years to come, Clyde, although a usually modest man, would later admit, “I’m the best Sherlock Holmes in America for digging up dirt. I don’t care who they are or how saintly, there’s something nasty that can be found out about anybody.”

Future presidents would provide J. Edgar and Clyde with far more damaging evidence than any scandal that they dug up on President Hoover.

In his book, *Sex Lives of the U.S. Presidents*, Nigel Cawthorne wrote: “Sadly, Herbert Hoover’s life was nowhere near as bizarre as his namesake and contemporary, J. Edgar Hoover’s was. There is no evidence that Herbert Hoover pored over pornography, liked dressing up in women’s clothing, gave oral sex to his deputy, or liked being masturbated by a young boy wearing rubber gloves while another leather-clad youth read passages from the Bible.”



The first U.S. president from west of the Mississippi, Iowa-born **Herbert Hoover** was in office from March 1929 until 1933. He presided over the Wall Street crash and the coming of the Great Depression, which he did absolutely nothing to alleviate.

In spite of her dour, Victorian-era appearance, his wife, globe-trotting **Lou Henry Hoover**, had transported supplies to the front lines via bicycle during mainland China's Boxer Rebellion in 1900.

While First Lady, she broke the color barrier in the White House and invited a black woman, Mrs. De-Priest, wife of Illinois Republican Oscar DePriest, for tea. *Tout* Washington was shocked.

After a tedious investigation, Clyde could turn up no extramarital affairs of the president. The only known affair he'd had before marriage was when he worked in Australia for a British company backing a gold mining operation. There, the young Herbert Hoover had fallen madly in love with a barmaid in Kalgoorlie. Apparently, they had a torrid affair. He wrote her a love poem which was later published in *Those Were the Days* by Arthur Reid in Perth in 1933.

While the starlight-spangled heavens rolled around us when we stood, And a tide of bliss kept surging through the currents of our blood, And I spent my soul in kisses, crushed upon your scarlet mouth, Oh! My red-lipped, sunbrowned, sweetheart, dark-eyed daughter of the south.

Back in California, the future U.S. president married Lou Henry, his Stanford sweetheart, with whom he had two sons. All that could be discovered was that Mr. and Mrs. Hoover ate seven-course lunches and dinners in formal attire while millions of the unemployed stood in long lines forming at soup kitchens.

Hoover did not want to encounter White House servants, and three rings of a bell announced his approach. Staff members

were to duck into the nearest closet or hide behind a corner until he passed out of sight. The same policy held true for groundskeepers who had to conceal themselves behind the shrubbery until “The Great Engineer,” as he was called, passed by.

When the Stock Market crashed on October 29, 1929, eight months after Hoover’s ascension to the presidency, both Clyde and J. Edgar knew that Hoover would be a one-term president.

The question that plagued J. Edgar and Clyde was this: Would the newly elected “post-Crash” president, scheduled for inauguration in 1933 and almost certain to be a Democrat, want a clean sweep? Would he fire all of President Hoover’s “boys”, especially J. Edgar himself?

Even though Clyde and J. Edgar drank heavily, they both agreed that Prohibition had been a national disaster, turning thousands of citizens into lawbreakers and giving rise to gangs of bootleggers who made billions off illegal booze, and its spin-offs, such as protection rackets, prostitution, and pay-offs to the police.

The enforcement of Prohibition remained the responsibility of the meager corps of only 4,000 agents assigned to the Treasury Department. Gangs, especially in New York and Chicago, battled each other over liquor sales and rackets, much as drug cartels operate in the 21st century. The Treasury Department’s agents were unarmed, and they were unable to make an arrest.

With the permission and approval of Attorney General Harlan F. Stone, J. Edgar and his investigators uncovered links between police departments and bootleggers which led to arrests, indictments and convictions.

Sitting alone in his study at night, J. Edgar dreamed of “the big case” that would put him on every front page in America. As if to answer his prayer, his telephone rang at eleven o’clock on the night of March 1, 1932. Charles and Anne Morrow Lindbergh had reported that their twenty-month-old son, Charles Augustus Lindbergh Jr., was missing from their home at Hopewell, New Jersey.

Overnight, the story became front-page news across America and the number one subject on everybody’s lips. After all, at the time, Charles A. Lindbergh was a genuine American hero in the wake of his solo flight from New York’s Long Island to Le Bourget in Paris on May 20-21, 1927.

H.L. Mencken called the saga of the Lindbergh baby kidnapping “the greatest story since the resurrection.” The writer was right in his assessment. The kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby became known as “The Crime on the Century.”

J. Edgar was bitterly disappointed that kidnapping had not been made a federal offense. All he could do was sit around and be handed bulletins, even though he wanted to direct the case himself. Arriving the next day at headquarters, J. Edgar learned that the famed aviator and his wife had received a ransom note, calling for \$50,000 in small denominations. Operating outside his authority, J. Edgar set up an unofficial “Lindbergh Baby Squad” to assist in the investigation.

This angered the agents of the Treasury Department and local law enforcement officers in New Jersey. Each agency was vying for the publicity that solving the case might generate. “If I can solve this case and find the kidnapper, I can become a household word,” J. Edgar told his agents. He asked Clyde to coordinate the Bureau’s investigation. “You’re the only man I can really trust to get the job done.”

J. Edgar ran into conflict with Col. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, who was the head of the police department for the state of New Jersey. He refused J. Edgar’s offer of assistance, which caused the Bureau chief to remark, “His only experience in solving a crime was as a floor walker at Bamberger’s Department Store.”

The colonel’s son, General Norman Schwarzkopf, was the supreme commander of Desert Storm during the Persian Gulf War.

Without an invitation, J. Edgar visited the Lindbergh estate, where Charles Lindbergh himself, in a perhaps futile attempt to recover some of his family’s privacy, refused him admission. The famed aviator later referred to J. Edgar “a fussy, nosey little man.”

J. Edgar demanded that his agents find the missing baby and return him unharmed to his parents. Every day he mentioned to Clyde and some of his top staff members the publicity that a resolution of the case would generate. “Everyone in America is talking about nothing else,” he said. His jealous law enforcement rivals called J. Edgar and his agents “federal glory hunters.”

About ten weeks after the child’s abduction, on May 12, 1931, the body of the little boy was found in a shallow grave less than five miles from the Lindbergh home. J. Edgar sent a personal plea to President Hoover to put the Bureau of Investigation in charge. Hoover didn’t specifically grant that request, demanding instead that all federal law enforcement agencies get involved.



In spite of accusations about pro-Nazi leanings in the late 1930s, **Charles A. Lindbergh** (*photo above*) was a genuine American hero after flying his *Spirit of St. Louis* nonstop to Paris in 1927.

The kidnapping of his baby, Charles A. Lindbergh Jr., in 1932 generated almost as much publicity. J. Edgar longed to handle the case personally, though much of it fell under the authority of New Jersey law enforcement officials.

“I do not like being in a subordinate role,” J. Edgar told Clyde and his agents. “I should run the show.”

But President Hoover, bowing to public pressure, finally designated J. Edgar as coordinator of federal assistance, hoping that a collaboration of various agencies could solve the case. At long last J. Edgar was assigned to lead a Federal network of law enforcement agencies, including the Secret Service. However, there was still no Federal kidnapping law, and as such, J. Edgar had only limited authority.

He seized the initiative and began to issue press releases about the hunt for the kidnapper. Soon the American public came to believe that he was personally in charge.

The public became disillusioned at the failure to bring the kidnapper to justice. But along the way there were some bright notes for J. Edgar. Such papers as *The Philadelphia Record* advocated a central agency to oversee America’s battle against organized crime. Several papers thought J. Edgar would be the ideal choice to head such an agency.

Even though under attack for the tragic outcome of the Lindbergh kidnapping, he was sometimes given undue credit. Such was the case when he was praised for sending America’s number one gangster, Al Capone, to prison for income tax evasion. The credit really belonged to the Internal Revenue Service.

In the somber and politically galvanized aftermath of the Lindbergh kidnapping, the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Investigation was re-defined and expanded by a law passed by Congress on June 22, 1932. Known as the Lindbergh Law, it cited kidnapping as a federal offense and gave the Bureau jurisdiction if a kidnap victim was transported across state lines. Of course, that eliminated the Lindbergh case, whose kidnapping and murder had occurred entirely within the borders of New Jersey.

“If it is the last thing I ever do, I am going to see that the man who kidnapped the Lindbergh baby will die in the electric chair,” J. Edgar vowed.

To his ultimate dismay, the case would drag on in the courts for another two and a half long years.

For J. Edgar and Clyde, life was not always about work. They had to have some amusement other than sexual release with each other.

As the 1930s dawned, they started going to the movies a lot, their favorite films being the 1930 *Little Caesar* starring

Edward G. Robinson or the 1931 *The Public Enemy* with James Cagney. They also attended the original prison drama, *The Big House* (1930) with Chester Morris, and *20,000 Years in Sing Sing* (1932) with Spencer Tracy and Bette Davis.



Charles A. Lindbergh is pictured in the top photo with his famous wife, **Anne Morrow Lindbergh**. The picture of their kidnapped baby was plastered with a **WANTED** poster all over America.

Using the kidnapping as an excuse, J. Edgar lobbied to get Congress to pass the Lindbergh Law, making it a federal crime to kidnap a person within the borders of the United States.

After watching their favorite gangster movies, Clyde and J. Edgar would eagerly look forward to reading the morning comics. In 1931 Chester Gould had introduced his new comic strip detective, Dick Tracy. With the enthusiasm of little boys,

the men followed Dick Tracy's daily adventure before reading the news of the day.

Back at his office every morning, often after a night at the movies, J. Edgar was always anxious to read his morning mail.

He received correspondence from such groups as the American Legion, calling for floggings for most crimes and, in one case, a demand that a criminal arrested a second time be publicly hanged as a deterrent for anyone contemplating a life of crime. Although he didn't say so in public, J. Edgar privately believed that the death penalty should be strenuously and frequently mandated and inflicted by the courts.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, prior to the imposition of later, more liberal policies of Franklin Roosevelt, crime was interpreted as a symptom of national decay, and calls were strident and frequent for the establishment of a powerful Federal agency to coordinate national anti-crime efforts.

The official designation of what constituted a Federal crime began to change in the 1930s, as J. Edgar's Bureau assumed increased power. When he had any time, he studied Federal laws, going over the legal codes with his experts to see if his Bureau could extend its power. He began to view his lowly Bureau as an agency that one day would assume the power of a national police force, even extending its tentacles around the globe.

The Mann Act, passed by Congress in 1910, particularly intrigued him. It made it a Federal crime for unmarried couples to travel across a state line to have sex in a hotel or even in a private residence.

J. Edgar sat back in his chair and informed Clyde and the Bureau's legal experts of his opinion. "If I read this act correctly, and I am certain that I do, this empowers us to investigate any man or woman in the United States, from the President of the United States himself to the lowliest B-picture movie star—and, of course, any person I consider a dangerous American, and, as you know, there are plenty of those who must be caught in the act."

But night after night, J. Edgar feared his dream of a powerful national police force might never be realized. Then, on November 8, 1932, he lost the support of his namesake, Herbert Hoover, when a liberal Democrat, Franklin D. Roosevelt, was swept into the Oval Office by a landslide. In the middle of a worldwide Depression, the former New York governor offered hope to the downtrodden and the unemployed, whose ranks comprised 25 percent of the work force.

Whether it was true or not, word quickly reached J. Edgar that FDR had said, "My first official duty will be to remove J. Edgar Hoover as the chief of the Bureau of Investigation."

As J. Edgar told Clyde and his chief aides, "Fortunately, ever since the Wall Street crash of 1929, I knew that Hoover would be swept out of office. We've been looking into the private lives of Mr. Roosevelt and his ugly wife, Eleanor. We have turned up scandals that could destroy his presidency even before it gets off the ground. I understand he's a reasonable man and will listen to me."

"Are you suggesting blackmail, Mr. Hoover?" one of his lawyers asked.

"That is such a dirty word!" J. Edgar said. "Our work here is vital. We must be allowed to carry on with it. If we have to use intimidation, then so be it."

Unknown to the Bureau at large, Clyde and three agents had for months conducted secret investigations into the private lives of the Roosevelts.

"They both have mistresses," Clyde told J. Edgar, revealing the contents of the various reports.

"You mean Franklin has a mistress and Eleanor has a lover on the side."

"That is true, but she also has a mistress," Clyde revealed. "The bitch is a switch hitter."



For entertainment, J. Edgar and Clyde went to gangster movies. Along with much of America, the two G-Men were thrilled as **Edward G. Robinson** (*top photo*) played Little Rico in the fast-paced Mervyn LeRoy production of *Little Caesar* (1930).

Their second-favorite movie was *The Public Enemy* (1931). This story of a Prohibition gangster's rise and fall put Cagney on the map—that and the scene where he smashes a grapefruit into **Mae Clarke's** face.

CHAPTER THREE

Even before meeting FDR at the White House, J. Edgar had concluded that the president's marriage was not patterned in a traditional "American family values" style, but a working political relationship instead.

From 1920 on, Eleanor in private preferred the company of lesbians, allowing FDR to conduct his own private sexual trysts, or so J. Edgar concluded.

No one will ever know exactly what took place in the Oval Office between FDR and J. Edgar. The Bureau director not only kept his job that day, but by the mid-1930s had nearly all effective restraints on his surveillance powers removed.

"J. Edgar Hoover, in essence, became the head of the American Gestapo," Harry S Truman later said. "Franklin told me personally that Hoover had accumulated massive evidence on not only his private life but on Eleanor's. Hoover continued to spy on Franklin until his death in 1945 and on Eleanor until her death in 1962. They had a lot of skeletons rattling in their closets."

FDR, the suave, martini-drinking American aristocrat, was like no person J. Edgar had met before. Although confined to a wheelchair, he had a commanding presence. J. Edgar had learned that even at Harvard he was known as a ladies' man, and loved to flirt outrageously with pretty women, although he knew he should marry a relatively straight-laced one if he wanted to pursue political power.

Thanks to Clyde, J. Edgar had all his facts straight concerning details of the private life of the Roosevelts, who were on the dawn of becoming "the power couple" of the 20th Century.

In 1905, FDR married his fifth cousin, "the ugly duckling," Eleanor, whose uncle was former U.S. president Theodore Roosevelt. "It's a good thing to keep the name in the family," Theodore said. From the beginning, the marriage was anything but idyllic, although it produced four sons and one daughter, Anna. The boys included Elliott, James, John, and Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr. Franklin Jr. was the second son to carry that name, as the first-named baby had died. Even from the marriage's debut, the handsome and dashing young FDR was a notorious rake.

In 1918, Eleanor discovered a pack of love letters exchanged between her husband and her social secretary, Lucy Mercer (later Rutherford). She threatened her young husband with divorce unless he ended his relationship with Lucy. To save both the marriage and his political career, he promised that he would. But he lied.

From that day forth, Eleanor cut off all intimate contact with her husband, who turned elsewhere for his sexual pleasures.

In 1921, Franklin was stricken with polio, which led to the loss of his use of his legs and his confinement for the rest of his life to a wheelchair. Amazingly, that fact remained unknown to most of the American public at the time. Nevertheless as *The New York Times* put it, "In plain English, he could still sustain an erection."

With his libido intact, FDR took a second mistress, Marguerite (Missy) LeHand, the daughter of an alcoholic Irish Catholic gardener. She was described as having "lips parted in that strange secret smile composed of cunning influence, forever baffling."

When Missy came to work for FDR as a secretary, he was smitten. He began an affair with her that would last until her death in 1944 of a cerebral embolism.

For reasons of her own, Eleanor wasn't as upset over her husband's affair with Missy as she had been with Lucy. "After all, the pot can't call the kettle black," said Sir Winston Churchill, the seventh-cousin-once-removed of FDR.



Franklin D. Roosevelt (left photo) was America's only President elected four times. After being crippled from polio, he told his imperious mother, Sara Delano Roosevelt, "I have not been put out of commission on all fronts, and I'm still a man where it counts."

Throughout his life, he had a number of affairs, but his two alltime favorite mistresses were **Lucy Mercy Rutherford** (*center photo*) and **Marguerite LeHand** (*right photo*), whom he affectionately called “Missy.” Privately, reporters referred to her as “the Second Lady of the White House” or “the Second First Lady.”

Eleanor, meanwhile, had been having affairs of her own. In 1928, this prim and proper Victorian woman threw off the shackles of her own strict upbringing and launched two simultaneous affairs—one with a woman, another with a man.

In his official role as governor of New York, FDR assigned a handsome, virile, New York State trooper, Earl Miller, as his wife’s bodyguard. A bodybuilder and notorious womanizer, Earl launched an affair with Eleanor. She was 45, Earl was 32. Her many lesbian friends were disturbed by this new liaison, and utterly horrified by the way Miller “manhandled” her in public.

Eleanor and Earl even made what was jokingly referred to years later as a “softcore porn film” entitled *The Kidnapping of the First Lady*. For years, the film was believed to have been destroyed, but acclaimed historian, Joseph E. Persico, found clips from it and published them in his book *Franklin and Lucy: President Roosevelt, Mrs. Rutherford, and Other Remarkable Women in His Life*. In the home movie, Earl, in a tight-fitting bathing suit, plays a bearded pirate with a bandanna. He abducts Eleanor, and hauls her away with him “for immoral purposes.”



Three views of **Eleanor Roosevelt**, arguably the most famous and influential woman of the 20th Century. **Lorena Hickok** (*left photo*) gazes affectionately at her lover, Eleanor, who’s wearing a fox stole and beaming at one of Hickok’s satirical jokes. “Hick,” as Eleanor called her, told her lesbian friends, “I like poker, bootleg bourbon, Cuban cigars, bawdy jokes...and Eleanor Roosevelt.”

Eleanor (*center photo*) poses in the most elegant gown and fur she’d ever been seen in. “When my old friend, Bernard Baruch, saw me dressed like this, he proposed that I divorce Franklin and marry him,” she said.

In one of her more typical dowdy dresses, **Eleanor** (*right photo*) poses with her handsome lover, New York State Trooper **Earl Miller**, who was known as a ladies’ man and famed for his athletic prowess as a horseback rider, champion swimmer, and in the boudoir of the First Lady.

After her husband had been in office for two years, Eleanor called J. Edgar and told him she was sending over copies of eight separate death threats she’d received in the mail. “I think you, as head of the FBI, should have your agents evaluate them to see if they are serious.”

He agreed to do that, although privately he said, “I wish she were dead.”

Before she rang off that day, he suggested seriously that she could carry a loaded pistol with her at all times. “I don’t know how to shoot, Mr. Hoover,” she protested.

“Then get someone to teach you.”

Bravely she made an attempt to become a markswoman. When she vacationed at Chazy Lake, New York, with her State trooper lover Earl Miller, in August of 1934, he tried to teach her how to fire a gun. She never could hit her target and told Miller, “Annie Oakley, I’m not.”



In this still shot (*left photo*) from a home movie, at a vacation retreat beside a lake in New York State, **Eleanor Roosevelt**, the First Lady, was “kidnapped,” “manhandled,” and “bound and gagged” by her lover. Earl Miller, the New York State trooper assigned to her as a bodyguard, disguised himself as a pirate wearing a bathing suit, bandanna, and false beard. He entitled their soft-core porn movie “The Lady and the Pirate.” He was filmed carrying her off into the woods for immoral purposes.

(*center photo*) **Eleanor** posed for this kind and endearing photo, which was the alltime favorite of her female lover, the White House correspondent **Lorena Hickok** (*right photo*), the First Lady’s beloved “Hick.” Lovingly inscribed, Eleanor’s photo was found on the night stand beside Hickok’s death bed.

Nonetheless, he urged her to carry around the pistol to protect herself. She obeyed him, and put the gun, unloaded, in the glove compartment of her car.

An equal opportunity seducer, Eleanor also took up with Lorena Hickok, a notorious, cigar-smoking lesbian, who stood five feet eight inches tall, and weighed more than 200 pounds. A journalist who was assigned to cover the Roosevelts for the Associated Press, Lorena drank a quart of bourbon a day and referred to herself as “one of the boys. I dress like a man, talk like a man, and curse better than any sailor,” she said.

Eleanor fell under her spell, launching an affair that would last from 1928 to 1940, when Lorena dumped the First Lady for a female tax court judge.

By the time J. Edgar made his first visit to the White House under the Roosevelt administration, Eleanor had already moved Lorena into the bedroom opposite hers.

Returning that day to his office at the Bureau, J. Edgar found Clyde eagerly waiting for a report on the meeting in the Oval Office. “We’ve got that crippled whoremonger in the bag for the rest of his administration, which I predict will be a short one,” J. Edgar said. “As for the lezzie, we’ll keep Old Horse Face silenced as well.”

Privately in the months ahead, when any of his agents asked why he never married, J. Edgar said, “One of the reasons is that God made a woman like Hoot Owl.”

“Who is Hoot Owl?” an agent might ask.

“Eleanor Roosevelt, the First Lady of the land. But she’s hardly what I would call a lady.”

In spite of his personal attacks on Eleanor, when the First Lady arrived for a tour of Bureau headquarters, he and Clyde were most gracious in escorting her around. When he met famous people whom he had extensive documentation on, he seemed more charming to them than those he did not. Perhaps in some way, he was more comfortable around those whose private lives he had already thoroughly documented, knowing that they would be of no harm to him because of the blackmail evidence he had accumulated on their private lives.

On October 19, 1933, frustrated over the failure of local law enforcement officials, Roosevelt issued a presidential directive putting J. Edgar in charge of the federal aspects of the Lindbergh baby’s kidnapping case. Even so, a year went by with no major breaks.

Actually, it was an alert gas station attendant who broke the case on September 15, 1934. A motorist bought five gallons of gas from a station in Upper Manhattan, using a \$10 gold certificate. He wrote down the driver’s license number. The bill’s number turned out to be part of the ransom money, and the license was traced to Bruno Richard Hauptmann, an unemployed carpenter living in the Bronx.

After a trial defined by some as “a mockery,” Hauptmann was convicted of the murder of the Lindbergh baby and was electrocuted on April 3, 1936. Privately J. Edgar admitted to his agents that he was “skeptical as to some of the evidence.”

In the years to come, he took credit for the FBI’s breaking of the case, but the role the Bureau played was only minor. New

York law enforcement officials and agents of the Treasury Department played a much larger but unheralded role. Treasury agent Thomas H. Sisk later said, “How typical: we do the work to break the case and Hoover takes the god damn credit, as always.”

To further boost J. Edgar’s power, FDR in 1933 announced that the Prohibition Bureau, the Bureau of Investigation, and the Bureau of Identification would become part of a new Division of Investigation, with J. Edgar as its director. Prohibition was gradually being phased out.

J. Edgar had frequently expressed utter contempt for the Prohibition Bureau, referring to its agents as “a pack of thieves, the most corrupt branch of the American government in history. They’ve got a thousand agents working for them—working did I say? They are worthless trash, all of the crooks on the take. They’re getting fat and bloated from illegal graft from the hooch business.”



An unemployed carpenter, **Bruno Richard Hauptmann** became the most hated man in America when he was arrested for the kidnapping and murder of Charles A. Lindbergh Jr., the baby of the fabled aviator.

When he was informed of Haupt-mann’s arrest, J. Edgar, with Clyde, took the next train from Washington to New York. The director attended the police lineup where Hauptmann was identified by a (dubious) witness to the kidnapping as the perpetrator of the crime.

The other men selected for the lineup included a dozen New York detectives.

Leon Turrow, part of the investigative team that choreographed the arrest, later said, “It was no contest. The detectives were strapping six-footers who looked like college football captains. Haupt-mann looked like a midget who’d roamed the halls of a Turkish bath for two sleepless days and nights.”

J. Edgar did not want to run the Prohibition Bureau as it was phased out. He went to his new boss, Homer S. Cummings, who had been appointed the U.S. Attorney General by FDR. He pleaded with Cummings not to integrate his Bureau “with those Prohibition boys, who are corrupt down to their little toenails.” He also claimed that with the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment, the Prohibition Bureau would recede in size and diminish in importance. Unlike some attorney generals J. Edgar would face in life, Cummings lent him a sympathetic ear. Roosevelt’s executive order ended up in the dead letter office.

In 1934, a year that generated many headlines, J. Edgar and Clyde embarked on the greatest crime-fighting spree of their careers.

The early 1930s had been an era of gangsters centered around New York and Chicago. Dons wore spats like George Raft in the Marilyn Monroe film *Some Like It Hot*. Submachine guns sold briskly. From illegal activities, money poured into their coffers.

In contrast to the lifestyle of these gangsters, hoboes rode in boxcars from town to town, and the unemployed stood in breadlines across the nation. FDR was offering hope at last to the disenfranchised with his New Deal.

J. Edgar had a new reason to live, the subduing of gangsterism in America. He personally vowed to take on Public Enemies Number One as they fled from state to state. That fact of flight made it difficult for local authorities who could not cross state lines in pursuit of criminals. J. Edgar's boys were relentless in pursuit of their enemies, with John Dillinger topping their wanted lists, followed by Baby Face Nelson and Pretty Boy Floyd.

He instructed Clyde, "Tell our men not to let anything stand in their way. To track down these thugs, we may have to become the most ruthless branch of the government. Do you think that Hitler fanatic over in Berlin would allow gangsters to run his country?"

J. Edgar would later say, "There are those who say I flaunt the law, but the results I have achieved in apprehending the foremost criminals of our day should make me immune from such attacks—probably communist-inspired."

Congress had banned wiretapping in 1934, but J. Edgar ignored the mandate. "Why should the Bureau get rid of one of our most effective weapons in fighting crime?" he asked. "Just because some idiots on the Hill say so? What do they know? I'll fight crime in any way I god damn please without interference from these jerks."

In 1933 and 1934, J. Edgar's agents rounded up some of the most legendary gangsters in America, and the term "G-Men" (Government Men) became a household word. All of these arrests were high profile cases that virtually put the newly named Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) on the map in 1935. And although J. Edgar was basking in glory, he didn't like to share the publicity with his agents. He and he alone wanted all the acclaim.

The first legendary gangster J. Edgar's agents nabbed was George Kelly Barnes, nicknamed "Machine Gun Kelly" because his favorite weapon was a Thompson submachine gun. One of the most notorious criminals during Prohibition days, he committed his most infamous crime in July of 1933, the kidnapping of oil tycoon Charles Urschel. He and his gang were paid a \$200,000 ransom, the highest ever in the history of the United States. Kelly's gang was pursued across six states, and he even sent J. Edgar letters taunting him as a "sissy."

Somehow, Machine Gun Kelly obtained the phone number of J. Edgar's mother and made threatening calls to her.

In 1928 he had teamed up with the equally corrupt Katherine Thorne, who wore a hideous red wig to cover up bald spots on her head. Machine Gun Kelly and Katherine, evocative of Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow, robbed small banks.

After Urschel's kidnapping, agents traced his hideout to a modest home in Memphis. They raided the house on September 26, 1933. Caught without a weapon, Machine Gun yelled, "Don't shoot, G-Men, don't shoot, G-Men." He not only surrendered to agents of the Bureau, but created a new term for them. For years to come, G-Men or government men became synonymous with FBI agents.



One of the most infamous of the Prohibition-era criminals was Tennessee-born **George Kelly Barnes**, nicknamed “**Machine Gun Kelly**” because that was his favorite weapon. A psychotic, he was known for armed robbery and kidnapping, demanding ransoms whose size was awesome for that time. Caught without a weapon near Memphis, he shouted, “Don’t shoot, G-Men! Don’t shoot, G-Men!” The legend of the G-Man was born.

In the lower photo, he’s seen, handcuffed, the second figure from the left, being escorted by a phalanx of guntoting G-Men.

At age 59, in 1954, he died in Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary, Kansas.

Katherine was also arrested in the raid, which led to J. Edgar adopting a bizarre theory that “the most vicious criminal, even more so than a man, is a female with red hair. If she doesn’t have red hair, she will wear a red wig.”

In October of 1933, Machine Gun and Katherine were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment. And although Machine Gun died in prison in 1954, she was released in 1958 from a prison in Cincinnati.

This was the first major case solved by J. Edgar and his G-Men, and it was the first crime in which the defendants were transported by airplane. Machine Gun has entered popular culture, and has been idolized in song and film. Charles Bronson starred in the 1958 film *Machine Gun Kelly* and countless songs have immortalized the gangster, including a 1984 single “Machine Gun Kelly,” released by the punk band Angelic Upstarts. Along with Pretty Boy Floyd and Baby Face Nelson, Machine Gun Kelly is one of the main characters in the comic book series “Pretty, Baby, Machine.”



Three views of **Melvin Purvis** (on the left, walking with **J. Edgar** himself); on the phone (*center*), and posing (*right photo*) as a dapper and somewhat campy dresser.

During the heady era of spats and speakeasies, pint-sized “Little Mel” became the most famous G-Man of his day, taking out John Dillinger and Pretty Boy Floyd. By the end of 1934, he was the most famous symbol of the law in America. But his triumphs sowed the seeds of his eventual downfall.

If Clyde had a rival for J. Edgar’s affection, it was Melvin Horace Purvis Jr., the son of a tobacco farmer from South Carolina, who had joined the Bureau of Investigation in 1927. He had headed division headquarters in such cities as Birmingham and Cincinnati.

Melvin stood five feet, nine inches and weighed only 140 pounds. The newspapers began to call him “Little Mel.” Although he was a crack shot, he did not look forward to gun battles. This courtly Southern gentleman with impeccable manners had been trained as a lawyer, and was addicted to the ballet, theater, and opera.

In 1932, J. Edgar appointed Melvin head of the Chicago office of the Bureau. That city became Ground Zero in the Bureau’s war on crime. Chicago was the headline-making assignment of the decade.

Clyde destroyed much of J. Edgar’s personal mail upon his death. But an amazing 500 letters exchanged between Melvin and J. Edgar between 1927 and 1936 have survived.

J. Edgar affectionately addressed him as “Dear Mel,” with Melvin responding “Dear Jayee.” J. Edgar noted how women were very attracted to the handsome Southern gentleman. In one conversation, J. Edgar jokingly told him, “You’re just a short guy but you must carry a heavy gun. I suspect Little Mel actually should be named Big Mel.”

“You’ve got that right, Chief.”

As time went on, J. Edgar’s letters to Melvin became more intimate. “I just saw *It Happened One Night*,” he wrote. “All the gals are crazy about this new sensation, Clark Gable. The Bureau has its own Clark Gable, and he’s a slender, blond-haired, brown-eyed gentleman named Melvin Purvis.” Letters such as this have come to be viewed as J. Edgar’s homosexual wooing of Melvin, who, so far as it is known, was heterosexual.

One Hoover historian claimed that the letters clearly reveal that J. Edgar was sexually attracted to Melvin. In letter after letter, J. Edgar pays homage to Melvin’s looks. In the words of his son, Alston Purvis, “Hoover saw in my father the style and charm he lacked himself, and perceived a romantic, idealized extension of himself.”

Melvin’s secretary, Doris Rogers, claimed, “It is not surprising that someone would have a crush on my boss. Many of us had crushes on Mel.”

Occasionally J. Edgar would send the object of his affection expensive gifts. He never paid for these. The gifts actually came from loot which agents had uncovered during raids on gangster hideouts. One morning when Melvin told J. Edgar he had a sore throat, the chief ordered an agent to deliver a Bel Air Smoke Consumer to his home to aid in his recovery.

There is ample evidence that J. Edgar wanted to carry this relationship much farther than Melvin was willing to go. Clyde, of course, became aware of the excessive attention J. Edgar was paying to Melvin, and he came to resent the agent. There were screaming feuds inspired by jealousy at J. Edgar’s home, but never at the office, where Clyde always treated his boss with the greatest of respect.

During a twenty-month span from 1933 to 1934, J. Edgar and Melvin joined forces to round up public enemies. Today, their names are entered as one of history’s greatest crime-fighting teams.

In 1934 Melvin captured more public enemies than any other agent in FBI history, a record that still stands. He led the manhunts that tracked down such outlaws as Baby Face Nelson and Pretty Boy Floyd. But the shooting death of John Dillinger was the one that garnered the most headlines. Unfortunately Melvin didn’t seem to realize at first that all these high-profile slayings, and all the subsequent publicity for him, would incur the jealous wrath of J. Edgar.

In the Depression-soaked 1930s, criminals robbed almost at will. For thirteen violent months, John Dillinger and his gang swept through the Middle West robbing banks such as the Central National Bank in Green-castle, Indiana, for \$74,000; the Securities National Bank in Sioux Falls, South Dakota for \$49,500; or the First National Bank in Mason City, Iowa, for \$52,000.

These daring robberies thrilled a despondent country, who read of Dillinger’s exploits. He even developed a fan base, some of the most ardent followers of his exploits viewing him as a modern-day American Robin Hood, since he stole only from banks, which were confiscating homes and farms throughout the country when owners could no longer pay their mortgages.

J. Edgar called Dillinger “a beer-drinking plug ugly.” He knew that capturing or killing Dillinger would be the greatest case in FBI history. No criminal since Jesse James had received more newsprint than Dillinger. The manhunt for the thirty-one year-old bandit was on. J. Edgar beefed up propaganda for his Bureau, claiming “the underworld has more armed men than the combined army and navy.”

Even though an order of “shoot to kill” was issued, Dillinger continued to evade capture. Such was the case on March 31, 1934, when two of J. Edgar’s men had him trapped in St. Paul, Minnesota. He managed to escape through a rear door, but suffered a gun wound in the leg. Trapped again, this time at a resort, Little Bohemia, in northern Wisconsin, Dillinger managed to escape once more. Baby Face Nelson, also staying at the lodge, fled in another direction.

In his eagerness, J. Edgar had summoned a press conference to announce, “There will be no escaping this time. Luck has run out on this modern-day Houdini.”

Officials in Washington called for the dismissal of both J. Edgar and Melvin. J. Edgar, who had wanted to be hailed as a hero in the press, was openly ridiculed. Clyde found him in a state of permanent agitation. Capturing Dillinger had become an obsession with the director.

After Dillinger escaped in Wisconsin, J. Edgar’s letters to Melvin took on a different tone. They became cold and formal. “Little Mel” had become “Dear Mr. Purvis.”

Earlier in his career of crime, Dillinger had been jailed twice but had managed to escape both times. He bragged, “There is no prison that can hold John Dillinger.”

Such a defiant remark infuriated J. Edgar. He told Melvin, “That may be true. But perhaps Dillinger will never see another prison cell, because we’ll gun the dirty dog down in the street, firing bullet after bullet into him so we’ll know the bastard is dead. I want your guys to get that son of a bitch at any cost. Take any risk, but try not to mow down a crowd of people while you’re doing it. The public doesn’t like that.”

On Saturday, July 21, 1934, the Bureau’s luck changed. Ana Sage, a Romanian *émigré* and the madam of a whorehouse in East Chicago, placed a call to Melvin. She told him that she was facing deportation but promised him if he’d help her, she

would tell him “how you can bring down Dillinger.” At first he dismissed her, as he was getting a lot of crank calls. But eventually, he believed her story.

Sage said that she and Polly Hamilton, Dillinger’s prostitute girlfriend, would be visiting Chicago’s Biograph Theater to see a film, *Manhattan Melodrama*, starring Clark Gable, Myrna Loy, and William Powell. Melvin immediately called J. Edgar to tell him the news. “If he escapes this time, they will call for our heads,” J. Edgar warned Melvin.



With his lopsided grin and a murderous gleam in his eye, a wisecracking Indiana farmboy, **John Dillinger**, became the most notorious of the Depression era gangsters. Feeling betrayed by their government, much of poverty-stricken America made him an underdog and ultimately the alltime American anti-hero. “Great desperadoes from little urchins grow,” crowed *Time* magazine.

In newsreels at movie houses across the country, Dillinger drew more applause than either FDR or the aviator, Charles A. Lindbergh.

“Don’t worry, Chief,” Melvin said. “Dillinger’s luck has run out. If he draws a gun or tries to escape, we’ll shoot him down.”

Hamilton was a twenty-six-year-old divorcée and prostitute, and a waitress at Chicago’s S&S Café on Wilson Avenue. She would be the last of Dillinger’s women.

The film let out at 10:30pm. J. Edgar had issued orders not to tangle with Dillinger in the crowded auditorium.

As arranged in advance, Sage agreed to wear an orange dress, which in the neon lights of the theater looked red. Later the press would dub her “The Woman in the Red Dress.” Along with the exiting crowd, Dillinger came out of the theater, with Sage and Hamilton following close behind.

Melvin took in the very recognizable figure even though his “straw boater” hat was pulled low over his eyes. He noted he wore no jacket on this hot night in which he might conceal a pistol, but had on gun-metal gray trousers and a white and stiffly starched Kenilworth shirt.

“He looked into my eyes,” Melvin claimed, “but obviously didn’t recognize my face, which had appeared in a lot of newspapers. If he detected something more than casual interest from me, he didn’t seem aware of it.”

Melvin later recalled, “I was so nervous I sounded like a girl soprano when I said, ‘Stick ‘em up, Johnny! We have you surrounded.’”

Dillinger ran ahead, trying to retrieve his .38 automatic pistol from the pocket of his trousers. It was too late.

Agent Charlie B. Winstead fired four bullets into Dillinger, the fourth and the fatal one, blasting through the back of his neck and fracturing his second cervical vertebra before crashing through his spinal cord and plowing into the right side of his brain, then exiting through the lower lid of his right eye.



A waitress/prostitute, **Polly Hamilton** was John Dillinger's last girlfriend. "On the afternoon of his death, he had relations with me four times—I'll never find a man like that ever again," she reportedly said during her interviews with the Bureau.

Two agents interviewed Hamilton after she saw Dillinger shot down, but her information was sketchy and later evaluated as false. Nonetheless, she was released and promptly disappeared forever, presumably into the wilds of the Dakota Badlands.

Melvin said, "He spun like a top before toppling over dead on the sidewalk."

Running up from behind, Melvin bent over the body to hear any final words. "But he was already dead," he said.

Word spread across Chicago. Literally thousands of rubber-necks rushed to the scene, many taking their white handkerchiefs and dipping them in Dillinger's blood as a souvenir.

His body was taken to the dank Cook County Morgue, where it was stripped naked before it was covered with a white sheet. Hundreds of rubber-necks gathered outside wanting to get in to view the body. In a surprise decision, Melvin allowed them to come in, providing they filed by the corpse in an orderly fashion and didn't linger too long.

One daring woman ripped the sheet from Dillinger's body, exposing his nudity. She gaped at the size of his mammoth penis. In front of some 200 spectators lined up, she shouted, "Some woman has lost a good friend." In this ghoulish atmosphere, the other men and women laughed, as a policeman hastily covered the body again.

That woman's act of exposing Dillinger that night formed part of the gangster's legend. He soon was called "the most heavily endowed man in America."

For his own amusement, J. Edgar ordered Melvin to have a Bureau photographer take a nude of Dillinger as he lay on that slab in the Cook County morgue. Voyeuristically, he wanted to see if all those rumors of the gangster's massive appendage were true. When a photograph arrived in Washington, J. Edgar studied it intently. "The rumor is true ... even more so. The man was a bull."

When Johnny Depp starred in *Public Enemies* in 2000, a gossip columnist wrote, "Only 'Donkey Dong' himself could play Dillinger—talk about typecasting."

To J. Edgar's jealous fury, Melvin, his former *protégé*, was given all the glory in the press. Newspaper reporters wrote that he was a genuine American hero having killed "the most notorious criminal in American history," although some critics felt that honor should go to the outlaw, Jesse James.

J. Edgar virtually had to ride on Melvin's coattails in trying to get press coverage for the Bureau itself and for him specifically, even though the killing came from an anonymous tip and not from any Bureau sleuthing.

Even Adolf Hitler, in the Berlin-based newspaper of the Nazi party, *Völkische Beobachter*, voiced his opinion: "The Chicago chief of police shot him like a mad dog in a public street, filling him full of holes, as a sieve, without regard to bystanders. Does a land where such things happen still deserve to be called a country where law rules? Without court

procedure, without a single question, the man was shot into the Great Beyond.”

From the New York islands to the Pacific Ocean, “Little Mel Purvis” reached hero status as “the G-Man who got Dillinger.”

For years after, J. Edgar tried to take responsibility for Dillinger’s assassination, creating a Dillinger Museum in FBI headquarters in Washington that displayed his death mask, the straw hat he was wearing, even the La Corona-Belvedere cigar he’d carried in his shirt pocket.

When a reporter for *The New Yorker* viewed Dillinger’s death mask, he said that his mustache evoked that of the German Kaiser in WWI.

Two years before J. Edgar died in Washington, he virtually had a stroke when he read a copy of *The Dillinger Dossier*, published by author Jay Robert Nash in 1970. In the book, the writer claimed that Dillinger was not killed that summer night in Chicago.

The claim was that Dillinger was tipped off that he was going to be gunned down and picked a fall guy to go to the Biograph in his place. Striking flaws were cited in the autopsy evidence. The FBI never produced any counter-evidence to refute Nash’s charges.

“If you’ll gather ‘round me, children, a story I will tell ‘bout Pretty Boy Floyd, an Outlaw. Oklahoma knew him well.”

—Folk singer **Woody Guthrie**

After Dillinger’s death and the massive publicity, the next on J. Edgar’s hit list was Charles Arthur Floyd. The public called him “Pretty Boy Floyd,” a name the bank robber hated, preferring to be known as “Choc” instead. The nickname came from a payroll master who stared into Floyd’s face during a robbery, later describing him to the police as “a mere boy—a pretty boy with apple cheeks.”



The nude body of John Dillinger

was placed on public display at the Cook County Morgue after doctors performed an autopsy.

Gawkers came in to stare up close at his face, and one woman ripped the sheet off his body to expose his mammoth penis.

It was not erect, but the lower of the two photos above made history. Rigor mortis had set in and when the public saw this picture. The position of Dillinger's hands seemed to simulate an erection. The urban legend spread that he had died with a fully erect foot-long penis.

About one hundred inquiries come into the Smithsonian Institution annually, inquiring if the preserved penis of John Dillinger can be viewed.

This American bank robber rose from a callus-fingered cotton-picking Georgia boy to a trigger-fingered desperado who terrorized much of the Middle West.

He was famously associated with Oklahoma where he grew up. A song, "The Ballad of Pretty Boy Floyd," claimed, "He took to the trees and rivers to lead a life of shame. Every crime in Oklahoma was added to his name."

His criminal record began when he was eighteen years old and was arrested for stealing \$3.50 in coins from a local post office. By the time he'd turned twenty-one, he was arrested again for a payroll robbery in September of 1925 in St. Louis. For this, he served five years in prison.

Out of prison he vowed he'd never be jailed again, as he began a series of robberies. After several minor arrests, he was sentenced in November of 1930 to fifteen years in the Ohio State Penitentiary for a bank robbery in Sylvania, Ohio, but he escaped.

WANTED

IN 5 STATES



JOHN DILLINGER PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE!

The Attorney General of the U.S. has authorized a
\$20,000 REWARD!
for information leading to the arrest of John Dillinger.



WANTED posters of **John Dillinger** were displayed in post offices and federal buildings throughout the United States. Wanting to claim the award in an America racked by the Great Depression, hundreds of people placed calls to the FBI, stating that they had seen the notorious gangster. He was spotted having dinner in New York's Chinatown; going to a movie starring Kay Francis in Hollywood, shopping for three pairs of white Hanes briefs, size 34, at a Chicago department store. All of these leads turned up nothing.

After Dillinger's death, the movie theater, **Biograph**, became a tourist attraction. There was always a hassle about patrons who wanted to sit in the same seat where Dillinger saw a Clark Gable movie.

In the lowest row of photos, a head shot of the real Dillinger (*left*) and the reel John Dillinger (*right*, as played by actor **Johnny Depp**), keep fanning the fires of the outlaw's legend.

Floyd robbed banks that were foreclosing on hundreds of farms, homes, and small businesses. In addition to lots of cash, he also took mortgage records, thereby turning himself into a sort of populist salvation hero to farmers losing their lands.

The FBI under J. Edgar became involved on June 17, 1933 in the notorious gunfight known as the "Kansas City Massacre," resulting in the deaths of four law officers.

Four Bureau of Investigation agents, together with an Oklahoma police chief and two local detectives, were escorting the escaped convict, Frank ("Jelly") Nash, to Leavenworth when machine gun-wielding bandits ambushed them. They killed Nash, which may have been the intent of the raid. Special Agent Raymond J. Caffrey, along with three local police officers, were also gunned down.

In a decision that was interpreted even at the time as rather odd, in the wake of the attack on Nash, J. Edgar ordered Melvin to go on an all-out pursuit of Floyd. Many eyewitnesses vehemently denied Floyd's involvement in this crime.

J. Edgar was given ample evidence to suggest that Floyd was not involved in the massacre, but he publicly continued to maintain that he was. He was hoping to leverage the publicity value of Floyd's capture as a means of getting more funding for the FBI.

"Hoover wanted to enhance his own position and beef up his Bureau, and how better to do that than netting another notorious criminal, Pretty Boy Floyd himself," wrote a reporter in Kansas City.

Finally, Congress reacted by removing legal barriers that had hindered his ability to chase criminals across state lines. The passage of the Fugitive Felon Act made an escape across state lines to avoid prosecution a federal crime. J. Edgar was jubilant, claiming, "Now we have the power to go anywhere and shoot anybody. I want my G-Men to shoot any rattler in the grass."



Pretty Boy Floyd, pictured above with his FBI fingerprints, wasn't really pretty, but the nickname stuck. He felt the label made him sound like a homosexual. "As a thousand women from Oklahoma to Chicago can testify, I ain't no god damn faggot."

Actually, his face was moony and flat, resembling the baseball great, a young Babe Ruth, with whom he was often mistaken. He did have a "touch of the lavender," as one reporter wrote, because he also doused himself with lilac water. "You could smell him coming around the corner," one of his gangster cronies claimed.

FBI agents were authorized to carry firearms with full arrest powers. "My dream has come true," J. Edgar told Clyde and others. "We now have an empowered national police force."

Basking in his power, J. Edgar drew up a Public Enemies List, which his critics called a "Morgue List in the Making." With Dillinger dead, the elusive Pretty Boy Floyd now topped the list.

In early October of 1934, J. Edgar assured the American people that Floyd would be dead "before Santa heads down from the North Pole with his reindeer." That night he placed a call to Melvin. "Don't make a god damn liar out of me," he barked at his agent, whom he increasingly resented, all affection in their relationship seemingly gone.

The press continued to lionize Melvin, who began to pay more and more attention to his dress, changing his white shirt three times a day so that he would look fresh in the photos frequently taken of him.

In a *Literary Digest* poll taken in 1934, he came in eighth on a list of the ten most important people in the world. In Washington, J. Edgar did not conceal his anger when reading the poll. "Who does this midget think he is?"

At this point, Floyd began to believe the many press reports about Melvin being an agent who always got his suspect, usually shooting them down. He decided to flee from Ohio to Mexico to avoid death.

In a midnight blue Ford sedan, he set out at night with three companions—his sidekick, Adam Richetti, along with two women who happened to be sisters, Rose and Juanita Baird.

The date was October 18, 1934. Floyd's plan was to drive back to the Cookson Hills in eastern Oklahoma where he grew up. There he wanted to pick up his family before heading south of the border.

On Interstate 7, deep in the valley of the Ohio River, Floyd as the driver encountered a pea-soup fog. Even so, he told his passengers that he planned to press on in spite of the dangerous curves in the road. Thirty minutes later he lost control of his car and crashed into a telephone pole.

Fearing he'd be recognized, Floyd ordered Juanita to walk into town. Miles back, they'd passed an all-night mechanic's shop. Rose was ordered to wait in the car while Floyd and Richetti took his machine gun and two blankets, heading for a wooded hill to wait it out.

An hour later, the car with the two women was towed away, and Floyd and Richetti decided to wait off Route 7 until their return. Foolishly, they were visible from the highway. Motorist Joe Fryman found it suspicious that two men would be sitting on a hill wearing a suit and tie but with no vehicle in sight. He wondered what they were doing there and how did they get there from town. It seemed too far to walk.

In town himself, he reported his suspicions to Police Chief John H. Fultz of Wellsville, Ohio. "There's something going on here," Fultz said, rounding up some law officers to take with him. Delivering a familiar line, he said, "These men sound like they are armed and dangerous."

Although Richetti was captured, Floyd fled into the dense woods. After all, he had evaded the police so many times he was known as "the Phantom of the Ozarks."

As depicted in many films, Floyd managed to elude the local sheriff. When J. Edgar found this out, he was furious, calling Melvin in Cincinnati, where he removed him from a case, ordering him to Wellsville at once to take charge.

Immediately Melvin rounded up some twenty-four of J. Edgar's agents in the area, drawing them from such diverse cities as Pittsburgh and Cleveland. All bridges in the targeted area were closed, and roadblocks were set up on all exits.

In pouring rain, armed agents with flashlights and dogs combed the dense Spencer Woods into which Floyd had vanished.

After surviving in the woods on berries for almost four days, Floyd spotted a farmhouse in the distance on October 22, 1934. He arrived at the back door, which was answered by Ellen Conkle. He told her he'd gotten lost in the forest and offered to give her a dollar if she'd fix him a dinner. Although suspicious, she agreed.

While eating, he noticed a Model A standing near a ramshackle corn-crib. She told him it belonged to her brother, Stewart Dyke, who would soon be returning from the fields. Floyd asked her if for ten dollars Dyke would drive him to the nearest bus station.



Adam Richetti, Pretty Boy Floyd's partner in crime, was also one of the primary suspects in the June 17, 1933 gunfight that infamously became known as the "Kansas City Massacre," resulting in the deaths of four law officers.

Some of the evidence against Richetti derived from a fingerprint that was said to have been recovered from a beer bottle. Both Floyd and Richetti, although admitting to other crimes, maintained that they were innocent of any involvement in that massacre, and the testimony that identified Floyd and Richetti as the killers was disputed by others, who maintained their innocence.

A recent book on the massacre attributes some of the slayings to "friendly fire" by a lawman unfamiliar with his weapon.

When Dyke arrived, he too was suspicious of Floyd. Fearing that he might be dangerous, he wanted to drive him away from the women in the house. As he started his car, he noticed two cars entering his driveway, blocking his only exit. Each car contained four men, one of whom was Melvin Purvis.

Feeling entrapped, Floyd leaped from the Model A and, with his .45 automatic gripped in his hand, ran once again toward the dense woods.

The sharpshooter of the law enforcement officers, Chester Smith, fired a single bullet from his rifle, hitting Floyd in the right arm. Knocked to the ground, he rose again and started running.

Melvin shouted for him to halt, but Floyd only ran faster. Melvin ordered the G-Men to open fire. Ellen Conkle later said, "The sound was like thunder from heaven."

Nearly one hundred shots were fired, a second bullet penetrating Floyd's back, shattering a rib before entering his stomach. Yet a third bullet plowed through his body to ravage his right kidney. Blood was flowing from his severed arteries.

He fell to the ground but was still alive when Melvin came to stand over him. Both men recognized each other, Melvin from the WANTED posters of Floyd, Floyd from all the newspaper photographs of Melvin. After all they were two of the most famous men in America.

"Are you Pretty Boy Floyd?" Melvin asked.

He winced at the Pretty Boy nickname. In a raspy voice, he said, "I am Charles Arthur Floyd." Then blood gushed from his mouth.

Melvin delivered the body to the Sturgis Funeral Home in East Liverpool, Ohio. Once there, Melvin put through a call to J. Edgar in Washington, telling him that “Public Enemy Number One is dead.”

Meanwhile, an autopsy was performed. The coroners took scissors and cut off small swatches of Floyd’s blue suit to hand out as keepsakes.

Floyd’s nude body lay on a marble slab. A coroner covered his genitals with a sheet and opened the doors of the funeral home. It was estimated that day that some 10,000 spectators filed through, one of the staff moving them along at fifty gaps per minute. It took more than three hours for all of them to view the body. One woman said, “He sure don’t look like no Pretty Boy to me.”

Back in Washington, J. Edgar gleefully handled calls from the press coming in from coast to coast. Somehow J. Edgar managed to get a call through to Melvin, telling him to leave Ohio to “lay low” for a few days. He also told him to silence his agents and disperse them. He did not want Melvin to talk to reporters. He’d made a mistake when he did that after the Dillinger shooting.

He wanted to take all the credit for himself. Melvin later recalled, “I think he wanted me to become the invisible man.” When reporters wanted to interview Melvin himself, J. Edgar told them that he was ill and needed rest.

In spite of J. Edgar’s muzzle on Melvin, reporters still claimed he was “the slayer of Pretty Boy, gunning him down like a dog,” in the words of one journalist. “MELVIN PURVIS: PANIC FOR GANGSTERS” screamed one headline.

In Salisaw, Oklahoma, Floyd’s body arrived in a cheap pine-box coffin. More than 20,000 people attended his funeral, the largest ever held in the state. To most of these Depression-riddled souls, Pretty Boy Floyd was their hero because of his role in fighting the banks that threatened them daily with foreclosures.

Melvin, once again a national hero, spent a lonely October 24, 1934 in his apartment on the North Side of Chicago. Perhaps remembering the day when their relationship was close, J. Edgar sent him a telegram: HAPPY BIRTHDAY. Melvin was thirty-one years old, and somehow felt his career as a crime fighter might be coming to an end.

In spite of J. Edgar’s black-out on Melvin, headlines once again declared: MELVIN PURVIS TRIUMPHS AGAIN.

Pretty Boy Floyd became a legend after his death, depicted in books, film, and song. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, a novel by John Steinbeck, Ma Joad refers to Floyd several times, claiming he was a young man driven to a tragic fate by the Great Depression. Larry McMurty and Diana Ossana wrote a fictionalized account of his life called *Pretty Boy Floyd*. Some of the handsomest actors in Hollywood have played Floyd on the screen—John Ericson in *Pretty Boy Floyd* (1960); Robert Conrad in *Young Dillinger* (1965); Fabian in *A Bullet for Pretty Boy* (1970); Martin Sheen in *The Story of Pretty Boy Floyd* (1974), and Channing Tatum in *Public Enemies* (2009).



Rose Baird (*left*) poses with her sister, **Juanita Baird** (aka Beulah Baird) for an FBI cameraman. Unlike Bonnie Parker, another famous fugitive of their era, the sisters were not accused of any active involvement in the robbing of any bank.

The long-suffering Baird sisters were the girlfriends of Richetti and Pretty Boy Floyd back in the 1930s, when they were colorfully known as “gun molls.” They were in the getaway car that Floyd crashed in Ohio. While the sisters coaxed the damaged car along an Ohio highway to a mechanic, both Floyd and Richetti escaped into the forest.

The sisters never saw their gangster lovers again, and faded into the history books of 20th century crimes.

Baby Face Nelson, the runty bank robber whose *modus operandi* was to shoot anyone in his way in and out of the banks he attacked, was next on J. Edgar’s list. The Bureau’s director also followed the exploits of Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow, calling them “those mad dogs from Dallas

Born in Chicago’s near West Side, the son of Belgian immigrants, Lester Joseph Gillis used a pseudonym for most of his life, George Nelson. When he became a bank robber, the public came to know him as “Baby Face” Nelson, because of his youthful appearance and small stature.

As a teenager, Nelson had moved in and out of the state reformatory. By 1928, he was running bootleg liquor to speakeasies in the Chicago suburbs where he fell in with a Capone-like mob, “The Touhy Gang,” who specialized in armed robberies.

On April 21, 1930, his first bank robbery netted him \$4,000. He continued a spree of bank robberies and house break-ins, often making off with \$25,000 worth of gemstones from robberies of private homes.

By the winter of 1931, his luck ran out. He was arrested and sentenced to one year to life in the state penitentiary at Joliet, Illinois. By then Baby Face Nelson had become tabloid fodder. He escaped from prison in February of 1932 and once again turned to robbing banks.

After a botched robbery in 1933, Nelson decided to form his own gang. During robberies, Nelson wildly sprayed machine gunbullets to make his getaway, not caring whom he killed. His wife, Helen Gillis, and young son, Ronald, often were in the back seat of his getaway car.



Ellen Conkle is pictured inside the kitchen of the modest farmhouse where Pretty Boy Floyd had his last meal. He arrived out of the woods and offered her “a fast buck” if she’d cook some supper for a hungry man. She whipped him up some pork chops, collards, mashed potatoes, and biscuits—and got her dollar.

After he was slain nearby, she charged fifty cents to stray tourists who came and wanted to see the table where the gangster ate his supper. She never washed the dishes until the tourists stopped coming. She later sold the dishes for a hundred dollars.

In the spring of 1934 Nelson had forged a quasi-partnership with Dillinger.

After a shoot-out between Nelson and Dillinger vs. FBI agents at the Little Bohemia Lodge in Wisconsin, both gangsters escaped. There were calls for J. Edgar’s resignation, and a widely circulated petition demanded that Melvin be suspended.

Nelson and Dillinger, along with other gang members, robbed the Merchants National Bank in South Bend, Indiana, carrying off sacks of bills whose value amounted to \$28,000. Police and bystanders died that day, but the gang escaped. This was the last robbery for Dillinger and Nelson.

J. Edgar intensified the FBI dragnet. When Dillinger was ambushed at the Biograph Theater in Chicago on July 22, 1934, Nelson knew he’d be next. By August of that year, Nelson had emerged as the sole survivor of the “Second Dillinger Gang.”

In the annals of the FBI, Nelson became known for killing more of its agents in the line of duty than any other American criminal. John Dillinger and Pretty Boy Floyd became folk heroes. Not so Nelson—in fact, he was the very antithesis of popular.

No one considered him one of the “Robin Hood gangsters” of the Depression era. Nelson, “the cold-blooded killer with the hot temper” killed both law officers and any innocent bystanders nearby. Surprisingly, he was a devoted family man who often ran from the law with his wife and kids following him.

After fleeing to California, Nelson made the worst decision of his life. He returned East with his wife, Helen and son.



The body of the recently slain **Pretty Boy Floyd** was propped up in the back of Melvin Purvis's car and taken to the **Sturgis Funeral Home** (*top photo*) in East Liverpool, Ohio.

He was stripped of his clothing and laid out on a slab, where he was fingerprinted. His blue suit was cut into small swatches, later to be sold to souvenir hunters for \$5 a piece.

Sightseers were allowed to come into the funeral parlor to view the body (*center photo*). At 8:30 that night, some 10,000 people (*bottom photo*) had gathered.

The next morning, the local newspaper defined it as, "The greatest show on earth. But in Floyd's condition, he didn't look very pretty."

The FBI had staked out Lake Como in Geneva, Wisconsin, thinking Nelson would return for the winter. He did. But once again Nelson made a daring escape heading for the town of Barrington, Wisconsin. Here on November 27, 1934, he was shot to death along with FBI agents Ed Hollis and Samuel P. Cowley.

Nelson was shot a total of seventeen times. Seven submachine gun slugs had lodged in his body and ten shotgun pellets had ripped into his leg. He told Helen, "I'm done in." She fled with him to a "safe house" in Wilmette, Illinois, where he died in bed that night.

On a tip, FBI agents tracked down Nelson's corpse, finding it in a ditch, wrapped in a blanket, in front of St. Peter's Catholic Cemetery in Skokie, Illinois. As his wife later explained to police, "I put the blanket around his body because he always hated the cold."

Learning that Helen was free, J. Edgar issued her "death order." The young widow became "the first female Public Enemy." Arrested in Chicago on Thanksgiving Day, she served a year in prison for harboring her late husband. She told police that Nelson uttered his final words at 7:35pm. "It's getting dark, Helen. I can't see anymore."



This mug shots from 1931 show **Baby Face Nelson** (aka Lester Gillis) who had been born on Chicago's Near West Side in 1908. For a period of his reckless life, he was a partner of John Dillinger.

"Nelson liked killing for killing's sake," claimed Melvin Purvis. "He was diabolical in appearance. He grinned when he killed. Because of his brutality, his sadistic delight in the sheer joy of killing, he stands in a class by himself."

Either directly or indirectly, Melvin Purvis had played a key role in ridding society of its Public Enemies Number One. "It's time we cut our big hero down to size," a jealous J. Edgar told Clyde and other agents. "In my opinion, the FBI has room for only one star. Anything else confuses the public."

Actually, J. Edgar feared that FDR might replace him with Melvin as Bureau director. Many newspaper editorials suggested that the President do just that.

Doris Lockerman, secretary to Melvin, claimed, "Hoover had the green eye of jealousy. His letters to Melvin, and I read every one of them, were cold and distant. At one point they became like some harsh schoolmaster disciplining an unruly pupil."

"It's true that Melvin was drinking a bit after hunting down all those mad dog criminals, but that was because of the abuse he was getting from Hoover," she said. "The most outrageous charge was that Melvin got so drunk at a party in Chicago that he pulled out his penis and urinated on the sofa of the hostess. That was a damn lie. There was another story that he went wild in a department store, pulled out his gun and shot at the chandelier."

"These unadulterated lies were so ridiculous I didn't think any sane person would believe them," she said. "Unfortunately, some very stupid people in the Bureau believed all the rumors spread about Melvin, which were told by those, especially Hoover, who wanted to destroy him because he'd done such a good job and taken the national spotlight off Hoover himself. He couldn't stand someone else getting credit for anything. Fortunately, Clyde Tolson knew how to hide in the background."

J. Edgar had a real dilemma. Melvin was too high profile as an agent, a national hero, in fact, and could not just be dismissed. There had to be another way.

J. Edgar dispatched agents to Chicago to investigate how Melvin was running the Bureau there. Without J. Edgar actually saying so, the agents knew they should file negative reports.

One somewhat petty charge made in one of the reports claimed that Chicago agents, especially those involved in long stakeouts, habitually left their dirty underwear in the men's room whenever they changed into a fresh pair of undies. More destructive was an accusation that Melvin had amateurishly dragged his feet on the resolution of 232 FBI cases and that consequently, all of them had been bogged down "with undue delay."



Baby Face Nelson's body is inspected by a police officer and two FBI agents. J. Edgar wanted a full report with photos that included full frontal nudes. An autopsy showed that Nelson died from seven bullet wounds inflicted by G-Men. The most damage was caused to his abdomen, through which a .45 caliber bullet had blasted.

After reading all the criticism, including how agents and staff were "invariably late for work," J. Edgar ordered that Melvin be stripped of authority over big cases. He ended up being assigned to a job interviewing prospective men who wanted to join the local Bureau.

Finally, Melvin could take it no more. On July 10, 1935, he sent J. Edgar a telegram, resigning his post. J. Edgar immediately accepted the resignation but didn't let it go at that. He continued to pursue Melvin as if chasing down Dillinger.

Before filing Melvin's letter of resignation, J. Edgar altered it, claiming "termination with prejudice." He ordered that Melvin be put under the sort of surveillance reserved for public enemies. For the next twenty-five years, J. Edgar received detailed dossiers on the activities of his former friend. Before J. Edgar's death, these reports were destroyed.

Clyde himself was in charge of assembling the reports. J. Edgar especially liked damaging evidence, and agents curried favor with him. It is believed that G-Men inserted made up stories about Melvin when they found that was what J. Edgar wanted to read.

On a visit to New York, Melvin was said to have received a blow-job in a men's room in a theater in the Times Square area during the screening of a Humphrey Bogart movie. On another occasion, in San Francisco, he was accused of visiting a bordello where he engaged in sex with two prostitutes over a six-hour period. Whether these reports were true or not is not known, but many were thought to be fabricated. Of course, before sending them in to J. Edgar, Clyde deliberately wanted to make the reports as damaging as possible.

"Trashing my father could even advance an agent's fortunes," said Alston Purvis in his memoirs, *The Vendetta: Special Agent Melvin Purvis, John Dillinger, and Hoover's FBI in the Age of Gangsters*.

Newspapers routinely prepare obituaries of famous people long before their deaths. In November, 1935, the Associated Press sent J. Edgar their obituary of Purvis, asking the FBI to check to see if the facts were correct. At first J. Edgar ignored it until the U.S. attorney general pointedly asked him to respond.

J. Edgar claimed that he did not feel that any one individual should be singled out to be “dramatized as the man responsible for the death or capture of a notorious desperado.” His reasoning, false though it was, asserted that individualized publicity would make it impossible to use an agent in future cases because his identity would henceforth be known.

He overlooked the fact that Melvin, thanks to his involvement in the Dillinger slaying, was already a household word when he went after Pretty Boy Floyd.

There was nothing that J. Edgar could do to prevent Melvin from writing the story of his own incredible rise to fame. So in 1936, after his resignation from the Bureau, Melvin “the ace G-Man,” published his memoirs, entitled *American Agent*. After its publication, J. Edgar claimed that the book was filled with nothing but “lies, distortions and exaggerations.” On another occasion, he contradicted himself, saying, “I never read pulp trash.”

Actually what really infuriated J. Edgar was that there was no mention of him in *American Agent*, which became a bestseller.

In *The New York Times Book Review*, a critic claimed, “Melvin Purvis makes sensational statements because he is dealing with sensational facts.” After publication of the memoirs, Melvin became a celebrated figure, perhaps not knowing that agents from the Bureau were clocking his every move.

A café society party was held in his honor at the 21 Club in Manhattan, which had been a former speakeasy. Here he was introduced to his favorite movie star, Joan Crawford, dining with her new husband, Franchot Tone.

An agent later reported to J. Edgar that when Tone had to fly back to Hollywood to make a film, Crawford stayed in New York an extra week. According to the report, Melvin visited her suite on three different nights and didn’t leave on any of the occasions until the following morning.

Melvin needed money, and even though he found it humiliating he accepted contracts to endorse products. “Getting the drop on Public Nuisance No. 1—unsightly beard bristles,” was his promo for Gillette Safety Razors. For Dodge cars, the advertisements proclaimed “Famous G-Man Corners Dodge Economy.”

Melvin achieved his greatest commercial success when he signed to promote a breakfast cereal, Post Toasties. As part of the publicity campaign for the breakfast cereal, he hosted a radio show called “Junior G-Men,” which became tremendously popular with America’s wannabe law enforcement agents. Melvin Purvis Junior G-Man Clubs were formed in every state. At its peak, 260,000 children were enrolled. “J. Edgar fumed, fussed, and fizzled,” said secretary Betty Buffton. J. Edgar tried to prevent the club from handing out Junior G-Man badges, but a judge rejected his request.

Later, as the media ball got rolling, and with Post Toasties as its sponsor, the Melvin Purvis G-Man Board game became wildly successful, selling for \$1.50. Even though he resented it, J. Edgar also became popular with young kids because he was the head of the FBI. “Without really meaning to, Melvin increased the popularity of that old toad,” said an executive at Young and Rubicam, which handled the Post Toasties account.

Melvin’s fame also grew in Hollywood. After the success of James Cagney’s 1935 film, *G-Men*, studios clamored for more crime stories, especially those dealing with the inner workings of the somewhat mysterious FBI. Melvin seemed a natural as a source for scriptwriters hoping for “the real low-down on the FBI.” That prospect aroused anxiety in J. Edgar, who feared that Melvin would use the Hollywood media as a platform to attack him personally, as well as the Bureau in general.

In Hollywood, Darryl F. Zanuck offered Melvin a position as “crime consultant” on movie production at 20th Century Fox. But after Zanuck received a phone call from J. Edgar, the offer was withdrawn. He told Zanuck that if Fox or any other movie studio needed technical advisers, the FBI would supply them for free. In job after job which Purvis was offered, including a 1938 offer to become supervisor of police affairs at the Santa Anita (California) racetrack, J. Edgar sabotaged his chances.

In Hollywood, Melvin was a celebrity at the studios. In the 1930s, gangster pictures were all the rage, particularly those made at Warner Brothers starring George Raft, Edward G. Robinson, Humphrey Bogart, and James Cagney.

Producer Samuel Goldwyn negotiated with Melvin to become an adviser on the 1937 movie, *Dead End*, the picture that introduced the Dead End Kids. Melvin met one of his favorite actors, Humphrey Bogart, who had the third lead in the film.

During his time in Hollywood, Bogie introduced Melvin to Jean Harlow, the reigning blonde film goddess of her day. She gave Louella Parsons a quote she couldn’t print. “Mel has twice as much as Clark Gable.” Although Melvin’s affair with Harlow quickly fizzled out, he was deeply saddened to learn of her early death on June 7, 1937.

One morning in Washington, J. Edgar turned to his favorite column, one written by Louella Parsons which ran in the *Washington Herald*. He devoured movie gossip. But on that particular morning, he exploded like Mount Vesuvius. The gossip maven reported that Paramount Pictures was set to film a movie called *Federal Dick*. Melvin would be played by Cary Grant, with George Raft, a real-life gangster, cast as J. Edgar himself.



Joan Crawford called Melvin Purvis “the man of the hour” and came on strong to him. Dazzled by her stardom, he gave in to her sexual desires.

However, she later switched sides, becoming an informant for the FBI and a confidential friend of Melvin’s nemesis, J. Edgar Hoover.

Angered and filled “with absolute horror and disgust,” J. Edgar called his top agent in Los Angeles, J.E.P. Dunn, and demanded an investigation. It is not known what pressure the FBI put on the studio, but *Federal Dick* never went before the cameras.

Through Clyde, J. Edgar turned down all requests from reporters wanting to interview Melvin for feature stories. Melvin was enjoying his Hollywood celebrity and was as fascinated with movie stars as they were by him.

He started dating Janice Jarrett, the most famous advertising model in America during the era that she embodied the Lucky Strike Girl. J. Edgar was so furious when he learned about the Jarrett/Purvis affair that he quit smoking Lucky Strikes.

He became obsessed with Melvin’s sexual affair. Newspaper headlines thrilled readers with news of their romance: LUCKY STRIKE FOR PURVIS and MELVIN PURVIS CAPTURED BY CUPID. In March, it was announced they would marry on April 20, 1937, and invitations were mailed out to 3,000 dignitaries, including such stars as Clark Gable, Fredric March, Joan Crawford, and even Louis B. Mayer and Samuel Goldwyn. It was hailed in the press as the celebrity wedding of the year.

When Jarrett had to travel to San Francisco for a photo shoot, Melvin remained in Los Angeles, perhaps not knowing that he was being trailed by FBI agents. J. Edgar wanted to set up an entrapment for him, and ordered an FBI photographer to get a blackmail photo of Melvin in bed with a woman.

Momentarily, Melvin may have been madly in love with Jarrett, but he was not immune to other beautiful stars, some of whom were blatantly making themselves available to this American folk hero. Bogart introduced Melvin to his co-star, Joan Blondell, who was immediately attracted to him.

The upcoming weekend found them checking into a hotel together on the beach at Malibu. Shortly after midnight, two agents and a photographer, using an FBI master key, slipped into their bedroom where a picture was snapped of a naked Melvin and Joan in bed together. A copy of this picture of Joan with Jarrett’s groom-to-be was anonymously mailed to the model. In the emotional aftermath, she cancelled her widely announced and publicized wedding.

In Washington, FBI agents learned of this entrapment which was never made public. When Clyde and J. Edgar were out for lunch, one agent said, “Hoover is just pissed off because Purvis is not marrying him. Our director always wanted to get into that little guy’s pants.”

Eventually, Melvin married Marie Rosanne Willcox, with whom he had three sons. He drifted from job to job as the years went by. For a while he set up a law practice in San Francisco. Later he bought a radio station, WOLH, in Florence, South Carolina. During World War II, he served in the U.S. Army as a colonel.

At war’s end, the army dispatched him to seek out Nazis such as Martin Bormann, evocative of the way he’d gone after Dillinger. During the famous Nürnberg trials, Melvin interviewed Hitler’s war criminals.

J. Edgar tried to erase the memory of Melvin from any dramatizations of the Bureau. When *The FBI Story*, as authorized by him, was filmed in 1956, no character named Melvin Purvis appeared in the movie. When Melvin applied for a Senate job, J. Edgar sent senators an official memo, with “some disturbing facts about one Mr. Melvin Purvis.” J. Edgar’s accusations against his former agent were never made public.

In 1959, Melvin was suffering from chronic back pain. He became addicted to morphine which eased his agony. He spent sleepless nights wandering around his home in Florence, and was deeply troubled by the past and by J. Edgar in particular. In November, he contracted a case of the Asian flu which lingered and lingered. He was in a very weakened condition. Often, very late at night, his family heard him cursing J. Edgar. “That god damn son of a bitch. He ruined my life.”

On February 29, 1960, Melvin committed suicide, or so it is believed. He shot himself using a pistol given to him by his fellow agents when he resigned from the FBI in 1935. It was rumored to have been the weapon used to take down Dillinger.

It may not have been a suicide after all, and the coroner agreed. Melvin may have shot himself accidentally trying to extract a tracer bullet jammed in the pistol. If that were the case, it is ironic that he may have died from the same weapon that had been used to kill Dillinger.

Melvin was only 56 years old.

J. Edgar did not send a letter of condolence to the widow. Nor did he send an official delegation from the FBI, although many agents, some of them retired, showed up anyway.

After the bleak funeral on a rainy day, Marie Willcox Purvis sat down and sent a Western Union telegram to J. Edgar. “We are honored that you ignored Melvin’s death. Your jealousy hurt him very much but until the end I think he loved you.”

CHAPTER FOUR

“Two deadly snakes—a rattler and a cobra—were crawling around some garbage one night and came across each other. Instead of striking each other with their deadly venom, they bonded to spew their poison upon the world.” Or so said Eleanor Roosevelt’s lesbian girlfriend, Lorena (“Hick”) Hickok, a correspondent for Associated Press.

When Walter Winchell and J. Edgar met in the 1920s, the influential newspaper columnist and the director of the Bureau of Investigation must have sized each other up. J. Edgar could supply Winchell with secrets for his column, and in return, the newspaperman could build up J. Edgar’s reputation as a powerful law enforcement figure.

J. Edgar was willing to overlook the fact that Winchell was “a New York Jew,” and these two men became best friends, known as “the odd couple.”

Winchell was no great devotee of homosexuals, calling them “lavender lads,” but he tolerated J. Edgar’s obsession with Clyde Tolson, who was always included on any nighttime outing. The columnist asked no questions about the nature of their relationship and was given none.

Born in New York, Winchell had always wanted to be a journalist and finally made it in the summer of 1929, when he joined the *New York Daily Mirror*, working himself up to become a syndicated columnist. His work would, in time, appear in some 2,000 newspapers worldwide and be read by some 50 million people who virtually had to learn a new language of “Winchellisms.” Examples included use of the word “handcuffed” for marriage, and “pashing it” for falling in love.

Instead of J. Edgar and Clyde, Winchell in the 1920s preferred to hang out with gangsters, especially Owney Madden, the No. 1 gang leader in New York during the Prohibition era. When he felt his life in danger because “I knew too much,” Winchell fled to Los Angeles.

After several months, he returned to his native New York “a changed man” in his words. Almost overnight, or so it seemed, he’d become a cheerleader for Uncle Sam, law and order, mom, and apple pie.

J. Edgar had gotten to know him when he reported on the Lindbergh kidnapping case. His stories received national exposure. Their friendship grew.

Clyde and J. Edgar were invited to join Winchell in his nightly rounds of the Stork Club in Manhattan, whenever they were up from Washington. This was America’s most famous night spot and the last dying gasp of the lost world of café society.

Born in the Roaring Twenties, “the Stork” was run by Sherman Billingsley, an ex-bootlegger from Oklahoma. As he moved into the 1930s, he created a glittering, glamorous world labeled by one reporter as “a haven for guns, diamonds, champagne, and caviar where starlets, high-class whores, and lavender boys with talented butts chased perverted millionaires with dubious reputations.” In the midst of the Depression, it was not unknown for the headwaiter to be given a \$20,000 tip.

Winchell was the scribe-in-residence, mingling with movie stars, aristocrats, generals, political bosses, and stage actresses. Patrons included Tallulah Bankhead, Ernest Hemingway, Cole Porter, Milton Berle, Bob Hope, Robert Benchley, Bing Crosby, Humphrey Bogart, Charlie Chaplin, Louise Brooks, Gary Cooper, Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, Jack (“Legs”) Diamond, Dwight D. Eisenhower, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Clark Gable, Cary Grant (with Randolph Scott), and Myrna Loy. Gangster Dutch Schultz was seen drinking one night with the aviator hero Charles A. Lindbergh. Another aviator, Howard Hughes, showed up one night with two “dates”—Errol Flynn and Tyrone Power.

In the words of Winchell, the Stork Club was “the New Yorkiest spot in New York.” He always held court at the choice table, No. 50. Whenever they were in town, Clyde and J. Edgar were usually seated beside him.



The most faithful patrons of the Stork Club, columnist **Walter Winchell** (*top photo*) appears in the bottom photo (*left*) with **J. Edgar**. Clyde Tolson was seated on J. Edgar's left, but was conveniently left out of the photograph.

Even though J. Edgar professed to be Winchell's "great and good friend," he secretly spied on him, ordering the compilation of an FBI dossier that eventually grew to 3,908 pages.

He later told Clyde and other FBI agents, "Walter Winchell is the most crooked journalist in America."

On those nights, Billingsley instructed Yetta Golove, a robust Russian Jewish immigrant in charge of tables, "Hold those seats for J. Edgar and Mrs. Hoover."

"I didn't know he was married," Golove said.

"Don't be an idiot," he said. "I mean Clyde Tolson."

Winchell's lawyer, Ernest Cuneo, claimed that Table 50 in the Stork Club's Cub Room was the virtual center of gravity in Manhattan. "To Walter's table came the most important men in the world—newspaper and book publishers, bankers, Hollywood magnates, celebrities of all kinds, an international Who's Who." He added under his breath, "Even J. Edgar Hoover and his boy friend."

Cuneo reflected nostalgically on an age gone by, recalling "beautiful women, beautifully clothed—terrific form, terrific grace, and terrific style. It was like the *Belle Époque* in France, like a Dufy painting of Longchamps on Grand Prix Day."

J. Edgar liked the Stork Club so much he invited Clyde there on a date to celebrate New Year's Eve in 1936. Of course, Billingsley wanted to work a beautiful girl into the photo. He asked the fashion model, Luisa Stuart, to pose for a gag photo, wielding a toy gun. The picture was widely published in newspapers, suggesting that Stuart, not Clyde, might have been J. Edgar's "date" that night.

"I was not his date," she later recalled. "It was all staged for the benefit of a photographer. As the evening wore on, I caught J. Edgar holding hands with Clyde."

More than any other person in America, Winchell sold the heroic image of the G-Man to the public, with J. Edgar configured as the nation's valiant crime fighter. To return the favor, J. Edgar provided Winchell with some of the biggest scoops of his career. The FBI director always denied that. "I never play favors with the press," he lied.

With John Dillinger, Baby Face Nelson, and Pretty Boy Floyd wiped out, there remained Alvin Karpis, the last "Public Enemy Number One" at large.

Born to Lithuanian immigrants in Montreal, Karpis was nicknamed "Creepy" because of his sinister smile. He grew up with gamblers, bootleggers, and pimps, and turned to a life of crime that included bank robberies and kidnapping. He became particularly sought after when he hooked up with the notorious Barker gang.

J. Edgar wanted his G-Men to make another high-profile arrest, hoping to get the bureau's annual operating budget increased. He'd also applied for an increase in salary from \$9,000 to \$10,000 a year. At a budget hearing, J. Edgar was called before a congressional committee.

In April, 1936, at a U.S. Senate hearing, Kenneth D. McKellar of Tennessee lambasted J. Edgar for his performance at the FBI. "You're called America's greatest lawman, but you personally have never arrested anyone. Is that true?"

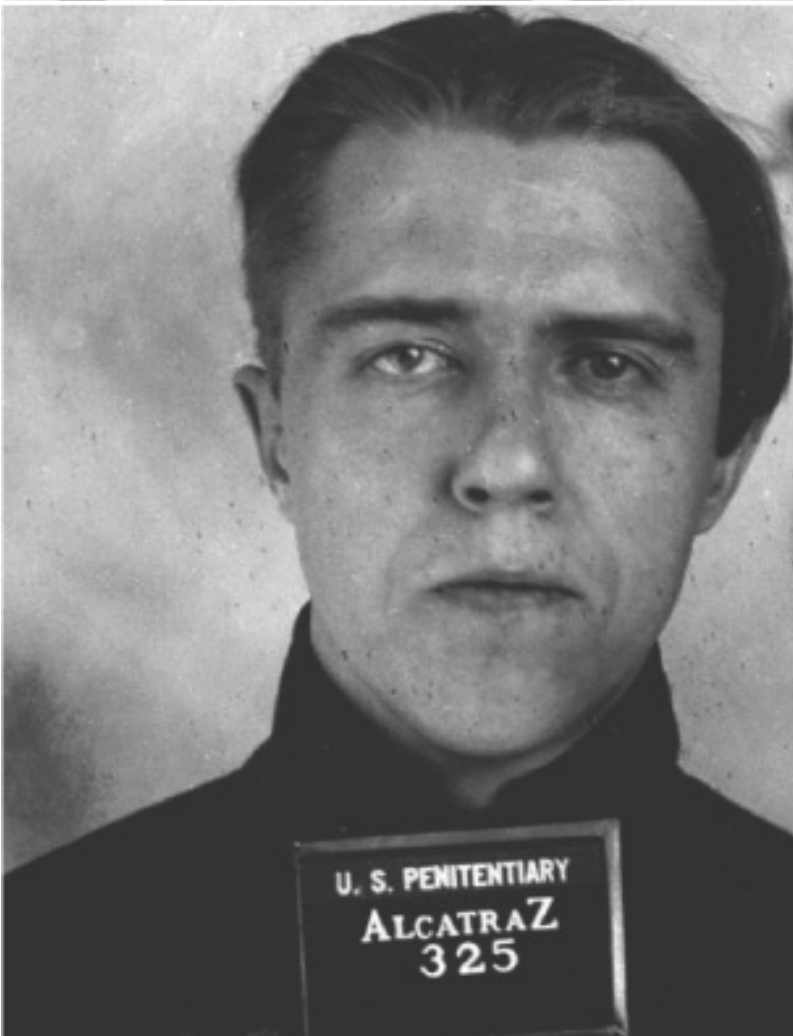
Turning red in the face, J. Edgar could barely suppress his anger. He felt he'd been publicly humiliated by the senator, but was forced to admit that his words were true.

"So, you're telling me that you and your so-called Babe Ruth physique have sat on your butt in some office during your entire career as head of the Bureau?" Enraged, J. Edgar only nodded.

Congressman Marion Zioncheck made the hearing even worse by accusing J. Edgar of being "a dictator, a master of fiction, a product of self-generated public relations to create a macho image completely divorced from reality. You're supposed to hunt down the nation's most dangerous criminals, but I read in a feature story you take only mincing steps. Maybe your little feet are too dainty to catch these gangsters."

J. Edgar could hardly speak. Finally, he said, "My record of rounding up Public Enemies Number One is well known."

Outside the building, an infuriated J. Edgar told Clyde that he was going to launch an immediate investigation of both McKellar and Zioncheck. "How dare those cocksuckers blacken my masculine image. We'll get the dirt on them even if we have to create the mud to sling."



Alvin (“Creepy”) Karpis is seen in handcuffs preceded by J. Edgar (lower left figure in upper photo) at the time of his capture in New Orleans. The lower photo replicates Carpis’ mug shot at Alcatraz.

Today, his claim to fame might be as the prison inmate who taught a fellow prisoner, the psycho Charles Manson, how to play the guitar.

After suffering through public ridicule at the hearing, rumors of his homosexuality spread through official Washington. A furious J. Edgar vowed to the press, “I will capture Creepy Karpis single-handedly.”

During Karpis’ incarceration at the Kansas State Penitentiary in Lansing, Kansas, he’d met Fred Barker, a notorious member of “The Bloody Barkers.”

Fred invited him to join their gang after both of them were released from prison in 1931. Karpis headed to Oklahoma where he hooked up with “the most dangerous mad-dog criminals of the Depression era.” The Barkers never hesitated to kill

anyone who stood in their way, including innocent bystanders, as they robbed banks or hijacked mail deliveries.

At some point, Karpis convinced the Barkers that they could earn more money through kidnapping than in robbing banks. Their first kidnapping was a millionaire Minnesota brewer, William Hamm, which netted them \$100,000.

When Karpis and the Barkers abducted a Minnesota banker, Edward Bremer, Jr., the ransom was \$200,000, a vast fortune in those days. Bremer, as it turned out, was a friend of FDR, who threw the weight of the White House behind rounding up the Barker gang.

In Oklahoma, Karpis met the notorious “Ma” Barker who had given birth to four boys, Herman, Arthur, Lloyd, and Fred, each of whom had evolved from juvenile delinquents into dangerous criminals. Ma’s real name was most unusual—“Arizona Donnie” Clark.

As legend had it, Ma Barker was the brains behind the robberies. But Karpis soon discovered that this rather ignorant woman “couldn’t even plan breakfast.” He took over the plotting of their future bank robberies. The story that Ma Barker was the mastermind of the Karpis-Barker gang was pure fiction. Karpis charged that J. Edgar had created that myth to justify the killing of an old lady when agents gunned down “Ma” on January 16, 1935. After an intense, hour-long gun battle, both Ma and her son, Fred, were killed within the premises of a modest house in Ocklawaha, Florida. J. Edgar falsely reported that the FBI had found a tommy gun in Ma’s dying hands, and ordered that their bodies be put on public display.



J. Edgar defined “**Ma**” Barker (*top photo*) as “a she-wolf, a veritable beast of prey.” But movies and books have grossly exaggerated her role as the leader of her notorious killer sons. She wasn’t the criminal mastermind that she was said to be. According to one of her associates, “Ma Barker couldn’t even plan breakfast.” On some occasions, while her boys were out killing and looting, she’d go to the butcher shop to buy them sirloins for grilling that night.

After she and her son, **Fred Barker**, were mowed down at their hideout on Lake Weir in Florida, J. Edgar ordered that their bodies be put on public display (*bottom photo*).

Fred, her most faithful son, had always told her, “We’ll die together, Ma.”

The J. Edgar myth, not the truth, has entered popular culture. In the 1966 *Batman* series, one of the villains is Ma Barker, played by Shelley Winters. Her story was also adapted in the low-budget film *Bloody Mama* (1970), and “Ma Barker and Her Boy” was an episode of *The Untouchables* with Eliot Ness leading the assault on the Barker hideout, which was a total fabrication. The opera, *Ma Barker*, by John Eaton in 1955, is still presented at concerts.

With the gang narrowing down, another rumor was spread that Karpis had threatened to kill J. Edgar in revenge for the

shooting of Ma Barker. But, as it turned out, J. Edgar himself was the source of this wild rumor.

Late one night, when J. Edgar was in bed with Clyde, he received the phone call he'd wanted for a very long time. His FBI agents had traced Karpis, who was wanted on charges of kidnapping and murder, to an apartment house in a residential section of New Orleans.

Unusual for the time, J. Edgar chartered a 14-seater airplane. With Clyde at his side, he flew to Louisiana with a dozen other FBI men. "We're going to take Karpis this time, dead or alive," he said.

In New Orleans, J. Edgar, Clyde, and other FBI agents surrounded the apartment building where Karpis was hiding with another gang member, Fred Hunter. The FBI had to wait only one hour before Karpis and Hunter emerged from the building heading for their car. Both men got into the vehicle before agents surrounded them.

Karpis and Hunter were arrested on May 1, 1936. The arrest was routine and fairly uneventful, although it became fodder for a legend in the making.

Clyde later claimed "We ripped the joint apart with machine gun fire." However, not one bullet was fired. J. Edgar wrote a letter praising Clyde's assistance in nabbing Karpis, although Clyde had been posted as a look-out.

Only when J. Edgar was assured that the prisoners were being held at gunpoint did he emerge from around the corner. When J. Edgar found it safe to approach the car, he informed Karpis that he was under arrest. He ordered his agents to handcuff Karpis and Hunter, but discovered they had not brought the handcuffs with them. The two criminals were tied up with neckties worn by the agents.

In the official FBI version, J. Edgar and agent E. J. Connelley, the head of the special squad division, approached the car. J. Edgar, or so he claimed, lunged at Karpis through an open window and grabbed him by the collar, as Connelley moved in on Hunter who was, according to the official version, seated on the driver's side.

In J. Edgar's words, "The man upon who was bestowed the title of Public Enemy Number One folded up like the yellow rat he is. He was stammering, stuttering, shaking as if he had palsy."

J. Edgar received massive publicity in the wake of the arrest of Karpis. His favorite headline was HOOVER ORDERS STICK 'EM UP! His version of that night was pure fantasy, as he claimed he personally approached the car, putting Karpis and Hunter under arrest at gunpoint before Karpis could reach for his rifle in the backseat.

Karpis later claimed that it was not J. Edgar but agent Clarence Hurt who ran up to the side of his car and put a .351 automatic rifle to his temple. Hurt was one of the special agents who'd shot Dillinger.

After he was subdued, Karpis claimed he heard Hurt yell, "It's all clear, Chief. I saw two well-dressed men emerging from behind the apartment building wearing suits and blue shirts. One was slight and blond, the other was heavy-set with dark complexion. I recognized him at once. It was J. Edgar Hoover." Unknown to Karpis at the time, the other well-dressed man was Clyde Tolson.

In his memoirs, Karpis claimed, "The story of Hoover the hero is false. He didn't lead the attack on me. He hid until I was safely covered by many guns. He waited until he was told the coast was clear. Then he came out to reap the glory. That May day in 1936, I made Hoover's reputation as a fearless lawman. It's a reputation he doesn't deserve. I made the son-of-a-bitch."

J. Edgar's story about the rifle in the back seat was discounted. "I drove a 1936 Plymouth coupe," Karpis said. "There was no fucking back seat."

With the arrest of Karpis, the era of "Depression" criminals was coming to an end. Only Harry Brunette, another bank robber and outlaw, remained at large. He, too, was declared a Public Enemy by the FBI.

One by one, these high-profile criminals were taken down to become the stuff of legend. Wiped out were such gangsters as Jack ("Legs") Diamond whom J. Edgar, knowingly or otherwise, had sat next to at the Stork Club. Vincent ("Maddog") Coll bit the dust, as did Dutch Schultz. As for Al Capone, he was in Alcatraz slowly going insane from syphilis.

Karpis, too, ended up at Alcatraz in 1962. As the notorious prison was being shut down, he was transferred to McNeil Island Penitentiary in Washington State. There, he met a young Charles Manson and taught him how to play the guitar.

In his autobiography Karpis noted that "Little Charlie" was lazy and shiftless, the son of a prostitute who "is meek and mild for a convict." He told Karpis that he was a musician and would one day be "bigger than The Beatles."

Released from prison, Karpis fled to Spain where he died on August 26, 1979. Since sleeping pills were found by his body, it was ruled a suicide, although no autopsy was performed.

J. Edgar was one year from death himself when Karpis published his memoirs in 1971 "exposing what a coward" the FBI director was around guns.

It was the last book the FBI chief ever read. "I should have ordered him shot on sight that night in New Orleans, so he'd never live to write this pack of lies," J. Edgar said.

After all the publicity surrounding the arrest of Alvin Karpis, J. Edgar and Clyde were ready for another "showcase" arrest. The American bank robber and Depression-era outlaw, Harry Brunette, became their next target. After all, he'd been defined as Public Enemy Number One, the subject of WANTED posters displayed in post offices around the country.

A twenty-five year old former librarian, Harry Brunette, along with his partner in crime, Merle Vandenbush, had robbed a series of banks in the New York City area. Their biggest crime during 1936 involved the kidnapping of William A. Turnbull, a New Jersey state trooper.

The police in New York, cooperating with law enforcement officials in New Jersey, traced Brunette to an apartment on West 102nd Street in Manhattan, a residence they put under surveillance.

Out of professional courtesy, the NYPD contacted the Bureau and notified them of their stakeout, claiming that on the afternoon of December 14, 1936, they planned to raid the apartment and capture Brunette dead or alive.

Working behind the scenes, J. Edgar decided that he wanted to bring some glory to Clyde, his second in command at the Bureau, and allow him to personally arrest Brunette.

“Let’s jump the gun,” J. Edgar told Clyde and his agents, fully intending the double meaning. Then he concocted a plan to raid the Brunette apartment fourteen hours ahead of the schedule meticulously established by the NYPD. The city’s detectives were shocked at the noisy and highly visible arrival, unannounced, of a phalanx of agents from the Bureau.

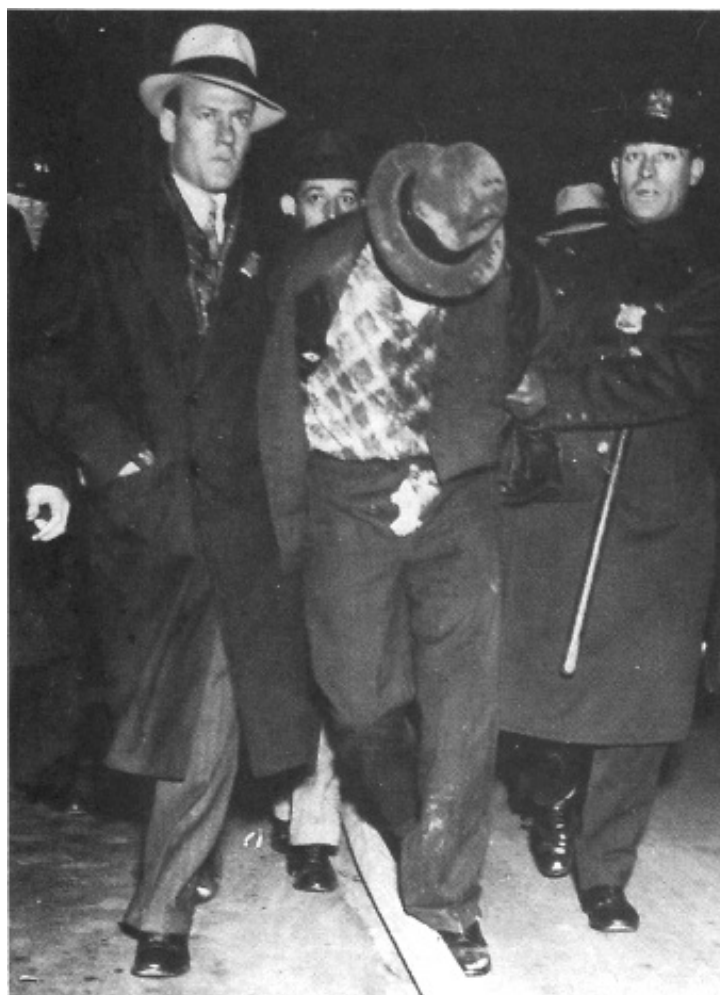
Armed with a machine gun, Clyde shot the lock off the door to Brunette’s apartment. Awakened from sleep, Brunette shot back. Two agents in back of Clyde lobbed tear gas shells into the apartment, setting it ablaze.

Brunette’s wife surrendered immediately but he fled down the hall and into a storage closet where Clyde and two agents discovered him. From the closet, he fired at them until he ran out of ammunition.

The New York City Fire Department, with alarms sounding, arrived on the scene. An overzealous G-Man held them back. As a reporter from *Newsweek* described the incident, amid the hubbub, a flustered G-Man poked a submachine gun at a husky fireman. “Dammit, can’t you read?” growled the fireman, pointing at his helmet. “If you don’t take the gun out of my stomach, I’ll bash your head in.”

The fire was subdued and Brunette surrendered. This time J. Edgar saved the glory for Clyde, who was photographed leading Brunette to a squad car.

His partner, Vandenbush, arrived on the scene and saw Brunette’s apartment under siege. When he was captured two months later, the fugitive claimed, “I stood close enough to Hoover to tap the fart on his shoulder.”



After capturing Harry Brunette (right), Clyde Tolson (left) became known, sometimes sarcastically, around FBI headquarters as “Killer Tolson.”

Armed with a Thompson machine gun, Tolson and FBI agents shot their way into the apartment of the librarian-turned-bank robber.

J. Edgar milked this arrest for all the publicity he could get. A letter he wrote his lover was made public: "You were subjected during the course of this raid to great physical danger, and you measured up to the high standard expected of all men of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Your courage and fearlessness upon this occasion are to be highly commended."

A much-publicized triumph for Clyde, during an episode that both betrayed and enraged the NYPD, the Brunette capture represented the only incidence during his long career at the FBI where he was personally and directly associated with the use of a weapon.

The G-Men captured the first headlines, but Police Commissioner Lewis J. Valentine shot back in the days that followed, accusing J. Edgar of "trying to steal the glory."

He issued an FBI press release, claiming that who captured Brunette wasn't the issue. "The issue is that we have this crook in Federal custody."

Much to J. Edgar's amusement, Clyde became known as "Killer Tolson."

One day while lunching at the Mayflower, Clyde clutched his lower stomach, complaining of a sharp, jabbing pain. J. Edgar went into a panic and ordered a nearby agent to rush him to the hospital in the Bureau's limousine, as "I don't trust ambulances."

On the way there, J. Edgar, in the rear of the limousine, offered what comfort he could, holding Clyde's hand and assuring him it was going to be all right. Clyde began to sweat profusely, and J. Edgar mopped his brow.

At the hospital, doctors informed J. Edgar that Clyde had a ruptured appendix which would require immediate surgery. Assuming the role of Clyde's legal spouse, J. Edgar gave his permission, Clyde was hauled into the operating room for a successful surgery.

When he regained consciousness, J. Edgar was at his side in his private room, holding his hand. "It's going to be okay."

For an entire week, Clyde remained in the hospital recuperating, with J. Edgar sitting by his bed. Except for routine office work, the Bureau of Investigation came to a grinding halt. All major decisions were delayed until the Chief returned to duty.

Clyde recovered rapidly and was released from the hospital. J. Edgar decided they needed a four-day post-operative vacation in New York. To his staff, he announced that they were going on a tour of the Bureau's offices in Manhattan.

In New York, they were graciously welcomed at the St. Moritz Hotel on Central Park South and given the presidential suite with a large double bed. The manager assured them the suite was complimentary. There would be no charges, even for food and drink.

Every night during their stay in New York, they were invited to the Stork Club as special guests of the columnist Walter Winchell.

Privately one night, perhaps after both J. Edgar and Winchell had had too much to drink, the columnist told his friend, "A lot of people are talking in this town. I think it's time you meet and are seen with some very glamorous women. You need some arm candy, and these stars I know are always hot for publicity. I think a deal can be worked out to give you two confirmed bachelors some much-needed exposure with the distaff side."

Winchell kept his word. To Table 50 he invited some of the headline-making, beautiful women of his day. They were often seated or photographed next to J. Edgar with Clyde sitting at the far end of the table out of camera range. No one seemed particularly interested in him, even though he was a handsome, masculine man. Perhaps the word was already out that Clyde was J. Edgar's personal property—"so hands off."

Winchell introduced Clyde and J. Edgar to the reigning model of her day, the beautiful Anita Colby, daughter of the cartoonist Bud Counihan, a legendary figure among New York artists. Making fifty dollars an hour, she was the highest paid model in New York, her lovely face and svelte figure plastered on billboards and in newspaper advertisements across the country. She was especially popular hawking cigarettes. At the time she met J. Edgar, she was planning a move to Hollywood, because "I want to be a movie star."

"You have the looks for it," J. Edgar told her.

She remembered that Clyde didn't say much to her, but "he couldn't take his eyes off me. I definitely had the feeling he was sexually attracted to me, although Sherman Billingsley had told me I was to flirt with Hoover."

Instead of building himself up as America's No. 1 G-Man, J. Edgar bragged on Clyde. J. Edgar claimed that it was Clyde, not Melvin Purvis, who had gunned down Dillinger. "I asked Clyde to tell me all about it," Anita said. "He went into a long, elaborate story about how he'd killed Dillinger, but decided to let Purvis take the credit. Later on I found out that was a complete lie. Clyde, or so I was told, wasn't even in the same town the night Dillinger was shot."



Called "The Face," Anita Colby became the most sought-after female model in America. For publicity purposes, she hung out with J. Edgar and Clyde at the Stork Club in Manhattan. She always maintained that she felt Clyde would have lived the life of a straight man had he not gone to work for J. Edgar.

"He probably would have married some woman and settled down. But what's a guy going to do when the most powerful law enforcement officer in America orders you to strip off your clothes and come to bed?"

"Winchell had told me that my two new buddies were homosexuals," she said. "That they had no interest in women whatsoever. I think that was true of Hoover. He could laugh and talk around women, but I'm sure that was as far as it went. As for Clyde, I was not so sure. Throughout our night together, I felt he was definitely interested in me. When Hoover excused himself to go to the gents' room to powder his nose, Clyde put the moves on me. He asked if he could come by my apartment the following evening, his last night in town, and perhaps take me out for dinner and dancing. I was intrigued by this silent, Gary Cooper type. I agreed and invited him for drinks at 6:30."

"He arrived exactly on the dot," she said. "Not at 6:31 or 6:29 but at 6:30pm. I was still putting on my makeup. I found him very shy around women. At one point I asked him if he were dating anyone in Washington. He said his work occupied all his time day and night. What he really meant to say, but didn't, was that Hoover occupied all his time morning, noon, and night."

"At one point he began to loosen up a bit and talk to me, but then suddenly there was an urgent ringing of my doorbell. I opened it and was shocked to see Hoover there. Without being invited, he barged into the apartment. Clyde seemed very upset to encounter his boss."

"Hoover took over the evening," she claimed. "He said he had a limousine waiting downstairs to take us to dinner at 21. In other words, he was just inserting himself into the evening."

"I decided to make it a three-way date," she said. "It was good for my image to be seen with two of the most powerful men

in America. Actually we had a great evening. When I loosened up the boys with a drink or two, I found them amusing. They certainly had the dirt on every name that was mentioned. They even told stories on their friend Winchell. They said one night in a bordello in Los Angeles, he visited a house run by a madam. The girl Winchell selected for the night rejected him because his dick was too short.”

“I thought whores had to take on all customers,” she said to them.

“Not always,” J. Edgar said. “We’ve made a study of this. In a cheap cathouse, anything goes. But some of the more high-class call gals are picky about who they’ll screw. From what I hear, the whores in the bordellos always want Errol Flynn to come back again and again, but one night with W.C. Fields is one night too many. I’m sure Mae West will agree.”

“Did you know Miss West likes big black dick, preferably attached to a boxer?” Clyde interjected.

“No, I didn’t,” she said. “But I do now. I’ll spread the news.”

“That night at my door, Clyde gave me a kiss on one cheek, J. Edgar on the other, and that was as far as our relationship went. I gave them my phone number in Hollywood, and each of them said he’d call.”

Anita was billed throughout the country as “The Face.” “It made me wonder about the rest of my body.”

In spite of the awkward beginning of their relationship, Anita became friends with both G-Men. “They were really voyeurs,” she said. “I was dating both Clark Gable and Jimmy Stewart. They wanted to know details, all the details, even anatomical ones, about both of these stars. I told them that Jimmy was the real stud in bed and that Clark, to my disappointment, was rather underendowed. They seemed to find that fascinating.”

“They were particularly intrigued when I told them that one night, in Palm Springs, Clark took me to a cocktail party. There were nothing but homosexuals there. I was surprised. Clark seemed too macho for that!”

“It could be all pretense,” J. Edgar said, “although we have a long list of women he’s bedded at MGM. Clyde and I will look into this. He had some homosexual liaisons in his past, especially when he was a young, struggling actor. We know for a fact that he spent entire nights at the homes of William Haines, Ramon Novarro, and George Cukor. Howard Hughes took him away for a weekend in San Francisco where they shared a suite with a double bed.”

“I became their Louella Parsons in Hollywood,” Anita said. “Sometimes I called them two or three times a week with little tidbits of gossip. I was invited to a party at the home of Barbara Hutton when she was married to Cary Grant. Clark Gable took me. At some point in the evening, Barbara told me that Clark had once asked her to marry him. ‘I should have accepted his proposal,’ she said. ‘I love Cary dearly, but he’s a homosexual.’”

“We know that,” J. Edgar said. “He and Randolph Scott were more than roommates. Once Grant was arrested in the men’s room of a department store in downtown Los Angeles. Money exchanged hands. It was hushed up. He also had to pay off a mother who threatened to sue him for picking up her teenage boy and propositioning him.”

On another night, Anita said that she’d been taken by actor Bruce Cabot to a party at the home of Errol Flynn. “There were about thirty people there. The most amazing thing happened. Errol went around greeting and talking to his guests, but he had unzipped his trousers and was displaying his penis. Later he masturbated himself until he was erect. Then he played a little tune on his piano, using his penis, not his fingers.”

J. Edgar told Anita that, “We’re getting a lot of disturbing reports on Flynn, and we’ll definitely have to add your tidbit to his dossier.”

Before he put down the phone, Clyde wanted to know if Errol was circumcised. She told him he wasn’t.

“What about Clark?” J. Edgar asked.

“Definitely not, but in his case he should have been,” she said. “His foreskin extends far too long.”

“When I decided that Hollywood wasn’t for me—or, more accurately—I wasn’t for Hollywood, I returned to New York to resume my modeling career. Through Winchell I encountered Clyde and Hoover on a few occasions—at the Stork, Morocco, or the Colony. They were quite the night clubbers in those days. But by then I knew what the situation was. Clyde was Hoover’s boy. Once they invited me and my companion to tour the FBI headquarters in Washington, and we did.”

She was referring to Frank Ryan, a wealthy young Washingtonian who was showering her with jewelry.

In the late 1950s, when Anita was invited as the house guest of Princess Grace of Monaco, J. Edgar and Clyde contacted her after she flew back to New York.

“They wanted to know all the details,” she said. “I viewed myself at that point as an FBI informant. I told them that Grace already had taken upon herself a handsome young beach boy from Nice and that Prince Rainier often flew to Paris to shack up with his mistress who was installed in a luxurious apartment there.”

By the time Anita married Palen Flagler in 1970, she more or less lost touch with Clyde and J. Edgar, who were getting old. J. Edgar would soon die.

“I really miss those two boys,” she told her long-time friend and former model of the early 40s, author Stanley Mills Haggart.

“Stanley had been a leg man for Hedda Hopper years ago, and he was interested in all the gossip I’d told Hoover,” she said, “especially the really wicked stuff. Of course, Hedda couldn’t print the stuff that I came up with. Stanley also told me that many of the items he discovered couldn’t be printed either. Times were different then.”

“I’ve spent most of my life looking and talking like a lady, but with Clyde and Hoover I could talk dirty without being judged a whore. How many women can pull off that trick?”

J. Edgar was delighted to meet a New Orleans-born singer at the Stork Club. She was in her twenties and called herself Dorothy Lamour, a name inspired by that of her stepfather, Clarence Lambour. Heading to Chicago after she won the Miss New Orleans beauty contest, she ended up working as an elevator operator at Marshall Field’s. Finally, she got a gig singing with bandleader Herbie Kay on his radio show, “The Yeast Foamers.” She married him while still a teenager but they were incompatible.

Fleeing to New York she worked briefly as a prostitute for Polly Adler, who was the reigning madam of the city, although frequently raided by the police.

Billingsley introduced Dorothy to J. Edgar. The Stork Club owner had a crush on her, and he’d hired her as a singer, later finding her “without talent.” He’d warned Dorothy, “It’s just for show. Hoover and Tolson are as queer as a three-dollar bill, but it’ll get you some publicity if you become Hoover’s arm candy.”



The press erroneously promoted a *faux* romance between J. Edgar and screen siren **Dorothy Lamour** (above). But instead of the FBI director, she was having an affair with a former bootlegger, **Sherman Billingsley**, who ran the celebrity-haunted Stork Club in Manhattan.

When Dorothy migrated to Hollywood, J. Edgar and Clyde often stayed at the home she shared with her new husband. “On several occasions, Eddie like to dress up wearing one of my famous sarongs. He didn’t look all that great impersonating me, but what the hell, the guy worked hard and deserved some fun in life.”

Sherman Billingsley ran the Stork Club, the most famous night spot in Manhattan, where he frequently entertained J. Edgar and his lover, Clyde Tolson.

Founded as a Jazz Age speakeasy, the club achieved its greatest fame in the 1940s, attracting movie stars such as Clark Gable and Joan Crawford, New York City mayors, gangsters such as Dutch Schultz, and royalty which included the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. As the years went on, John F. Kennedy wooed Jacqueline Bouvier here, and Prince Rainier showed up with the blonde film goddess, Grace Kelly.

“Sherman ruled the club with a velvet fist,” said Dorothy Lamour, who was his lover when Ethel Merman wasn’t around.

Veteran newsman Ralph de Toledano covered the FBI as one of his beats for *Newsweek*. He admitted that J. Edgar knew the “reigning sirens of the period, including Dorothy. But he was never serious in his attentions.”

He told newsmen, “I was in love once when I was young.” He never named the object of his affection. Nor did he indicate the sex of the person he was referring to. It could have been one of his schoolboy crushes on a man.

Rumors spread quickly through the New York grapevine, reaching Washington. The word was out, J. Edgar had fallen for the glamorous Stork Club singer, Dorothy Lamour. “It took a Louisiana Southern beauty, a real sweet magnolia, to melt the ultimate icy cold G-Man,” wrote one columnist, getting the facts all wrong. J. Edgar, of course, had fallen for the third party at the table, Clyde Tolson himself, who looked on and appeared somewhat irritated at times at the charade they had to play in public.

What started out as a mere publicity stunt developed into a friendship that would last a lifetime, as J. Edgar saw Dorothy through the ups and downs of movie stardom. She knew she could always turn to him for advice “and to rescue me whenever I fell into a manhole.”

In her own memoirs, *My Side of the Road*, Dorothy called J. Edgar “a friend of the family,” which is a far more accurate description than those who have ridiculously suggested some grand romance between the two of them.

Eventually, in 1936, Dorothy gravitated to Hollywood where she became a star playing Ulah, a sort of female Tarzan in *The Jungle Princess*. She wore a sarong, which became an outfit famously associated with her, especially when she burst into international fame with Bob Hope and Bing Crosby in a series of box office champions, the Road pictures, beginning with *Road to Singapore* in 1940.

For his fifty-eighth birthday celebration, Franklin D. Roosevelt invited both Dorothy and J. Edgar Hoover to the White House for a gala celebration. Dorothy appeared on the arm of the handsome matinee idol, Tyrone Power, with whom she’d starred in *Johnny Apollo* (1940). When she had a moment alone with J. Edgar, she whispered to him, “We’re having a torrid affair.”

He asked her to call him the following day because he had quite a dossier on Power that he felt she should know about.

For his date that night, J. Edgar invited Lela Rogers, the mother of Ginger. FDR went against Washington protocol. Most hosts always invited J. Edgar and Clyde as a couple, but FDR thought it would be better for him to have a woman accompany him to the White House celebration.

A furious Clyde was left at home. Throughout the rest of his life, he always said, “I hate Roosevelt’s guts.”

When Dorothy called J. Edgar the following morning, she was stunned at his revelations about the sexual life of Tyrone. She was unaware that he was bisexual and was virtually the kept boy of aviator Howard Hughes. She also learned that he was engaged in ongoing affairs with the other two reigning matinee idols of the day, Errol Flynn and Robert Taylor.

While seeing Dorothy, Tyrone was also slipping around in and out of the bedrooms of Betty Grable, his co-star in *A Yank in the RAF* (1941) and Rita Hayworth, his co-star in *Blood and Sand* (1941).

J. Edgar saved the final, shocking revelation for last. “He indulges in coprophagia.”

“What in hell is that?” she asked.

“Feces eating.”

There was a long pause. “I want to vomit.”

“Clyde interviewed an eighteen-year-old boy who was hired for the occasion. A gathering of these shit-eaters took place at the apartment of Monty Woolley. Our file on that lusty old perv would stretch from the Capitol building to Annapolis.”

Shocked and horrified, Dorothy dropped Tyrone at once and refused to come to the phone when he called her. He never knew why.

In lieu of a father, Dorothy turned to J. Edgar with her problems. Once when she complained that a producer didn’t have the money to finance a play in which she wanted to star, he came to her rescue. Through Clyde, he arranged for a Texas oil millionaire, who owed J. Edgar a big favor or two, to put up the money. Regrettably, the play flopped.

The biggest rescue of Dorothy came, however, when *Confidential* magazine in the 1950s was going to publish an exposé of Dorothy, revealing that during a bleak period in her life she’d been a prostitute for the New York madam, Polly Adler. No one knows what exactly took place, but Clyde paid a visit to the offices of *Confidential*. The story about Dorothy was never published.

Ovid Demaris wrote a biography of J. Edgar, based on the memories of those who remembered him, in 1975 shortly after his death. Called *The Director*, it contained an interview with William Ross Howard III, Dorothy’s second husband, whom she’d married in 1943. The couple had two sons.

Howard claimed that J. Edgar and Clyde stayed with them during their annual visits to La Jolla in California. “He was an expert at barbecue and made a wicked drink called a G-Man,” Howard said.

J. Edgar and Clyde slept in a double bed in their guest room.

One evening, without an invitation, gossip maven Louella Parsons arrived unannounced on the Howard doorstep. Dorothy let her in, but was afraid she might put something in her column about the intimate relationship of J. Edgar and Clyde. But Parsons admired J. Edgar and the FBI and kept his secrets.

Don Smith, the former manager of the Del Mar racetrack when Bing Crosby operated it, would also be visited by Clyde and J. Edgar after they’d spent time with Dorothy and her husband. “Clyde did everything for J. Edgar,” Smith said. “They were as close as any two men could be.”

Allegedly, he said, “that stuff about J. Edgar and Dorothy being lovers is pure bullshit.”

When Dorothy and Howard lived on the outskirts of Baltimore, she would often drive into Washington to dine with J. Edgar and Clyde at Harvey’s. “In some ways they were my closest friends. They visited me on at least two occasions when I was doing a Road picture with Bob Hope. Whenever we traveled abroad, such as to London, they always had agents who paved the way for us and handled any problem that arose on the road.”

“The sweetest gesture,” she recalled, “was when our boy, Tommy Howard, was born. Edgar sent an agent and had his toe

prints put on a gold coin. As Tommy grew older, he started calling him Uncle Edgar.”

Dorothy recalled one of the last times she saw Clyde and J. Edgar was when they showed up for her nightclub act in the 1960s at El Rancho Vegas in Las Vegas. “Clyde had lost a lot of weight and looked haggard.” She found out later that he’d suffered two massive strokes. “I fear he didn’t have much longer to live, and I didn’t know what J. Edgar would do without him. They were so close I feared J. Edgar might commit suicide.”

J. Edgar, in private moments, wished to deflect his homosexuality by painting a picture of Dorothy as “the gal who got away. After my romance with her, no other woman would do.” Of course, that was pure hype with no basis in reality.



J. Edgar broke up the blossoming affair between **Tyrone Power** and **Dorothy Lamour**, with whom she’d starred in *Johnny Apollo* (1940). She was unaware at the time that he was bisexual, having affairs with both Howard Hughes and Robert Taylor.

But what really ended Dorothy’s affair with him was when J. Edgar revealed a sexual perversion that the “Queen of the Sarongs” found “disgusting.”

J. Edgar had also learned that Errol Flynn broke up with Power “because he wanted me to do things to him I considered vile.”

Dorothy’s name surfaced after J. Edgar’s death when the Senate launched an investigation into FBI corruption. It was later revealed that J. Edgar frequently used FBI money to entertain Dorothy and Howard. One investigator recalled that J. Edgar and his agents spent a lot of FBI cash creating an artificial moon, an electric globe way up in a tree, as a prop for a lavish party for Dorothy. She had made a movie called *Moon Over Burma* (1940), and she’d also introduced the song “The Moon of Manakoora,” which became her standard.

J. Edgar and Clyde usually detested vulgar women, especially the out-spoken Tallulah Bankhead, a Stork regular. She was always making veiled references to their homosexuality. “The bitch is one to talk,” Clyde said. “She’s had more pussy than Porfirio Rubirosa, not to mention everyone in pants.”

One night, fueled by too much alcohol, Tallulah stopped by their Table 50 at the Stork Club when Winchell was interviewing someone at the bar. “Good evening, Mr. Hoover,” she said. “I understand that to join the FBI, a G-Man has to have at least nine inches.” He ignored her. She looked over at Clyde. “And how is Mrs. Hoover tonight?”

But in a complete reversal of their usual tastes in women, J. Edgar and Clyde virtually adopted Ethel Merman as “our all-time gal pal.” With her powerful and strident voice, she seemed the epitome of vulgarity and was known for her dirty jokes. The first time she heard what eventually became her standard, “Everything’s Coming Up Roses,” she quipped, “Everything’s

coming up Rose's what?"



As J. Edgar Hoover aged, his face grew stern and rigid. It was often compared to that of a bulldog. But regardless of how he looked, Clyde Tolson was always there for him, always at his side, morning, noon, and night.

A closeted homosexual and a transvestite, J. Edgar intimidated presidents who were afraid to fire him because of the damaging secrets he possessed. He ruled the FBI for nearly fifty years and struck fear in everyone from public officials to private citizens.

She even sent out tasteless Christmas cards. On one was a picture of Santa Claus, proclaiming "Have I got a big surprise for you." When the recipient opened the card, a large penis popped up.

For reasons known only to themselves, Clyde and J. Edgar viewed Ethel as their favorite entertainer, both on and off the stage.

When Sherman Billingsley first escorted J. Edgar and Clyde into the Cub Room, he said he created this annex to the rest of his club by cutting through the wall into a neighboring building. He converted it into the most exclusive part of the Stork Club because he wanted a place for his flame, Ethel Merman, to drink and relax after delivering a performance on Broadway.

"When Sherman told me that Clyde and J. Edgar considered me their favorite star, I had to meet them, and he arranged a dinner for us at the Stork Club," Ethel said. "It was one of those things where we bonded for a lifetime. They became my best friends. What a swell pair of guys, and they were so much in love. Under those draped linen tables at the Stork Club they held hands. I found that very romantic."

J. Edgar and Clyde had met Ethel when she'd opened on Broadway with Bob Hope in the musical *Red, Hot, & Blue!* by Cole Porter. In the show she'd introduced a song, "It's De-Lovely," which became one of her standards.

At a late-night champagne dinner, the two G-Men were enchanted by this brassy New Yorker who had been born in Astoria, Queens as "Agnes Zimmermann."

Amazingly, she brought these two closeted homosexuals out of hiding and immediately accepted their relationship. Of course, she'd been prepped by Billingsley himself before meeting the two FBI lovers. As the night wore on, she bonded with Clyde and J. Edgar, paying equal attention to both members of the pair.

To Clyde, she jokingly whispered, "Every time you top John, do you borrow my song, 'I Got Rhythm?'" When he laughed, she said, "I've made the Sphinx laugh!"

"Of course, you might also want to borrow another one of my songs, 'Blow, Gabriel, Blow,'" she said. "You can change it, of course, to 'Blow, John, Blow.'"

She was the only person who ever called J. Edgar "John." She later said, "John wasn't the talkative type. Clyde was the one with the quips. And John was careful never to lend the FBI's name to any commercial endorsements, especially anything a little risqué. But one way or another he came through for *Red, Hot, and Blue!*, telling the *New York Post*'s Michael Mok, "It's a bright entertainment, put over with lots of style, and there's quite a lot of truth in the cracks."

J. Edgar told her he approved of her love affair with Billingsley. "A perfect mating. The Queen of Broadway meets the

King of the Night.”

“Sherman treats me like a queen,” she said. “I bet he does the same for you.”

In normal circumstances, J. Edgar would never tolerate such kidding, but he found it amusing coming from the belting mouth of Ethel. “I adore you guys,” she said after their first meeting. “From this night on, consider me your den mother.”

Their first night had gone so well J. Edgar and Clyde came to see her show again, escorting her to the club after the performance.

At the door to the Stork Club, she greeted “Albino,” the long-time doorman. She flipped up her skirt, exposing bare flesh, as she wore no bloomers. “That’s in lieu of a tip.” Albino later told Clyde, “I’d rather have a dollar tip. Looking at that overworked pussy of hers doesn’t help me feed a wife and kids.”

J. Edgar agreed that Ethel was treated like royalty. Billingsley even kept a waiter by her side just to light her cigarettes, and he gave her expensive presents including bottles of *Sortilège*, a chic perfume whose distributorship he had acquired. For no reason at all, he sent her cases of the best French champagne.

Ethel’s biographer, Brian Kellow, wrote of her immense sexual attraction to Billingsley, whom she found extremely masculine. She told J. Edgar and Clyde, “At first he frightened me but I learned to melt those ice blue eyes of his. He is uncompromising about running the Stork Club the way you run the FBI, monitoring everything yourself. When I met him, I knew I’d found my soulmate, the way you did when you met this adorable Clyde here. I know Clyde looks stiff and formal on the outside. But, as they say, still waters run deep.”

On another visit to New York, Clyde and J. Edgar double-dated with Ethel and Billingsley and were seen dining at the Italian Pavilion of the 1939-40 World’s Fair. In the arcade shooting gallery, both J. Edgar and Clyde showed her what crack shots they were. “You guys hit those fake rabbits and ducks so well I can understand why Dillinger didn’t have a chance against you two.” Of course, J. Edgar and Clyde had not been at the scene of the slaughter of Dillinger, but they didn’t really want anyone to think differently.

One night at the Stork Club, J. Edgar had a double date—he with Clyde and Ethel with the bisexual actress, Bea Lillie. She amused them with her quick wit. She preferred lager, a lot of it, as Ethel downed champagne. That night Ethel revealed to J. Edgar that she, too, had a dark secret to equal his closeted homosexuality. “I’m a lesbian on alternate Sundays. Bea and I are having an affair.”



It was an unconventional friendship, but the Broadway stage star, **Ethel Merman**, who could belt out a song like no other, became [her words] “John and Clyde’s gun moll.”

She told the G-Men about her affairs, both with men and women, and they shared details about the intimate aspects of their lives with her.

She often purchased gowns and lingerie for J. Edgar when he wanted to dress in drag. J. Edgar warned her that “Judy Garland’s a bit young for you...you might get into trouble.” Garland was only a teenager at the time Merman seduced her.

The first time J. Edgar and Clyde visited Ethel at her home in California, she took them to her bedroom, where she opened her closet door. “Those two urns contain mom and dad. I like to open the closet and see those I love the most.”

As Ethel remembered Bea, “She looked as if she had just come out of a bandbox—always with that little Juliet cap she wore. She had lovely skin and wore only light powder and a little rouge. In her own peculiar way, I thought she was stunning. And funny!”

J. Edgar trusted Ethel enough to reveal to her one of his darkest secrets. He was a cross-dresser but only in the privacy of his home—never at a private party. She took this revelation in stride. In the words of Ethel’s biographer, Geoffrey Mark, “She even helped him go shopping for ladies’ apparel at the finest stores.” Of course, the sales clerks understood that the star was buying apparel for herself—certainly not for the director of the FBI.

Clyde and J. Edgar had to miss Ethel’s opening of *Stars in Your Eyes* (1939) because of pressing FBI business in Washington. But a telegram arrived on opening night. SINCERE GOOD WISHES TO YOU AND YOUR NEW SHOW. WE’RE SORRY WE CAN’T BE IN THE FRONT ROW TO HISS—TO KISS YOU. She told her co-star that Clyde must have written that telegram. “John doesn’t have that much humor.”

In 1978, years after both the deaths of J. Edgar and Clyde, Anita Bryant, the orange juice queen of Florida, launched her homo-phobic campaign against gay men, labeling them child molesters.

Beginning in Dade County, her campaign spread across the nation. A reporter cornered Ethel for her reaction. “Miss Merman, what do you think about what Bryant is doing?”

“Some of my best friends were or are homosexuals,” Ethel said. “Take J. Edgar Hoover, for instance. He virtually created the FBI. Many homosexuals are the most creative and dynamic people in America. I’m all for these guys. To each his own.”

Except for very brief mention here and there, Guy Hotell is almost a non-presence in biographies of J. Edgar Hoover. Guy has virtually disappeared from the FBI roll call. Yet for twenty-five years, he was the second most important man in J. Edgar’s life, ranking just behind Clyde Tolson himself.

J. Edgar had met the football player at George Washington University, but their friendship didn’t begin until decades later. Guy was a very masculine, rambunctious playboy. As J. Edgar remembered it, he was recognized as the stud of the university, and many of the female students chased after him. “In those days, Guy could have his pick of almost any gal he wanted,” J. Edgar said.

Clyde did not want it known that he was actually living with his boss, so J. Edgar rented him a two-bedroom apartment at the Westchester Apartments on Cathedral Avenue in Washington, DC. Clyde suggested that to cut down on his rent, he should rent out the extra bedroom.

“We have to rent it to someone we trust,” J. Edgar told him. “I know just the right man. Guy Hotell.”

At the time, Guy worked as a young executive for AETNA, an insurance company. Within two years, the insurance people wanted to transfer him to the Rocky Mountain states, but he didn’t want to go. Subsequently, J. Edgar hired him as a special agent at the FBI.

Right after Guy moved in, he was soon seen dining almost every night with J. Edgar and Clyde at Harvey’s, their favorite hangout.

“I was Clyde’s roommate in name only,” Guy later claimed. “The apartment was only for appearance’s sake, as he spent his nights with Eddie, coming home for a change of clothing.”

One agent had to deliver an urgent document on a Sunday to J. Edgar’s modest home. He found the director in his back yard, dressed in slacks and a jazzy sports shirt. He was digging in the dirt around his beloved tea roses. Clyde was frying pork chops on the stove, and Guy was raking the grass, removing debris from a recent rainstorm. “The scene was very domestic, very cozy, a happy trio tending to their home,” the agent claimed.

In later years, J. Edgar would try to erase any connection he had with Guy, and the file he kept on his special agent mysteriously disappeared after Guy left the bureau.

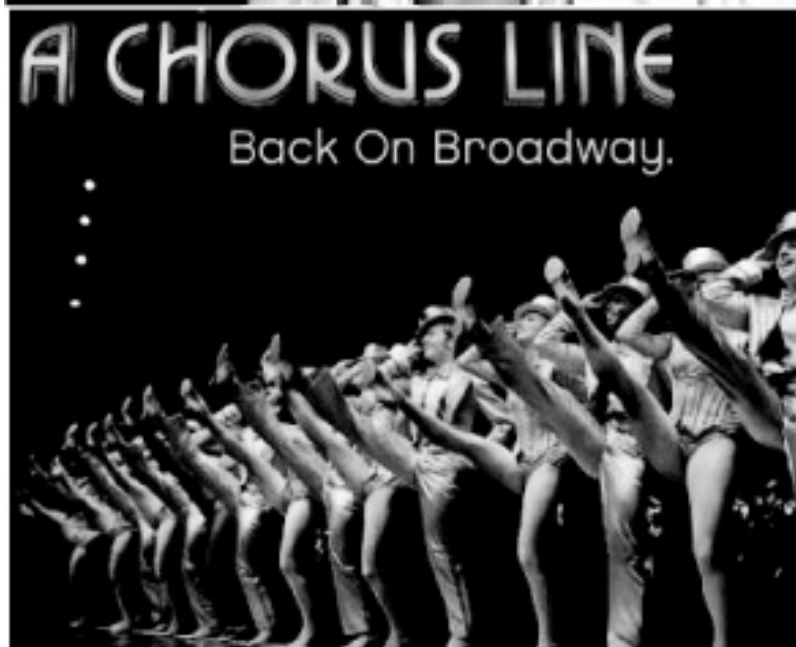
J. Edgar eventually turned on Guy because he was one of those “loose-lipped type of guys who sink ships.” When he drank excessively, which he did frequently in later years, Guy dined out on stories about his years with J. Edgar and Clyde.

At one point in the 1980s, he agreed to “tell all” to the author James Kirkwood Jr., who won the Pulitzer Prize for his Broadway musical, *A Chorus Line*.

“Jimmy,” as he was called by his friends, was the lover of another novelist, James Leo Herlihy author of *Midnight Cowboy*, the book that inspired the Oscar-winning movie (in 1969) with the same name. Jimmy was also a personal friend of Clay Shaw, a homosexual New Orleans businessman tried by district attorney Jim Garrison in New Orleans on trumped-up conspiracy charges associated with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas in November of 1963. Shaw was later acquitted.

As an author and investigative reporter, Jimmy thought the story of Shaw’s ordeal would make a lively yarn, and he signed to write the first-ever biography on Shaw, whom he invited down to his residence in Key West. Shaw showed up with Guy Hotell, who had been his lover in younger days.

During a yachting excursion to an offshore and uninhabited island in the Florida Keys, arranged by local businessman Bill Johnson, Jimmy spent hours talking with Guy, who told him “fantastic stories” about his life with J. Edgar and Clyde, each of whom were long dead, of course. Jimmy became so intrigued that he began to negotiate with Guy to do a second biography after he finished his memoirs of Shaw, which was eventually published under the title of *American Grotesque*.



"I did not kill President Kennedy," **Clay Shaw** (*top photo*) told his biographer, **James Kirkwood** (*middle photo*), an author who won the Pulitzer Prize for his Broadway musical *A Chorus Line*.

Shaw had been charged with conspiring to murder the President, but was later exonerated. Shaw flew to Key West for extensive interviews with Kirkwood. With him was Guy Hotell, who had been Clyde Tolson's roommate in Washington, DC, and one of the few persons who ever witnessed firsthand the intimate dynamic between "Eddie and Clyde."

A first-rate *raconteur*, Jimmy was the son of two famous actors, James Kirkwood Sr. (the lover of Mary Pickford) and Lila Lee (who had starred with Rudolph Valentino). Jimmy entertained guests at parties in Los Angeles, New York, and Key West with tales of J. Edgar, Guy, and Clyde. At one point, he planned to call his second biography *The Gay Adventures of J. Edgar Hoover and Clyde Tolson*.

Regrettably, Jimmy died of spinal cancer in 1989, and Guy died a few months later. But much of what is known about Guy's FBI days came from what Jimmy Kirkwood learned from Guy about this strange trio and the complexities of their relationship.

Had J. Edgar not found Guy so compelling, he would have dismissed him as a pervert and fired him from the bureau. Guy was a true bisexual, often proclaiming "all cats are gray at night."

In his book, *Hoover's F.B.I.*, former agent William W. Turner claimed that J. Edgar was the ultimate hypocrite, preaching family values during the day but leading a secret homosexual life at night. "As director, he bashed homosexuals with a vengeance," Turner said. "They were barred from Bureau employment at any level. The few who slipped through the screening process simply disappeared when discovered."



After two months of working for "Clyde and Eddie" (*left and middle figures, above*), FBI agent **Guy Hotell** (*right figure, above*) came to realize that his duties, which continued over the course of several years, involved "arranging private things for these guys who lived deep in the closet."

"Pimp is too nasty a word," Guy revealed, "but these boys couldn't very well arrange sexual liaisons themselves. They were too famous. I spent several nights with them when I was younger and still had a full head of hair."

"They also wanted me to go with them on nearly all their vacations. We had fun in those days. But unlike Clyde and Eddie, I was also a lady killer."

It wasn't just homosexuals that J. Edgar would fire. Turner claimed he was known for his arbitrary harshness. Once when

the director rode up on the elevator with one of the Bureau's teenage clerks, he noticed his face was covered with unsightly pimples. That afternoon the nineteen-year-old received his pink slip.

Married four times, Guy was known as a "wife beater." He always maintained that, "I am basically straight, but tempted by boy ass every other week." He also complained that he felt his roommate, Clyde, was basically straight as well, but was "detoured" into homosexuality by J. Edgar.

Guy maintained that Clyde formed attachments to two different women in 1939—one Edna Daulyton, a waitress in a café near the Justice Department, and another, Louise Edwards, who worked as a secretary in the Bureau's Washington headquarters.

In anger, Clyde broke off with Daulyton because she accused him of being "a fairy at Hoover's beck and call." When J. Edgar found out about Clyde's relationship with Edwards, he had her transferred to the Bureau's office in Kansas City.

FBI agents found Guy the friendliest of the trio, with the most engaging personality. "Tolson wore a perpetual frown like he was worried about something all the time," said one agent. G-Men claimed that J. Edgar had the face of a bulldog complete with that spatulate nose.

In the words of one G-Man in the Washington Bureau, "Hoover had a crooked smile but almost never smiled. When he fixed those brown eyes on you, I'm sure he looked like those monsters who dropped the gas pellets in the Nazi concentration camps. When he talked, it was with the syncopation of an FBI submachine gun."

"I liked women more than I liked men," Guy revealed to Jimmy. "But I engaged in a three-way with Clyde and Eddie whenever they wanted me to. I was a top man. So was Clyde. J. Edgar liked to be a sandwich between us."

"They also liked me to arrange certain gay parties for them, since each of them would never dare do it on their own," Guy said. "I was, in essence, their pimp. In fact, I seemed to have been hired for that job alone as I didn't do much work for the Bureau."

"I went with them on their vacations to Florida, California, and the Caribbean," Guy said. "These were disguised as inspection tours, but they spent more time at the nightclubs and race tracks than inspecting any local bureaus."

"I also attended fabulous parties with them," Guy said. "Eddie had many wealthy admirers who entertained him, along with Clyde and me. At banquets and parties those tire people and those car moguls made us feel like we were Louis XIV at the Court of Versailles." He no doubt was referring to executives of Firestone and Ford.

Guy recalled two trips with J. Edgar and Clyde when they were booked into the Flamingo Hotel in Miami. "We had a private terrace where we could sunbathe in the nude. Eddie wasn't all that endowed, and he liked to see Clyde and me walk around in the nude because both of us were low dangles. It was on one such afternoon there on that terrace that the notorious photograph was taken."

He was referring to an underground photograph that was alleged to have been taken of J. Edgar performing fellatio on Clyde. Although shot at a distance, no doubt from a tree, J. Edgar's face was clearly visible, Clyde's face less so, according to Guy who saw the photograph when it arrived at J. Edgar's private address in Washington.

It was rumored that the long distance photographer was hired by the Jewish gangster Meyer Lansky, who maintained his headquarters in Miami. Lansky once bragged to Frank Sinatra in Havana that he possessed such an incriminating photograph. "It's blackmail, sweetheart," Lansky told the singer. "That picture will keep Hoover a very good boy and out of my business."

"That's what I would call a Mexican standoff," Frank later told his friends.

On another occasion, at a gathering of the nation's arch criminals in Havana at the Hotel Nacional in 1947, Lansky exhibited the fellatio photograph. He announced to the assembled group of gangsters, "The director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation has been fixed. Of course, all of us should still be discreet when we have to kill someone like Bugsy Siegel."

On another trip to Florida, Clyde, Guy, and J. Edgar checked into Miami's Gulfstream Hotel. The following day Clyde joined some agents who wanted to head early in the morning to the Florida Keys on a fishing trip. J. Edgar remained behind with Guy.

Later in the day Guy was contacted about a case in Miami where the Bureau had apprehended a seventeen-year-old boy, Ricky Mazzini. He had stolen a car in Atlanta, robbed a service station, and had driven all the way to Miami where he was arrested by local police. Since the boy had crossed state lines while committing these crimes, it was viewed as a matter for the FBI.

Guy was sent to interview the boy. He told his would-be biographer, Jimmy Kirkwood, "The kid was a knock-out, a real sexy looker even at his age. I arranged to have Ricky released in my custody. I took him over to our suite at the Gulfstream. Eddie was at a private cabana on the beach at the time. While he was away, the kid and I had a hot time. He must have been broken in when he was eight years old."

"When Eddie returned, I could tell he was hot for Ricky, too," Guy claimed. "He asked me if he could spend a couple of hours in the bedroom with Ricky. The boy was only too willing. They spent a good part of the afternoon in that bedroom. I could just imagine what went on. Before five o'clock Eddie told me to give the boy a hundred dollar bill, drive him to the Greyhound bus station in Miami, and buy him a ticket back to Atlanta where he lived with his grandmother. The Bureau's case against him was dropped. When Clyde returned from the Keys, we had supper together and nothing was ever said about how

Eddie and I spent the afternoon.”

On yet another vacation to Miami Beach, J. Edgar booked a suite for himself, Clyde, and Guy at the Gulf-stream Hotel, a return visit. “Since I knew Eddie cheated on Clyde behind his back, I figured Clyde should have some fun on the side. I was still convinced he was basically straight. Boy, did I make a mistake. I arranged a double date with two models, who were really prostitutes. We were going to make it a foursome for the evening.”

“The next day, when Eddie found out, he threw a hissy fit,” Guy said. “He locked himself in the bathroom and started screaming and banging on the walls. At one point he threatened to cut his wrists with a razor. I couldn’t believe this was happening, and the plans for our four-way were nipped in the bud. Clyde helped me break down the door. No, this time, ‘Killer Tolson’ didn’t use a machine gun. I even slapped Eddie’s face to try to bring him to his senses.”

Because of Guy’s “loose lips,” the story made its way back to the FBI Bureau in Washington. Former agent William W. Turner referred to it in his book *Hoover’s F.B.I.*

“After Eddie warned me never to do that again, I left the Gulfstream and had to take care of the two whores by my self, which was an easy task for a man like me,” Guy said. “I once took on five *putas* in one night. When I got back to the suite that night, Eddie and Clyde were sleeping peacefully in each other’s arms. Very romantic, I would say, though Eddie sure wasn’t much of a looker, although some dog fanciers actually see a certain beauty in a bulldog’s face.”



“The Jew was the brains of the outfit.” Or so said Lucky Luciano about the gangster **Meyer Lansky**, pictured above.

“He was one smart guy and had blackmail evidence on Hoover. He more or less told the FBI to back off so we could go about our business. I never liked him, but Lansky was useful. You can stay in the mob as long as we find you useful. After that, it’s the kiss of death.”

As late as 1950, J. Edgar maintained to the Senate Special Committee to investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce that “there is no such thing as a national crime syndicate.”

As Guy later related to Jimmy Kirkwood, “The most compromising vacation Clyde, Eddie, and I took together was to Havana, Nassau, and San Juan. The trip would have far-reaching political and espionage implications.”

Guy and J. Edgar loved to go on vacations under the pretense of executing the business of the FBI. Since the arms of the Bureau stretched virtually everywhere, he could devise and disguise a business trip whenever it suited his need for a holiday.

One morning, he woke up with a mission. He decided that what he, as well as Clyde and Guy, needed was a luxurious eight-night vacation which would incorporate visits to Miami, Havana, San Juan, and Nassau. From his office, he ordered Special Agent Robert Page Burrus to make all the arrangements.

In a memo dated February 11, 1936, Burris wrote “The Boss,” claiming that his luggage would not be inspected at any port of call and that his presence in these exotic locales would not be made available to the press.

Winging their way to Florida, the trio checked in once again for an overnight stay at the Flamingo Hotel in Miami, before flying on to decadent Havana. In Cuba their luggage was transferred to the deluxe Sevilla-Biltmore Hotel on the Prado.

In this heady world of tropical nights, J. Edgar discovered “the Paris of the Americas,” and he joined forces with Clyde and Guy to sample the forbidden pleasures of the city. But he warned his agents they had to be very discreet. “I’ve got a lot of enemies, and they’d love to entrap me in something.”

In nighttime Havana, high rollers could mambo their way through the casinos, and later attend sex shows or patronize bordellos. In these well-decorated whorehouses, there was a steady supply of beautiful young girls or handsome young men, depending on a client’s preference.

Guy later recalled to author James Kirkwood, “Eddie wore a silly mustache, a pair of dark glasses, and a hat pulled down as we made the rounds, but no one seemed to recognize him. At that time in his life, his bulldog face was not much known to the Cuban people. Clark Gable and Franklin D. Roosevelt they knew.”

“Boy prostitution was rampant, and I slipped away with Clyde and Eddie to sample the treats at what we were told was the best male bordello in Havana. It was known as ‘Cocktail.’ We expected the rooms to be painted cherry red, and so they were. I’d arranged for Eddie and Clyde to inspect the boys in a private salon because they didn’t want to be observed by the other male clients, most of whom were visiting Americans. The madam was actually a male. She paraded some twenty young men in front of us. All of them were shirtless and had on very revealing, tight white pants. Before the night was over, we’d booked four of them, maybe five. Clyde and J. Edgar shared a bedroom, and I had a room all to myself. Both of my studs had golden skin and were willing to do everything. Right before we left, I slipped the madam a five-hundred dollar tip, which was a lot of money in those days.”

“You’ve trained your boy whores well,” I told the madam.

“And what fun it was,” the madam shot back.

On the following evening, Guy directed J. Edgar and Clyde to a sexual exhibition at a club called Smörgåsbord. Both men claimed they’d never viewed one before. “Inside, in a small arena, some twenty performers, both male and female, staged a show for us on a revolving stage. Every known sexual act was performed on that platform—men with men, men with women, women with women. All that was missing was a donkey. Most of the brown-skinned girls looked like teenagers. The men were slightly older, probably in their early twenties. There were two beautiful blond boys who were rather effeminate and looked Scandinavian. They got raped by two big burly Mandingos. J. Edgar was practically salivating. And this was the same guy who had walked out of the Cotton Club in Harlem when he saw a blonde-haired woman dancing with a black man. He was hard to figure out. Apparently, what was not acceptable to him in New York was titillating, when the gender combinations were changed, in Havana.”

“In one of those amazing coincidences that happens in a Charles Dickens novel, J. Edgar ran into Sumner Welles, emerging from one of the bedrooms. We found out later he’d been entertained by two strapping black boys. J. Edgar knew Sumner, but the two men did not acknowledge each other early that morning.”

A long-time diplomat in the Foreign Service, Welles was one of FDR’s favorites. Fluent in Spanish, he had served since 1933 as Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs. That same year, FDR sent him to Cuba as a special envoy, since the island nation was in the throes of a revolution.

At the time of their awkward encounter, J. Edgar did not know that Sumner was a homosexual. Before leaving Havana, J. Edgar found out all he could about Sumner’s private life. He told Guy and Clyde, “He knows too much about me. I’ve got to find out even more about him. He could destroy me.”

Weeks after their encounter, William Bullitt, the U.S. Ambassador to France and a longtime antagonist of Welles, called J. Edgar. Bullitt had just learned that Sumner had been kicked out of Cuba. Apparently, he’d moved two young black boys into his private apartments, and a scandal had ensued, apparently from an enraged father.

Having had “a hot time in the old town of Havana,” as J. Edgar put it, the three men flew to San Juan, Puerto Rico. Burrus had arranged for them to stay free in the penthouse suite at the luxurious Condado-Vanderbilt Hotel along the beachfront. More adventures lay in store for them.

After the tropical nights of Havana, San Juan seemed a bit dull. But on J. Edgar’s second night there, his interest was piqued. “Hawk Eyes never misses anything,” he bragged to Guy and Clyde, explaining what he meant when they were seated in a booth in the hotel restaurant.

At a far and distant booth he had spotted Porfirio Rubirosa dining with Joan Crawford in what was obviously an off-the-

record weekend. They seemed oblivious to the rest of the world. Joan was a friendly acquaintance of his, although he did not plan to intrude on her privacy, because he did not want to be seen chatting with “Rubi,” who already was being billed as “The Playboy of the Western World.” He’d been married to the whorish Flor de Oro Trujillo, daughter of Rafael Trujillo, the notorious dictator of the Dominican Republic.

J. Edgar’s real interest in Rubi would not become a full-scale obsession until 1947 when he married the tobacco heiress, Doris Duke. But on that night in San Juan he ordered Clyde to begin a file on “that woman magnet.” Eventually, Rubi’s FBI file would stretch to 1,100 pages.



In an attempted disguise, J. Edgar sampled some of the wild nightlife of Havana. Clyde and Guy Hotell accompanied J. Edgar on his nighttime rounds. His favorite was **The Super-man Show** at the Shanghai.

The star of the show, El Toro, came on stage boasting a fourteen-inch, very thick and erect penis. He was a tall, slender Cuban of African descent who wore a scarlet cape—and nothing else. Three beautiful women lay nude on cots before him. One by one he penetrated each of them.

Rubi was wanted for questioning by the New York police about a murder, and he had been avoiding the mainland of the United States. J. Edgar was familiar with the case.

Dr. Angel Morales, a Dominican statesman, was the chief rival of General Trujillo, and had fled his native island fearing that Trujillo would have him killed. In New York he lived in a modest rooming house as an exile, sharing quarters with Sergio Bencosme (aka Doctor Pascasio Toribio Bencosme Garcia), the son of a general who had opposed Trujillo.

J. Edgar learned about the case from the chief of the New York City Police Department. He had never been on friendly terms with “New York’s finest,” viewing the NYPD as a potential rival of the FBI. But he was told that in April of 1935, Rubi had arrived in New York harbor aboard the *S.S. Camao* carrying \$7,000 in each (the equivalent of \$100,000 today).

He stayed at the Dominican Consulate, where he met with his cousin, Luis de la Fuente Rubirosa (nicknamed Chichi), and one other potential assassin. The police assumed that Rubi turned the money over to these men with orders to gun down Morales.

While Morales was out of his room one evening, meeting with fellow Dominican dissents, Bencosme was alone in the apartment. An assailant broke down the front door, ran up the steps and barged into the bedroom where he fired two shots into Bencosme’s chest. As he did, he yelled, “Die Morales.”

He then escaped, although the landlady, Carmen Higgs, would later identify the assassin as Chichi when shown a file of possible suspects at the police station. It appeared that Chichi had meant to assassinate Morales, but had shot Bencosme in

stead.



The last person J. Edgar expected to see in one of Havana's male bordellos was **Sumner Welles** (*photo above*), one of the top advisers to (and a personal friend of) Franklin D. Roosevelt.

As Guy Hotell later recalled, "Both Sumner and Eddie by accident outed themselves to each other as being gay, but the two power-houses did not acknowledge each other. Although homosexual in nature, their sexual tastes differed when it came to color. Eddie dug white boys and Sumner was turned on by those black dicks. It was this love of forbidden fruit that led to Sumner's downfall. Otherwise, he would have become U.S. Secretary of State during the war."

Rubi's cousin fled the country but was indicted in absentia for murder on February 18, 1936. The police also wanted to summon Rubi for questioning, but he was out of their reach. Since Puerto Rico was a U.S. possession, J. Edgar had the power to arrest Rubi and bring him in for questioning. But he chose not to.

He explained to Guy and Clyde that Joan Crawford was a friend of his, and he didn't want to unduly involve her in a potential scandal. Consequently, Rubi got a reprieve from the FBI that night.

Over dinner, Guy noted that J. Edgar seemed far more concerned with Rubi's legendary endowment than he did about any murder in New York. Through the grapevine, J. Edgar, along with half the rest of the world, had heard that Rubi's penis looked like "a fat baby's arm dangling from his trousers."

J. Edgar told Guy and Clyde that, "Somehow we've got to get a nude of him for our private album. Since he's known to seduce hundreds of women, and an occasional young man, I'm sure that can be arranged."

"Leave it to me, Boss," Clyde said.

Although J. Edgar spent a great deal of his life investigating the sex lives of movie stars, he always protected Joan from scandal. "When it came to law enforcement," Guy said, "Eddie played favorites."

J. Edgar's friendship with Joan went back to the early 1930s when he had visited the studios of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and she had been his tour guide, introducing him to stars such as Clark Gable (her lover), Norma Shearer, Lionel Barrymore, and even Greta Garbo. Since that day, Joan and J. Edgar had bonded.

She must have had the same hawk eye J. Edgar possessed, as she had seen him in the dining room last night.

The next afternoon she called him on the house phone and asked him if she could come up to his suite for a drink. He told her he'd be delighted to see her again. "Incidentally, I'll be alone," she said, indicating she knew that it would be insensitive to bring Rubi up with her.

In respect for her privacy, J. Edgar also ushered Clyde and Guy out of the suite, suggesting they lounge by the pool for a while.

Guy found out later what J. Edgar's arrangement with Joan was. Since their meeting at MGM, Joan had kept him supplied with insider gossip about "who was fucking who in Hollywood," as she so graphically put it. J. Edgar was hungry for gossip, and she confided the secrets to him, some of which he found scandalous, such as Norma Shearer sleeping with Mickey Rooney, who was just a kid at the time.

Of course, Joan had her motivations for befriending J. Edgar. One day she had called him for a favor. She admitted that she had a police record in Detroit, where she was once arrested for prostitution.

Dancing in the chorus line, she, along with the other girls, accepted invitations for dinner with the Stage Door Johnnies who waited outside. This was in the 1920s when she was billed as Lucille Le Sueur.

One night after dinner she had returned to a hotel room with one of her johns. As he was seducing her on the bed, the house detective, along with an armed policeman, broke into the room and arrested her, letting the john go free.

At the city jail, she was booked and fingerprinted, having to spend the night with eight other prostitutes in a cell. Early the next morning, the backstage manager arrived to bail her out. She explained to J. Edgar that she was afraid that her police record would surface one day. He told her he'd handle the matter. He contacted the police in Detroit who sent him Joan's file. Presumably, J. Edgar destroyed it.

In a confessional mood, Joan also claimed that she and Brooklyn-born Ruby Stevens had briefly been prostitutes at a house run by Polly Adler, New York's most notorious madam.

Ruby later became Joan's best friend, a lesbian relationship existing between them when she went to Hollywood and became Barbara Stanwyck in the 1930s. Their liaison would continue until their mutual deaths. On her nightstand on the day Joan died rested a picture of Stanwyck.

J. Edgar never told Joan, nor did she ever admit it, but he'd also acquired a collection of the stag films she'd made in the 1920s to be shown to men at smokers. The so-called "blue movies" had been filmed in Astoria, Queens, New York.

Guy and Clyde had viewed J. Edgar's collection of Joan's films, which had begun as stills designed for display in machines in penny arcades. Porno loops she made included *What the Butler Saw*, *The Plumber*, *Velvet Lips*, *Coming Home*, *She Shows Him How*, and *The Casting Couch*. These were heterosexual films. In *Bosom Buddies*, she had a lesbian romp with another chorus girl.

Without alerting Joan, J. Edgar had his agents conduct an investigation of these porno movies and their distribution. That led to the arrest of two postal inspectors. Why they were arrested or the outcome of their cases is not known.

After Joan became a star, a copy of *The Casting Couch* was sent to Louis B. Mayer at MGM. Apparently, \$50,000 was demanded by a blackmailer. When Joan's contract was cancelled in 1943 by Mayer, he wanted her out the studio gates. But she had to settle \$50,000 on MGM, ostensibly to buy out her contract. But since Mayer didn't want to hold onto her, J. Edgar concluded that \$50,000 was to pay MGM back for putting up the money demanded by that long-ago blackmailer.

For the next thirty years, Joan would stay in touch with J. Edgar, usually by mail or over the phone—not in person. She told her best friend, gay actor William Haines, "Edgar and I have a barter arrangement. I feed him information, and he takes care of some potentially embarrassing problems for me."

"That sounds like a fair exchange to me," the impish Haines said. "Now, tell me the dirt: Does Mr. Hoover take it up the ass?"

"I'll set up a date with you two, dear heart, and you'll find out for yourself and can tell me."

"I know a bottom when I see one," he said.

Landing at the airport in Nassau, The Bahamas, J. Edgar, Clyde, and Guy checked into the second best suite at the Fort Montague Hotel, which The Chief had been told was the most exclusive hotel on New Providence island. He was disappointed that the best suite had not been reserved for him. "We have a very special guest in that suite who does not want his identity known," the manager told him. J. Edgar was furious that the manager would not give him the name. In America, he would have insisted on it.

En route from the airport, he had surveyed the ramshackle buildings and had told Clyde and Guy, "We should have spent all our nights in Havana instead of coming to this backwater."

Bored with his suite, J. Edgar sunned himself on the terrace. He'd placed a call to the FBI to see what VIP was staying at the Fort Montague. Clyde didn't like the sun as much and preferred to lounge in the nude in bed, reading a 10-cent paperback novel called *Gangbusters*. Later he told J. Edgar, "I could have written better shit than that. The writer got everything wrong."

Guy had left the suite "in pursuit of some poontang pussy," as he would later tell his would-be biographer, Jimmy

Kirkwood.

At two o'clock, a call came in to J. Edgar from FBI headquarters. "The guest in the presidential suite is Axel Wenner-Gren," a name very familiar to J. Edgar. After talking to his office, he called the hotel's manager, who had left for the afternoon. Instead, he spoke to Ronnie Symonette, the assistant manager.

"I would like to speak to Wenner-Gren," he said. "I'm sure he will talk to J. Edgar Hoover of the Federal Bureau of Investigation."

"One bigshot always talks to another bigshot," Symonette said. He called Wenner-Gren's suite, and the industrialist agreed to talk to J. Edgar. It is not known what these two giants had to say to each other, but Wenner-Gren invited J. Edgar "and his boys" to dinner that night in the hotel dining room.

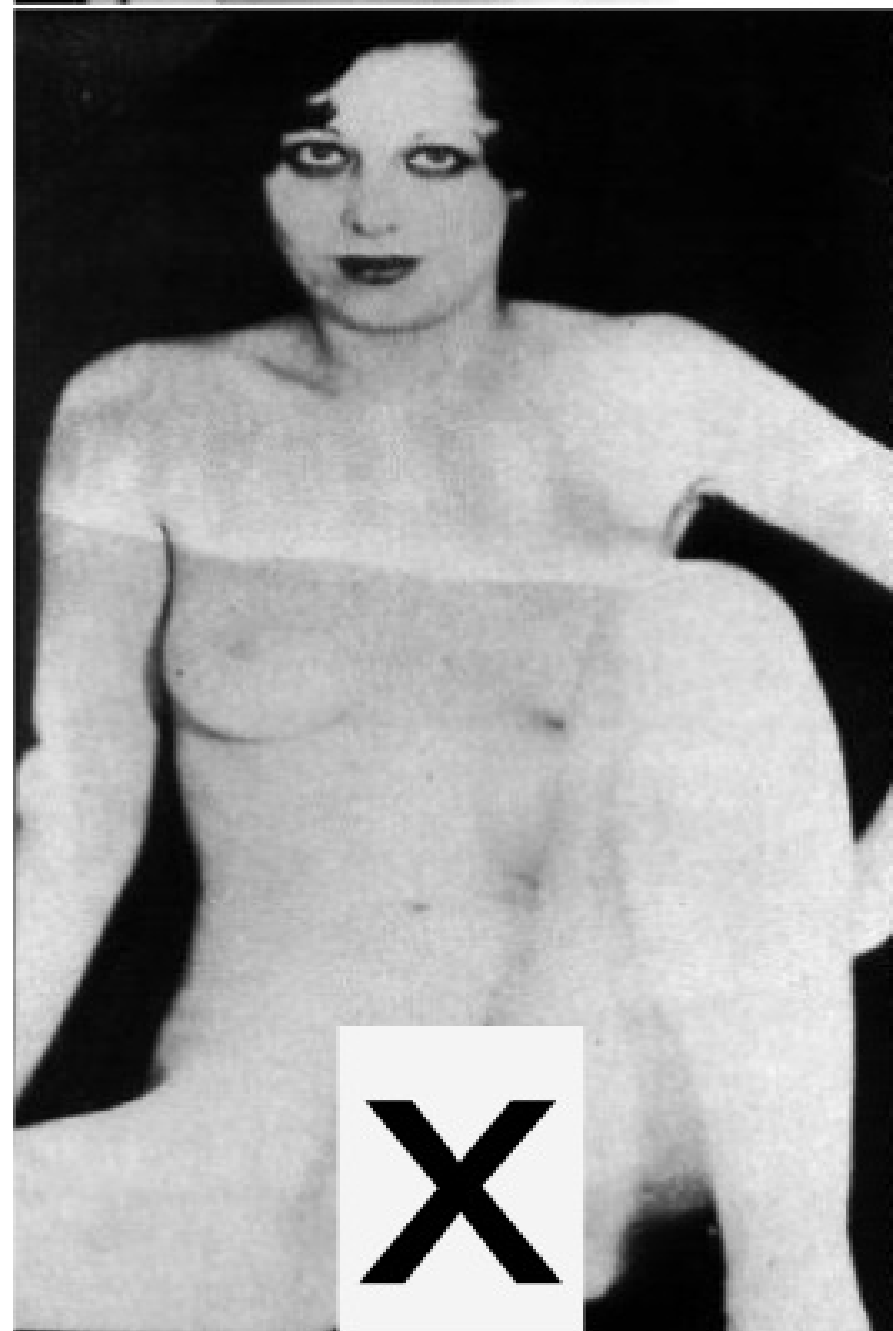
Since Wenner-Gren was possibly the richest man in the world, his biography was tabloid fodder. He'd made his fortune adapting the industrial vacuum cleaner for domestic use in households. By the early 1930s, he'd become the owner of Electrolux, the Swedish lighting company which became a market leader in vacuum cleaners and refrigerator technology. He also owned banks, newspapers, and had acquired many of the holdings of Ivar Kreuger, the Swedish safety match mogul who was in disgrace because of shady business dealings.

Not only that, but Wenner-Gren was a weapons manufacturer helping with the re-armament of Hitler's Nazi soldiers. He was also said to be a close friend of Hermann Göring, whose first wife, like Wenner-Gren himself, was a Swede.

Over dinner that night, Guy, Clyde, and J. Edgar found Wenner-Gren to be charming, sophisticated, and erudite, still retaining some of the visages of a once-handsome and young face. As Charles Higham, Errol Flynn's biographer, wrote: "Tall, magnificently built, Wenner-Gren looked like a Viking, but had the soul of a rattlesnake."

He told FBI agents that he was considering building a luxurious estate for himself on the adjoining Hog Island (later renamed Paradise Island). "In spite of its name, it's idyllic. You and your boys must come down for a holiday when I've completed it," he said to J. Edgar.

"We'll be there," J. Edgar promised.



Although they compiled a private file on her sexual escapades, J. Edgar and Clyde maintained a friendship with **Joan Crawford**. She admitted to them that she'd once worked for Polly Adler, the New York madam, as a prostitute when she was down and out. She also admitted that during the same period, she had been a player in porno films (See Miss Crawford, above, in a still from one of her lesser-known movies.)

Clyde acquired copies of these films, and enjoyed watching them, especially one entitled *The Casting Couch*. MGM frantically tried to buy every available copy, although versions of it still exist today.

Wenner-Gren tantalized them by telling them he was expecting a very exciting guest who had just arrived at the airport. "He'll be a surprise. You gentlemen will know at once who he is."

Fifteen minutes later a waiter told Wenner-Gren that his guest had arrived and would be down in twenty minutes to join them for dinner.

All four men were having key lime pie for dessert when Errol Flynn came into the dining room. At that point in his career, a lot of the guests had not seen any of his movies yet, but J. Edgar and Clyde had been captivated by him when he'd starred in *Captain Blood*. J. Edgar had called the film "a banquet of homoeroticism from the first reel to the final reel." He'd also proclaimed that the new film star from Tasmania was "the most devastatingly handsome man I've ever laid eyes on."

Errol apologized that his plane had been late, and after shaking hands and flashing his brilliant smile, he sat down and immediately ordered a drink. In the flesh, Errol seemed even more alluring than he was on the screen, if that were possible. He told his fellow diners that he'd just completed a movie called *The Perfect Specimen*.

"Sounds like typecasting to me," J. Edgar said, as if flirting with him.

"Coming from the top G-Man in the country, I'll take that as a real compliment," Errol said.

Under Errol's gaze, J. Edgar seemed to be experiencing a meltdown, if Guy was to be believed when he related the incident years later.

After dinner and drinks—lots of drinks—J. Edgar noted that Errol was occupying the same presidential suite as Wenner-Gren.

Back in their own suite, J. Edgar speculated that the industrialist might be a homosexual. "Why else would he be shackled up with Flynn?"

An even more troubling question for J. Edgar was why Errol was in Nassau socializing with a rumored munitions tycoon supplying arms to Hitler?

Before retiring that night, J. Edgar told Clyde and Guy that he wanted the FBI to start files on both men.

The night was not over for J. Edgar, who later said he could not sleep. Jimmy Kirkwood didn't know if he should trust Guy's next revelation, suspecting it might be a cheap shot to sell his biography. But Guy claimed in all sincerity that J. Edgar that night wandered down by the pool area where the honor bar remained open until morning.

He later told Clyde and Guy that he saw a nude young man swimming at three o'clock in the morning. Seeing J. Edgar, the man emerged from the pool completely nude.

"Got a towel, sport?" a dripping Errol asked J. Edgar. When the Chief found a towel, Errol asked him, "Would you dry me off, sport?"

Later, J. Edgar admitted to Guy and Clyde that he was only too willing to perform this service. Errol produced an erection as he was being rubbed down. "Care to help me with this thing, sport?"

The next morning over breakfast, J. Edgar told Guy and Clyde that, "I showed him what a sword-swallower I am. I've had a lot of practice on you guys."

The allegation could be true or apocryphal. But Guy later swore that J. Edgar claimed that he'd performed fellatio on Errol by the pool.

If he did that, he did not develop a schoolgirl crush on Errol. When he returned to Washington, he ordered an ongoing investigation of both Errol and Wenner-Gren. The Chief began an almost two-decades-long obsession with Errol, his FBI file growing every month until it became voluminous.

J. Edgar's suspicions about Errol and his Nazi connections were confirmed when the FBI received a report from Clyde that the film star had flown to Spain in 1937 with the Austrian-born Dr. Hermann Erben, who was rumored to be an espionage agent with strong links to Nazi Berlin.

Erben and Errol had been friends since meeting in 1933. Born in Vienna, Erben traveled the world, most often as a ship's doctor, and he was a suspected spy for the Nazis. Once he'd worked in Berlin for the film industry, at which time he'd doctored a young Greta Garbo and a young Marlene Dietrich.

A friendship between Erben and Errol was forged on April 14, in Salamaua, a town on the north shore of Papua New Guinea, when they sailed for a plantation on nearby Garowe Island. They became so close on the voyage that Errol was invited to move into Erben's cabin.

Writing in his 1959 autobiography, Errol said that "thanks to Erben and his lusty practical outlook on men and mice, sex, morals, and morons, I was seldom ever trapped again in this world between Skylla [he'd meant to write Scylla] and good clean living and the wicked Charybdis of a good solid hard-on."



In Nassau, The Bahamas, **Axel Wenner-Gren** (*photo above*) entertained Guy Hotell, J. Edgar, and Clyde, introducing them to the dashing new film star, Errol Flynn.

A Swede, Wenner-Gren was the richest man in the world, his personal fortune estimated at a billion dollars. At least some of that money came from the sale to Hitler of munitions and other strategic materials.

During the war, Wenner-Gren arranged with Hermann Göring for a neutral Sweden to allow passage across its borders of German munitions to war-torn Norway.

At dinner, he told the vacationing trio from the FBI, "I'm so rich, I'm above international law."

On Garowe Island, Erben, an avid photographer, took shirtless pictures of Errol wearing a pair of white shorts. Later, Errol stripped off the shorts and posed nude for his friend. Years later these nudes fell into the hands of J. Edgar, who gave them an honored place in his album of celebrity frontals.

After a visit to Garowe island, the tall, handsome, and well-hung future film star, according to FBI reports, visited Hong Kong and Saigon with Erben. In Vietnam at a bordello, he contracted what he called "the pearl of great price" (actually gonorrhea).

In discussing his reports with J. Edgar and other agents, Clyde said, "Our friend is playing a very dangerous game with these Nazis. There's a war coming on. I think the FBI should stay on this guy's ass for the duration."

After a long battle with cancer, Annie Hoover died in 1938. She had been so long attached to her son that even after her death, she remained a hovering presence. Clyde told Ethel Merman, "I never could completely relax with Eddie when she was around. I felt he would never belong to me until she passed on."

J. Edgar had been at her side in the bedroom where she'd died. It was the same room where she'd given birth to him in 1895.

At the time of Annie's death, J. Edgar was forty-three years old, and he'd lived with her all his life. Often, however, he was out of town with Clyde at his side, but he would call her two or three times a day. Clyde once told Dorothy Lamour, "Annie's apron strings extended all the way from Washington to La Jolla."



While filming *Captain Blood* in 1935, Errol Flynn (photo above) was frequently visited by his boyhood friend from Sydney, Freddie McEvoy, a Nazi spy and legendary playboy sought out by wealthy women for his sexual prowess. Errol made frequent trips to Mexico City with Freddie, where they were entertained by Mexican fascists and Nazi spies. Errol and McEvoy often shared a suite at the Beverly Hills Hotel, where they made love to everybody from movie star Joan Bennett to tobacco heiress Doris Duke.

On several occasions, the American-born Nazi beauty Tara Marsh, who had lived in Berlin, was their guest. She later told Countess Dorothy di Frasso, "The difference between making love to Freddie and Errol as opposed to Hitler and Goebbels is the difference between washing dishes in a soup kitchen and experiencing seven fantastic orgasms, the greatest in your entire life, within a period of twenty-four hours."

J. Edgar would never completely free himself from her overwhelming presence. Her memory, in his own words, "hung like a cloud over me." He often would say, "Annie would not approve of this," as if she were still around to judge whatever he was doing.

Dorothy Lamour once visited Annie when invited by Clyde and J. Edgar for a dinner at the director's home. "I visited with her alone in her bedroom, and she looked into my eyes," Dorothy said. "She told me that she didn't have much time left on this earth, and that she knew I would make a good wife for her Edgar. I just went along with it, playing the game. She told me her own marriage had been a sham, and her husband was a weakling. She claimed her entire life had been a disappointment except for the achievements of her son. To my astonishment, she admitted 'I'm living my life through him.'"

Once he'd buried Annie, J. Edgar no longer wanted to live in her house with all its memories. He purchased a one-story brick house at 4936 Thirtieth Place in the Rock Creek section of Washington, DC, where he would live until his death in 1972. Clyde continued to maintain a separate residence for appearance's sake. He urged J. Edgar to add a second floor.

Although a male-on-male love affair was taking place right in front of her eyes, Annie was always in denial about her son's homosexuality. She claimed that Clyde and her son were working late at night on official FBI business even if they were going to a night club or vacationing together.

When she heard that a neighbor's son, who was constantly bullied because of his effeminate manner, had committed suicide, she told J. Edgar, "It's better that way. If I had a son who was homosexual, I think I would kill him, then kill myself."



Bosom buddies in Nazi espionage and sin, Austria-born **Dr. Hermann Erben** (*left*) and **Errol Flynn** (*right*) shared a cabin when they sailed aboard the *Queen Mary* ocean liner in 1937.

After Errol filmed *Captain Blood*, Erben joined him in Hollywood. The doctor had bragged to Errol and his other Fascist friends that he'd planned the assassination of the Austrian Chancellor, Engelbert Dollfuss. That event occurred on July 25, 1934, when a member of the Nazi S.A., Oskar Planetta, fired a bullet into Dollfuss' throat. Several members of the Gestapo, including Erben, watched the anti-Nazi Dollfuss suffer an agonizing and protracted death.

In the assassination's aftermath, Vienna police ransacked Erben's villa, finding drugs, munitions, forged passports, and obscene photographs, including those taken of Errol Flynn having sex with both women and teenage Austrian boys.

"When are you two lovebirds going to get married?" That was Franklin D. Roosevelt talking at the White House on the occasion of his fifty-eighth birthday celebration.

The President had long ago learned that J. Edgar was a homosexual, so he was addressing the FBI director tongue in cheek. At the gala, J. Edgar was escorting Lela Rogers to the birthday bash. She was the powerful stage mother who had propelled her dancing daughter, Ginger Rogers, into international stardom, especially in those RKO musicals with Fred Astaire.

Although Lela was forty-seven, only four years older than J. Edgar, she was an experienced, even adventurous woman of the world—or "one tough broad," as her friend Walter Winchell characterized her. On the dawn of World War I, she'd been one of the first ten female recruits into the previously all-male bastion of the U.S. Marine Corps, handling publicity issues. She soon became editor of *Leatherneck*, the magazine of the Corps.

Winchell also noted that she was "to the right of Attila the Hun in her political views and would become a founding member of the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals. J. Edgar admired her Right Wing political position, although not totally agreeing with her that the United States should bring back the guillotine of the French Revolution to handle its enemies on the far Left.

Lela and J. Edgar were frequently seen together, causing speculation that they might get married one day. Actually, he never had any intention of marrying her. Without any legal recognition, he was already "wed" to Clyde Tolson. J. Edgar admired and

respected Lela, finding her a gutsy woman. He began seeing her very soon after the death of his mother, Annie Hoover. Friends of J. Edgar speculated that he was drawn to this strong-willed woman because he needed a mother substitute in his life.

Lela had been introduced to J. Edgar at Manhattan's Stork Club by their mutual friend, the model, Anita Colby. What reporters didn't write about was the fact that Clyde accompanied J. Edgar on all his "dates" with Lela. Harry Viner, a close friend and businessman, as a gesture of good will, always picked up the tabs for Clyde and J. Edgar at Harvey's Restaurant in Washington.

"Sometimes when she was in town, Lela would dine with the boys," Viner said. "I'd pay for her dinner, too. J. Edgar never took Lela back to her hotel. He gave her a little peck on the cheek and had one of his FBI agents drive her back to where she was staying. He and Clyde always remained behind to enjoy a brandy before disappearing into the night together. As I said, I know because I picked up the bill."



FBI agents referred to J. Edgar's mother, Annie, as "**Mother Hoover.**" To her critics, she was known as "The Mother from Hell." She was smothering in her love for J. Edgar, overly possessive, domineering, and unnaturally attached to her son. She insisted he live with her and never leave home, and he gave in to her wishes. "I want to be alive on the day Eddie is named President of the United States," she told friends.

When author Philip Wylie was writing his attack on "Momism," *Generation of Vipers*, he told an interviewer that one of the women he was attacking for "motherly evil" was Annie Hoover.

A vicious homophobe, she always said that if she found out her son was a homosexual, she would shoot him and then commit suicide.

After a long bout with cancer, she died with her loyal son at her bedside. Clyde Tolson told Guy Hotell that, "It wasn't the cancer eating away at her body that killed her, but the cancer eating away at her soul."

The press constantly asked Lela if she planned to marry J. Edgar. She had a pat answer: "That's up to him." The director's

usual response was, “Lela Rogers is a fine and decent woman.”

A first-rate raconteur, Lela amused J. Edgar with insider gossip about Hollywood and tales from her own life. She claimed that her mother, Saphrona Ball, a grocery store clerk, had to give birth to her on Christmas Day in 1891 in the family barn where, at the same time, she had to fend off a hungry bear.

One magazine reported that J. Edgar “is known as a man’s man. Lela Rogers fits into that category. She acts more like a bull-headed father to her daughter, Ginger Rogers; has a shrewd head for business, iron nerves like an FBI sharpshooter, colossal self-assurance, indestructible intestinal fortitude, and a belief that all enemies of America should be wiped off the face of the earth. If she ever married J. Edgar—highly unlikely—she would definitely wear the pants in the family.”

Over the years there have been published accounts of J. Edgar slipping off with Lela for illicit sexual trysts, but these appear to be inventions to give him credentials as a straight man. Ginger was extremely close to Lela and called her mother at least twice a day. She would have been aware if Lela had ever run off to such places as Florida with J. Edgar.

“The claims about my mother and Edgar are ridiculous,” Ginger said after his death. “Lela was perfectly aware of Edgar’s relationship with Clyde Tolson, and it posed no threat to her. From 1938 until 1955 they were close friends until they had some falling out over some silly little disagreement. My mother found Edgar a convenient friend to have. Edgar used both my mother and Dorothy Lamour to throw off the bloodhounds who claimed he was a homosexual. Was he a homosexual? Lela told me he definitely was. I don’t know. I never hid under the bed of Edgar and Clyde. But back in Missouri where I was born, we had this saying: If it waddles like a duck, quacks like a duck, and looks like a duck, then it must be a duck.”

Another friend of J. Edgar’s, Cobina Wright, a society hostess and Hollywood gossip columnist, also became aware of the Hoover/Tolson affair. But she never wrote about it. Once, when queried, she said, “There are some things, such as my age, that must never appear in print.” She was born in Oregon back in 1887.

Whenever Lela’s beloved “Ginja” encountered any trouble in Hollywood or New York, Lela turned to J. Edgar for advice and help.

Ginger had married actor Lew Ayres on November 14, 1934. But by 1939 she was having other affairs, including one with Howard Hughes, and no longer slept with her husband, although she was still married to him. As Ginger later candidly confessed, “After a few years of marriage, I really wanted to experience the joys of being a single gal again.”

In those books, such as *Did She or Didn’t She?* by Mart Martin, Desi Arnaz always tops the list of her lovers, probably because his name begins with an “A.”

Born in Cuba, he had fled to Miami following the 1933 revolution led by Fulgencio Batista. Ginger had been attracted to him in 1939 when he appeared on Broadway in the musical *Too Many Girls*. She’d gone backstage to congratulate him. In his pre-Lucille Ball days, he found the blonde beauty extremely attractive. An off-the-record affair ensued, since she was still a wedded wife.



A girl’s best friend is her mother,” or so said **Ginger Rogers** (*right*) in a cuddly pose with her “tough-as-nails” stage mother, **Lela Rogers** (*left*). Lela for years was a close friend of J. Edgar’s, and he was delighted as rumors spread that they were going to get married. Some gossip columns even maintained that J. Edgar was slipping off to such places as Palm Beach for illicit sexual trysts with Lela.

After J. Edgar died, Ginger claimed that such reports were ridiculous. She believed that J. Edgar used her mother as a “beard” to cover up his love affair with Clyde Tolson.

Three months later she’d gone to Lela and told her, “I’m pregnant. The father is Desi Arnaz.”

When Ayres saw that Ginger was pregnant, he reacted angrily since he knew he wasn’t the father. He told her that he was going to divorce her and name Desi as co-respondent.

Ginger was horrified knowing that such a scandal would sabotage her career in the moralistic 1930s. Flying to Washington with Ayres’ threat, Lela pleaded with J. Edgar to “bail out my poor Ginja who has made a terrible mistake.”

He assured her that he would look into the situation. She interpreted that to mean that he would provide the solution as he did to most troubles his friends encountered.

Lela’s close friend, Anita Colby, was made aware of the Ginger Rogers/Desi Arnaz affair, and also of J. Edgar’s involvement in it. She waited until both J. Edgar and Clyde had died before she gave some tantalizing details about the scandal, although it had been fodder for gossip in Hollywood for years.

J. Edgar and Clyde had heard many rumors about the handsome young actor, Lew Ayres, who had shot to fame in *All Quiet on the Western Front* where he played a young German soldier disillusioned by the realities of war. The anti-war sentiments expressed in this 1930 film, directed by Lewis Milestone, had such a profound effect on Ayres that he became a conscientious objector during WWII.



J. Edgar was never as close to **Ginger Rogers**, pictured above, as he was to her mother, Lela. But J. Edgar, much later in Ginger’s career, gave her a sexual education, or so claimed Guy Hotell.

“Like many people in those days, Ginger wasn’t really familiar with the concept of bi-sexuality. One day when Ginger and Lela visited J. Edgar and Clyde at the FBI, I was ordered to bring out a file on the bisexual activities of many of Ginger’s former lovers. The FBI had documented homosexual affairs that her previous lovers had indulged in. The list included Desi Arnaz, Fred Astaire, Cary Grant, Howard Hughes, George Montgomery, David Niven, Jimmy Stewart, and Rudy Vallee. Ginger looked shocked.”

“Surely not David and Jimmy,” she said to J. Edgar. He rose from his chair and said, “Yes, Niven with Errol Flynn and Stewart with Henry Fonda.”

To silence Ayres and to blackmail him, FBI agents in Hollywood were ordered to investigate his private life, as he was rumored to be a bisexual. At this time, Ayres was enjoying wide popularity in America through his appearance in Dr. Kildare movies.

Almost immediately, the FBI learned that Ayres had engaged in a homosexual love affair with a very closeted gay, Spencer Tracy. When J. Edgar learned that, he called off the investigation.

“That’s all we need,” he said. “We don’t need more evidence of other affairs. The thing with Tracy is dynamite enough. That Tracy! He’s so masculine on the screen.” He ordered Clyde to arrange a private meeting with Ayres. “Show him our evidence about his affair with Tracy. That will silence Dr. Kildare for good. He won’t make any trouble for Ginger.”

Just in case Desi Arnaz considered making trouble for Ginger and didn’t cooperate by “keeping silent forever,” J. Edgar ordered that he be investigated as well.

It was relatively easy following Desi’s sexual escapades, as the Cuban entertainer usually left what Clyde called “a road map to what he was up to.” After only three weeks, FBI agents concluded that TV’s future Ricky Ricardo “would stuff his Cuban sausage into any hole he could find,” as one agent so bluntly put it.

Since arriving on Broadway, Desi had quickly established himself as the intimate friend of every chorus girl. When he was cast in *Too Many Girls*, he claimed that “the title of this play suits me perfectly.”

He freely admitted to some of his escapades such as the night he encountered Polly Adler, New York’s most notorious madam. At Club 21, she headed for his table, clutching the early morning editions, each containing a rave review of *Too Many Girls*.



The Hollywood gossip columnist **Cobina Wright** made the cover of *Life* magazine’s February 17, 1941 issue. Throughout her career, she kept J. Edgar and Clyde informed of “all the stuff I couldn’t print.”

Cobina was aware of many scandals about J. Edgar, not all of them sexual. She learned that three of J. Edgar’s books, including *Masters of Deceit*, had actually been written by FBI personnel at taxpayers’ expense, even though he pocketed the royalties.

In 1950, when a respected attorney, Max Lowenthal, published a book, *The Federal Bureau of Investigation*, which contained criticisms of J.

Edgar, Cobina noted the dozens of attacks Lowenthal suffered from pro-Hooverites.

About the only dirt J. Edgar's supporters found on Lowenthal was that he attended Harvard Law School "like many other Parlor Pinks, fellow-travelers, Communists, and convicted perjurers."

"Cuban!" she said in her baritone voice, "you are the biggest fucking hit in town." She grabbed him and kissed him.

That wasn't all. To celebrate, she had arranged for him to spend the night in her apartment, which was really a bordello. For his pleasure were one redhead, one blonde, and one brunette.

By the time Desi made curtain call at eight-thirty the following night, he said, "I was pooped out, petered out, and drained dry."

Of an even more embarrassing nature than patronizing prostitutes, it was discovered that Desi was also allowing the Broadway lyricist Lorenz Hart to fellate him. He was one of the co-authors of *Too Many Girls*. As Clyde and J. Edgar, along with three FBI agents agreed, Desi was not above "climbing the lavender ladder" to success on Broadway, as so many young men had done before him.

Clyde ordered agents to have Desi picked up after one of his performances on Broadway and brought to the Bureau's headquarters in Manhattan. There he was fingerprinted, stripped, searched, and photographed in the nude. There was some vague talk that his immigration papers had not been in order when he entered Florida.

Desi would later tell another one of his fellators, gay actor Cesar Romero, that "I was so dumb. I thought taking that nude photograph of me was the way police matters in America were handled. Years later I found out that Hoover and his buddy liked to collect nudes of celebrities, both men and women. Someone who saw the collection told me that I am number two in the album, following a nude picture of John Dillinger taken in the morgue. At least I'm sure I looked a bit livelier."



The second husband of **Ginger Rogers** (left) was **Lew Ayres** (center), with whom she'd co-starred in the 1933 film *Don't Bet on Love*. He is embracing **Lela Rogers** (right) his mother-in-law. Here they seem friendly enough, but both Ayres and Lela detested each other. The composer, George Gershwin, one of Ginger's many lovers, said, "She has a little love for a lot of people, but not a lot of love for anybody."

That included her handsome husband. As she told her mother, "I did not always make myself sexually available to Lew. I don't think a wife should be treated like cattle, always available for her husband to fuck her like some bull with a cow. I don't mean for a minute that Lew was a bull. He was not. With some of his male friends, he played the role of a cow, or so Hoover informed me one afternoon."

An agent lent Desi an FBI car, and he was told to drive Ginger to Montreal where the Bureau, under Clyde's direction, had arranged for her to have an abortion.

Desi was warned never to speak of the matter again.

If Desi thought that that was the last of J. Edgar in his life, he was mistaken.

Throughout the 1930s, and lasting until the eve of World War II, J. Edgar, assisted by his loyal Clyde, continued to pursue high-profile, headline-grabbing criminals in dramatic arrests or shootouts. In all cases, J. Edgar's role in these arrests was either exaggerated or else completely fictionalized.

One such case, avidly followed by millions, was the arrest of Louis (nicknamed "Lepke") Buchalter—a Jewish-American mobster who was the chief honcho of a hit squad notoriously known as "Murder, Inc."

At the time, J. Edgar, who wanted Lepke on Federal charges, was locked in a major battle with New York's attorney general, racket-busting Thomas Dewey. The race was on as to which law-enforcement officer would nab Lepke and the subsequent headlines.

Lepke is a name that will live in the saga of the FBI's arch criminals. At the age of twenty-two in 1919, he had already served two maximum security prison terms at Sing-Sing. After his second release, he went about taking control of the garment industry unions on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. He terrorized factory owners with paralyzing strikes and demands for weekly "alimony" payments.

In the early 1930s Lepke joined forces with Charles (Lucky) Luciano, Benjamin (Bugsy) Siegel, and Meyer Lansky to form Murder, Inc., a deadly organization that specialized in fulfilling mob murder contracts. In that role, Lepke worked hand in glove with Albert ("the Mad Hatter," or "the Executioner") Anastasia in committing murders coast to coast. Their most famous murder was that of mob boss Dutch Schultz.



Beating his drum at La Conga in Miami, **Desi Arnaz** attracted the attention of Lorez Hart, the popular Broadway composer. He was immediately attracted to the young Cuban. In New York, he had him cast in his first Broadway musical, *Too Many Girls*.

After an audition, Hart invited Arnaz to dinner, followed by an invitation to come to his apartment. A football uniform lay on his sofa. "You're supposed to play an eighteen-year-old football player, the best in Latin America," Hart said. "Would you strip down and try on the uniform so I can see if you'll look right in the part?"

As Arnaz later confided to Cesar Romero, "I stripped down, but I never got a chance to try on that uniform."

A \$50,000 reward was offered for the capture of Lepke, who was living secretly in a modest room next door to police headquarters in Brooklyn.

In August of 1939, while at the Stork Club, Walter Winchell received an unexpected call. The gruff-talking man on the other end claimed he was a friend of Lepke, who was willing to surrender but only to J. Edgar. Whereas Dewey had threatened to seek the death penalty for Lepke if New York authorities captured him, on charges of murder and extortion. The FBI wanted him only for narcotics trafficking.

In an urgent call, Winchell reached J. Edgar in Iowa where he was attending the funeral of Clyde's father. He and Clyde immediately flew to New York to await the surrender of Lepke. "Here's our chance to upstage that shithhead Dewey," J. Edgar told his agents.

During Winchell's famous Sunday night radio broadcast, J. Edgar and Clyde were sitting beside him in the studio. The broadcast that night shocked the nation. "Attention Public Enemy Number One, Louis (Lepke) Buchalter, I am authorized by John Edgar Hoover of the FBI to guarantee your safe delivery if you surrender to them."

Fifteen minutes after going off the air, another call came in for Winchell. It was from Lepke himself. “That was fine, Walter. I’ll soon be seeing you and Hoover. I’ll keep in touch.”

Clyde and J. Edgar waited for three days in New York before another call came in. A gang member asked Winchell, “Lepke wants to know how many years he’ll get if he turns himself over to the Feds.”

The columnist didn’t know and rushed over to the Waldorf-Astoria where he found J. Edgar and Clyde relaxing in their underwear.

“Dewey will send him to the chair for a good sizzle,” J. Edgar told Winchell. “But for Federal charges, he’s likely to get fourteen years.”

Testing J. Edgar’s limited patience, negotiations dragged on for three weeks in New York. Flashing anger, J. Edgar turned on Winchell, accusing him of being “New York’s champ bullshitter.” He charged that Winchell was just trying to increase readership of his column and more listeners to his radio show.

A bitterly wounded Winchell denied these charges before J. Edgar issued a threat. “If Lepke doesn’t turn himself in, in forty-eight hours, I’ll order him shot on sight.”

Stung by J. Edgar’s allegations, Winchell broadcast an appeal for Lepke to turn himself in at once. Finally, the call Winchell had been waiting for came in. It was from Lepke, who told him that “between ten-ten and ten-twenty on the night of August 24, 1939, I’ll be waiting at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 28th Street.”

J. Edgar later claimed that he stood on the lonely corner waiting to arrest Lepke. That was not true, as Clyde had ordered nearly two dozen FBI agents to stake out the area. In a separate vehicle, Winchell had picked up Lepke five blocks away and had driven him to J. Edgar’s limousine where he waited, armed, in the back seat.

After two agents thoroughly searched Lepke, he was allowed into the rear of the limousine with Winchell. J. Edgar sat far in the corner of his seat, his face partially hidden behind a pair of dark sunglasses.

After Winchell introduced Lepke, he said, “Glad to meet you, Chief.” He extended his hand but J. Edgar didn’t shake it, but told him, “You did a smart thing turning yourself in like this.”

En route to police headquarters, Lepke soon realized he’d been betrayed. During his final phone call to Winchell, he had been told that J. Edgar thought he’d get no more than ten years, of which he would probably serve only five if he got off for good behavior.

But in the back of the limo, J. Edgar stated his original judgment. “You’re staring at least fourteen years in the face.”

“You dirty double-crosser,” Lepke charged. Taking his gun, J. Edgar whacked the murderer across the face, bloodying his nose. Actually, that was a deliberate action. He wanted it to appear that Lepke had put up a fight at the time of his arrest, and that J. Edgar had subdued him.

Still infuriated at the nearly month-long “horsing around” that J. Edgar felt Winchell had subjected him to, he decided to betray his friend, who wanted an exclusive on the story, which he well deserved. While Winchell was being questioned by the police, J. Edgar went into an adjoining office and called the Associated Press. Glorifying his own role, he gave reporters the complete story in time for them to make morning editions across the country.

Dewey wanted to interview Lepke about a number of murders, but J. Edgar refused to release him from Federal custody.

“I’m going to run for President of the United States,” Dewey told him. “My first official duty will be to fire you.”

“Perhaps,” J. Edgar said, “unless I decide to seek the presidency for myself in 1940.”

Tried on Federal charges, Lepke was sentenced to fourteen years at Leavenworth. He would not remain there. An authority higher than Dewey or J. Edgar intervened. Republican newspapers, including *The Chicago Tribune*, claimed that the FBI and FDR had made a deal with Lepke to keep him from revealing the Roosevelt’s administration’s link with Murder, Inc. Enraged, FDR ordered “that the son-of-a-bitch be turned over to Dewey.”

Consequently, under the jurisdiction of the New York State judicial system, Lepke was tried and convicted for murder and sentenced to death in the electric chair at Sing-Sing, in Ossining, New York, on March 4, 1944.

His last words were, “I hope the God damn Nazis and Japs take over this fucking country, put a guillotine in front of the White House and hang that fucking Roosevelt, Hoover, and Dewey after publicly castrating each of the bastards.”

In 1975, Tony Curtis revived the fame of the gangster when he starred in the movie *Lepke*. Curtis was intrigued with the fact that the only mobster ever sent to the electric chair was Jewish. The savage realism of the electric chair climax was horrifying to film-goers.

Was J. Edgar a closeted child molester?

If he ever had an obsession with a female, it was little Miss Shirley Temple herself. At the age of five, she’d become acclaimed as the most famous child on the planet. In her movies of the 1930s, she perked up the spirits of an America caught in the grip of a lingering Depression. Guarded like royalty, she made more money than the President of the United States.

J. Edgar took Clyde to see every one of the films of this chubby-cheeked moppet who delivered goody-goody lines on the screen, trying to wring forth every tear. Clyde preferred gangster movies, but sat patiently with J. Edgar through such froth as

The Little Colonel (1935) and *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937).



"I fell in love with Lepke when I played him in my movie," said Tony Curtis. He was referring to **Louis ("Lepke") Buchalter** (*above*), the mobster who ran "Murder, Inc.," killing people designated with the kiss of death by the mob.

In 1975, Curtis starred in a "my comeback film," *Lepke*, playing the Brooklyn mob leader. "Even though Lepke had a compulsive viciousness, you come to love the character you're playing, even a killer," Curtis claimed.

Lepke was betrayed by J. Edgar Hoover, who misled him, signaling that he was going to get off with only five years served in a Federal prison. Instead, in 1944, at the age of forty-seven, Lepke was hauled kicking and screaming to the electric chair.

J. Edgar personally requested that Shirley's studio send him a series of shorts called "Baby Burlesks," which Shirley made at the dawn of her career, spoofing notable movie stars of the time. Today these skits are a favorite of pedophiles. Viewed in a more enlightened era, the shorts are really soft-core child porn.

As one of the most celebrated personages in the world, Shirley was sought out not only by other movie stars but by politicians, each and every one of them wanting to have their pictures taken with Shirley because of her publicity value.

In 1935, she'd received an invitation to the White House from Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. Her mother, Gertrude Temple, told her daughter, "You are a Republican, Roosevelt a Democrat, but since he's the President we can't turn him down."

She recalled her meeting with FDR, who was disappointed that she didn't smile, as she was celebrated for her smile. "I'm sorry, Mr. President, but I've lost a front tooth, and I'm ashamed."

That day he invited her to his weekend country estate at Hyde Park. Once there, she saw Eleanor bending over an outdoor grill checking the burgers. Shirley had taken her slingshot to Hyde Park hoping to down a bird or two. Eleanor made such a tempting target, Shirley couldn't resist. She picked up a pebble and fired at the First Lady, scoring a bull's eye on her butt. Shirley concealed her weapon, and neither Eleanor nor the Secret Service knew who did it.

J. Edgar became involved in Shirley's life when she faced two daunting challenges—the first in 1936, another in 1938. Since she enjoyed world-wide fame as a moneymaker for Fox, she was often threatened with kidnapping. On a few occasions, psychos sent in death threats. Some of these threats were discarded by the Fox mail department, but occasionally one would

emerge as a genuine threat to her safety.

A threat was received at Fox at the time Shirley and her parents, Gertrude and George, were driving up the northwest coast to Vancouver Island in Canada for their summer vacation. Fox sent them an urgent cable. According to the letter, if \$25,000 were not dropped from an airplane on May 15, 1936 near Grant, Nebraska, Shirley would be assassinated.

Since interstate blackmail was a federal crime, George contacted the FBI. Shirley got to speak to J. Edgar for the first time. "I knew if anybody in America could save my life, it was J. Edgar Hoover himself," she later said.

He agreed to handle the case personally, assigning Clyde as the chief investigator for the FBI. By July 13, the G-Men found their man, a sixteen-year-old Nebraska farmhand who appeared in a cornfield at the time a small airplane dropped the money. Actually, the bag of "cash" was stuffed only with newspapers. When arrested, the teenager claimed he got the idea of threatening Shirley from having watched a movie about a ransom plot.

On hearing of the naïve boy's arrest, J. Edgar said, "Rodents like that should be exterminated."

Weeks later, yet another death threat arrived at Fox, this one also demanding "\$25,000 or Shirley's life." This newer threat was mailed from Atlanta. Once again, J. Edgar assigned his trusted Clyde to the case.

Shirley's faith in the FBI and its G-Men was justified on September 15, 1936, when agents seized a boy who was also sixteen years old like the previous farm boy from Nebraska. This time he confessed he was inspired to threaten Shirley after watching a gangster film starring George Raft.

"I wanted the money to entertain my gal in style," he told FBI agents. On October 6, a Federal judge sentenced him to a reformatory school near Washington DC until he was twenty-one years old.

In gratitude, Shirley called J. Edgar to thank him personally "for saving my life" and to invite him to visit her when he came to California.

"My little sweetheart," J. Edgar told her, "that's an invitation I will accept."

As J. Edgar would learn, Shirley's troubles weren't over.

A blaring headline on August 22, 1938 shocked the young girl's millions of fans—IS SHIRLEY TEMPLE A COMMUNIST?

Representative Martin Dies, a right wing congressman from Texas, not the brightest bulb on the hill, was gathering testimony from workers in the movie colony about actors and directors accused of spreading communist propaganda.

In testimony before a congressional hearing, James B. Matthews, a former Communist Party official, had accused six actors of spreading communist propaganda. The actors, each a devout patriot, were Clark Gable, Robert Taylor, and James Cagney. The actresses included arch rivals Miriam Hopkins and Bette Davis. Shirley's name on the list came as a shock. She called J. Edgar asking him to investigate. "I'm not a communist," she told him. "I hate communists."

Both Hopkins and Davis were charged because they were members of the League of Women Shoppers, an alleged communist front organization. Actually, it was anything but. It had been formed as a group boycotting Japanese silk stockings in favor of cotton ones from American fields.

As J. Edgar and Clyde discovered, Shirley's link to a communist organization did not exist. Her signature had been among those included in an anniversary cable to the offices of *Ce Soir*, a daily newspaper published in France. Paula Walling, Shirley's former tutor in French and a Hollywood correspondent for *Ce Soir*, had included Shirley's name in the cable. Actually the newspaper was owned by a consortium of loyal French bankers, each a patriot.

J. Edgar personally cleared Shirley of any communist affiliation. However, Dies inserted in the *Congressional Record* a damning statement: "Shirley Temple unwittingly has served the purposes of the Communist Party. The testimony given before our committee has never been denied by the screen star herself." Privately Dies, to his supporters, accused J. Edgar of covering up the communist links of "this little lollipop-sucking Red jail-bait gooey glob working to overthrow the American government."

Three years later, the *Los Angeles Times*, in a satirical article, wrote: "Shirley Temple was only ten years old when she was accused of spreading Communist propaganda. Since then she has become quite respectable."

On a vacation to California, J. Edgar, along with Clyde and seven other agents, wearing cream-colored snap-brim hats, went to visit Shirley. He had a gift for her, a Minox camera used by his G-Men to take clandestine photographs. She told him she would have preferred a tommy gun.

He jokingly asked her to sit on his lap so he could take her fingerprints.

She later recalled, "As laps go, his thighs were just fleshy enough, his knees held calmly together, and there was no bouncing or wiggling. One arm circled me protectively and mine curled around his neck as I rested my cheek against his. For me the whole FBI was romantically encapsulated in his strong, quiet presence."

"Are you married?" she asked.

"No, I've been living all my life with my mother until her recent death," he told her.

"Then I'll kiss you." A photographer was on hand to take a picture of her lips pressed tightly against Hoover's, the only known time he ever kissed a female on the lips. It was a kiss seen around the world, as newspapers in countries as varied as Russia and Brazil ran the photograph.

It was also the beginning of an unlikely “odd couple” friendship that would last a lifetime.

Early one morning as J. Edgar was rising from the bed where he’d spent the night with Clyde, a call came in from the White House. It was a secretary who informed him that President Franklin D. Roosevelt wanted to speak to him.



Pictured above, **Shirley Temple** is being escorted around FBI headquarters in Washington by **J. Edgar**, who even gave her an autograph. She rewarded him with a kiss, but only after he assured her that he was not married. “I will never get married,” he informed her, “until you turn twenty-one years old.”

“Oh, Mr. Hoover,” she cooed.

Shirley never did marry J. Edgar, of course, but she did check with him when her second husband, Charles Black, proposed marriage. “Only after learning he was clean did I finally marry Charles. I should have had Mr. Hoover investigate my first husband, John Agar.”

In 1948, Shirley had co-starred with Agar in *Fort Apache*, directed by John Ford and featuring such big names as John Wayne and Henry Fonda. J. Edgar and Clyde later learned that Fonda had walked into Ford’s office one afternoon without knocking and found the director “with his tongue down Agar’s throat.”

Fearing trouble, J. Edgar nervously held the receiver.

“Hoover,” came the familiar voice of FDR. He wasted no time in idle chit-chat. “A little birdie told me that you plan to seek my job in the 1940 elections, although I don’t know which party you’re affiliated with—no doubt, Republican. I’ve got some real bad news for you. Last night I met with Eleanor, a rare occasion for us, and we decided to put up a brave front of our marriage and stay in the White House for another term. Not only that, but I plan to run again in 1944, 1948, 1952, and 1956. When my last term is finished in 1960, I’ll turn the field over to you. Perhaps even throw my support to you if some gangster hasn’t shot you by then.”

“Mr. President, you will have my complete support in all your campaigns, and I’d like to be your loyal chief through all the years.”

“My God, my good man,” FDR said. “Do I have any other choice? You know too much about Eleanor and me.”

Later that day, J. Edgar told Clyde and some agents, “That was the most disappointing call of my life. I have always harbored a secret desire to run for president. I know I’m a popular hero in America. I’m even featured in G-Man comics. Yet it’s an ill wind that doesn’t blow somebody some good. At least with FDR still in the Oval Office, I’ll be able to keep my job.”

CHAPTER FIVE

The months leading up to World War II and the war itself provided the excuse J. Edgar needed to pry into the secrets of virtually anybody, to open closet doors previously locked tight, and to expand FBI files on everybody from Frank Sinatra to Albert Einstein.

The award-winning historian, Dr. David Eisenbach, wrote, “J. Edgar Hoover was a snoop even as a little boy growing up in Washington. At eleven years old, he meticulously recorded the daily activities of his neighbors and published a one-cent newsletter filled with gossip. He was not interested in just the facts, he collected every rumor, no matter how implausible.”

“As a grown man in charge of the Bureau of Investigation, he continued to collect both facts and gossip on famous Americans,” Eisenbach wrote. “Even innocent people were afraid of what their FBI files contained, and in Washington very few people were completely innocent. Not even FDR, the man who battled Adolf Hitler, could stop Hoover from spying on his wife.” Dr. Eisenbach might have added—from spying on his wife or even on the President himself.

No friend of J. Edgar’s, Robert H. Jackson became the United States Attorney General in 1940, resigning to become Associate Justice of the Supreme Court in 1941. This “county seat lawyer” would later become the Chief U.S. Prosecutor at the Nürnberg war trials.

At times, the Supreme Court weighed in on the topic of wiretapping. In a decision on March 15, 1940, Attorney General Jackson issued an order forbidding the FBI from indulging in wiretapping.

To the public, J. Edgar praised the decision: “I don’t wish to head an agency of potential blackmailers.” Privately, and perhaps with the tacit permission of FDR, he continued to use wiretapping as a device to ensnare criminals and Nazis, or else to spy on any American who crossed his path.

Finally he got the ban overturned because he persuaded FDR that wiretapping was necessary to root out Nazi spies and saboteurs within the U.S. government. At one point he asserted that his G-Men had overheard Nazis plotting to blow up the British ocean liner, the *Queen Mary*.

Later, Jackson told his staff, “I hate this man Hoover. I should have fired him. I’m supposed to be over him, but he has far more power than I do. He’s got so much blackmail on Roosevelt that the President more or less has to give in to him.”

Right before Jackson’s death, he addressed the danger of having a national police force, “especially one controlled by a despot who follows the old Nazi handbook of going after perceived enemies.”

On the eve of World War II, J. Edgar and Clyde turned their attentions to investigating Nazi infiltration into the United States. “They saw a spy around every corner,” said Jackson. “Hoover was very suspicious of German Americans, especially the Bund, and he feared that if war came they would quickly be turned into enemy agents hell bent on sabotage.”

Clyde had agents infiltrate the Bund [a highly organized pro-Nazi group of German sympathizers], and they succeeded in planting three spies in their midst. They provided detailed reports on the group’s activities. However, the FBI director rejected a report from newspaper columnist Heywood Hale Broun, a member of the legendary Algonquin Round table, who claimed that there were already pro-Nazi storm troopers in America.

J. Edgar and Clyde were particularly concerned that communists would successfully persuade American labor unions to block production of munitions in an attempt to sabotage FDR’s announced intention of turning the United States into an “arsenal of democracy.”

In a decisive move, J. Edgar expanded the reach of both the FBI and his own personal power, fomenting alliances with Britain’s MI-5 and Scotland Yard, and even with France’s *Deuxième Bureau*. He also worked with the Office of Naval Intelligence.

Months before the United States entered the war, J. Edgar and his FBI launched a war against subversion, espionage, and sabotage. FDR instructed him he didn’t need to waste the Bureau’s power and money on Italians residing in the U.S. “They’re nothing but opera singers anyway.”

FDR did not like J. Edgar personally, and Eleanor “detested” him, but nonetheless, J. Edgar rose in power during the Roosevelt administration. FDR told his aides, “The nation needs a police chief in time of war. We not only have enemies abroad but at home. The land is filled with saboteurs.”

Hugh S. Johnson, who had headed FDR’s National Recovery Administration during the 1930s, defined the attacks on J. Edgar as “obscene.” He also criticized “sucker columnists and sucker politicians who support sabotage against the United States.”

Westbrook Pegler, an influential columnist for *The Washington Post*, who won the Pulitzer Prize for journalism in 1940, accused FBI agents of bugging rooms and taking clandestine pictures of Washington politicians, “even if they are man and wife.” J. Edgar shot back that Pegler had “mental halitosis.”

Ironically, J. Edgar seemed to have run out of domestic gangsters and “public enemies” to subdue. But as war seemed to inevitably descend over Europe, other enemies loomed on the horizon to justify his increased budget demands. He perceived

ample opportunities to resurrect the menace of communism and there was, of course, Hitler and his Nazi sympathizers working subversively within America.

At a secret gathering for top FBI agents within J. Edgar's private home, the director warned that war in Europe could break out at any time. He also expressed his firm belief that "Roosevelt and Britain in time will see that the United States rushes in. There's no way that Britain can triumph over Hitler's armies without us sending troops to the rescue like we did in 1917."

At the meeting, he outlined a string of espionage proposals that would be secretly conducted by the FBI. "Saboteurs and enemy aliens will be overrunning this country. They are, in fact, already here. Our job is to catch the dirty bastards. Let the spying begin. My trusted man here, Mr. Tolson, will oversee the day-to-day operations."

Before he launched an all-out espionage war, J. Edgar decided he and Clyde needed a vacation in Florida. Guy Hotell was invited, too, mainly to handle the urgent calls flooding in from FBI headquarters in Washington. Many were of the crank nature, one woman in the Hamptons on Long Island having spotted Hitler shopping for frankfurters and Sauerkraut in the local market.

One call that came in for J. Edgar was from the wealthy Axel Wenner-Gren inviting him to Hog Island in The Bahamas where he was hosting the widely disgraced Duke of Windsor, the newly appointed governor of The Bahamas, along with his notorious Duchess.

After the death of King George V on January 20, 1936, the Duke had ascended the throne as King Edward VIII. At the time, he was having an affair with the still-married Wallis Warfield Simpson. When she was free to remarry, the King told Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin that he wanted to wed this recently divorced woman. Baldwin had informed him that as Supreme Governor of the Church of England, he could not marry a divorced woman. If he insisted and married the American divorcée, he would be forced to abdicate the throne.

That is exactly what the Duke did on December 11, 1936 when he addressed what was left of the British Empire. As he put it, "I have found it impossible to carry the heavy burden of responsibility and to discharge my duties as King as I would wish to do without the help and support of the woman I love."

Ever since his abdication, Clyde and J. Edgar had been compiling a dossier on the Duke and Duchess, including mounting evidence that both of them were bisexuals, and that each of them had suppressed a respective string of scandal, which may be one of the reasons they had opted to marry in the first place. But a more serious charge had surfaced: that each of them was a Nazi sympathizer.

They were viewed as security leaks. In FBI files designated as "International Espionage Behind Edward's Abdication," there appeared a memo. "Certain would-be State secrets were passed on to Edward, and when it was found that Joachim von Ribbentrop actually received the same information, immediately Stanley Baldwin was forced to accept that the leakage had been located. It was Edward himself. Even though King, he was actually spying on England."

By the time J. Edgar, Clyde, and Guy Hotell flew to Nassau, the director had read the most pertinent revelations in his file on the newly appointed governor of The Bahamas. J. Edgar was particularly interested in reports of the Duke's homosexual trysts. The most notorious revelations had occurred in the 1920s when the then Prince of Wales had gone on a tour of the British Empire with his celebrated cousin, Louis Mountbatten, during which they were said to have conducted a homosexual love affair.

In another report, the Prince was accused of commanding the dashing handsome Lord Chaud Hamilton of the Grenadier Guards to strip naked in front of him and then sodomize him. It seemed that the Duke often liked to strip down himself except for a diaper. On several occasions, he was accused of commanding Admiral Sir Lionel Halsey to push him through the halls of his residence in a perambulator.

But these were considered minor perversions when stacked against a far more serious accusation that bordered on treason. Against the wishes of the British government, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor visited Nazi Germany in the wake of his abdication. In October of 1937 the royal couple was received by Adolf Hitler at his vacation retreat at Obersalzberg.



The deposed king of England, now the **Duke of Windsor**, is seen on his wedding day, June 3, 1937, with his bride, **the Duchess**, at the Château de Condé, in the Picardy region of northeastern France.

As early as May, 1937, the Duke demanded that his future wife be addressed as “Her Royal Highness.” No one obeyed that command.

The Duke gave *der Führer* the Nazi salute. The FBI file claimed that the Duke endorsed Nazism, viewing it as a bulwark against the communist menace from the east. If he had stayed on the throne, he planned to pursue an alliance with Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union. Hitler himself is reported to have said, “The abdication of Edward VIII is a severe loss for us.”

In Lisbon, after his abdication, the Duke had in an interview suggested that Britain could not win a war with Germany. Upon learning of this, Britain’s new prime minister, Winston Churchill, decided such a defeatist attitude could not be tolerated from a former king. He was ordered (some say “banished”) to the “backwater” of The Bahamas where he was named governor. “In that post he could do the least damage to the British war effort,” Churchill said.

Arriving in Nassau, the Duke referred to The Bahamas as “a third-rate British colony.” Within a week, the Duke and Duchess were seen aboard Axel Wenner-Gren’s yacht, reaffirming J. Edgar’s conviction that all three parties were entrenching their links to *Luftwaffe* commander Hermann Göring.

Before leaving Europe, the Duke, according to the FBI files, had received a personal letter from Hitler, promising that if the Duke would publicly support the establishment of a fascist Britain, the Führer would return him to the throne and make his Duchess the ruling queen. Both would have imperial power, as Hitler planned to dissolve Parliament and establish a Nazi Council to govern the U.K.

Many of these reports reached Roosevelt, who ordered the FBI to begin “covert surveillance of the Duke and Duchess.” J. Edgar carried out these orders, even assigning eight agents to spy on the Windsors when they visited Palm Beach in April of 1941.

Before flying to Nassau, Clyde gave J. Edgar a secret communiqué from Lord Caldecote in London. In it, he claimed that British intelligence had learned that the Duchess had been the mistress of von Rippentrop when he had functioned as Germany’s ambassador to Britain. She was said to have leaked highly confidential information to the diplomat, who then systematically forwarded it to Berlin.



Joachim von Ribbentrop was Hitler's special adviser in foreign affairs and ambassador without portfolio.

During his affair with the Duchess, he sent her seventeen red roses every day. In return, she gave him sex and state secrets.

At a dinner party on Hog Island, J. Edgar, Clyde, and Guy were astonished at how vain the Duke was and how self-involved and imperial the Duchess was. "I don't usually dine with the police," she said, insulting J. Edgar.

The Duke spent most of the dinner conversation talking about how he kept his waist so thin. He even stood up and modeled to the dinner table how fit and trim he was.

When a conch salad was served, he nibbled at the lettuce leaf encasing it. Even though Wenner-Gren had ordered his Bahamian chef to roast a suckling pig, the Duke insisted on a small cut of boiled grouper, no sauce, which he followed by eating an apple for dessert.

J. Edgar maneuvered the venue so that he could have some time to talk alone with the Duke, hoping to learn something of his plans. The Duke wasn't very revelatory. When J. Edgar mentioned Hitler, the Duke startled him by saying, "I don't think he's such a bad chap."

As part of his after-dinner entertainment, Wenner-Gren had hired a junkanoo band. It seemed that the Windsors liked to dance. The Duke preferred to dance the night away, doing the fox trot with Guy. Clyde invited the Duchess to be his partner while J. Edgar and Wenner-Gren looked on, each of them slightly bemused.

Later in the evening Guy showed the Duke the way to the bathroom, where the two men remained an inordinate amount of time. Guy later told J. Edgar and Clyde, "The Duke's a homosexual all right, and has the world's smallest dick. He is the active partner in fellatio and the passive partner in sodomy, because he doesn't have much to work with."

J. Edgar told Wenner-Gren, "Your new governor and his First Lady appear to be quite a horny couple." J. Edgar couldn't help noticing that when the Duchess was dancing with Clyde, she pressed her body into his.

"My dear fellow, you don't know the half of it," Wenner-Gren said. "In his new home, the Duke often wears only a diaper, or so a servant told me. He dirties that diaper and gets a wicked spanking from the Duchess."

"I'm sure England has had more perverted kings than the Duke," J. Edgar said.

Before J. Edgar's departure from Nassau, he arranged to have two agents stationed on the island of New Providence to feed him information about the exiled Duke and Duchess's every movement. In utter secrecy, Clyde also contacted that gossipy manservant at the Windsors's residence. For a hundred dollars a week, the Bahamian agreed to file a weekly report on everything going on in the royal household.

Back in Washington, J. Edgar sent FDR a confidential memo. "We have the Windsors under constant surveillance now that they're living in our part of the world. If the Duke tries to make a deal with the Nazis to use Bahamian ports as a base to launch an attack on Florida, we will be the first to know."

For years to come, the Duke and Duchess would remain on J. Edgar's radar screen even when they were no longer security threats. Guy later recalled, "Eddie found that their lifestyle made titillating reading late at night."

Flying back into Miami from Nassau, J. Edgar and Clyde found themselves involved in a round-up of "white slavers" in Florida. His G-Men had discovered a ring of men exploiting young boys and girls, forcing them into the sex trade. Many of the male and female prostitutes were from Cuba or the Dominican Republic. Young girls seeking a better life in the United States fell victim to pimps. There were incidents of gang rapes.

Even more shocking to G-Men was the discovery that some homeless young boys had been illegally brought into Florida to be auctioned off nude to pedophiles.

The FBI's handling of this white slave trade won J. Edgar praise from Walter Winchell in his column. Since their days at the Stork Club, J. Edgar's friendship with the journalist had chilled, but Winchell was still supplied with tips from Clyde in exchange for a favorable press.

Back in Washington, J. Edgar seemed reconciled to the fact that the Roosevelts might become permanent "squatters" within the White House. "I think the only way Roosevelt will leave that Oval Office is when the Grim Reaper knocks on his door."

He ordered Clyde to step up the FBI's investigation of Franklin and Eleanor, and especially those men in power around them. J. Edgar singled out Sumner Welles in particular. His influence on FDR seemed to be growing monthly, and the politician knew too much about J. Edgar after that embarrassing encounter at the male bordello in Havana.

The FBI director constantly referred to Welles as a "connoisseur of black meat." To Clyde and Guy, J. Edgar predicted, "We'll get enough on this guy to bring him down. As for FDR and his ugly squaw, they are the most scandalous couple ever to occupy the White House, including that whore Dolly Madison."

Since she outlived her husband by about seventeen years, Eleanor's FBI file came to occupy two overstuffed filing cabinets. Of that original file, only a meager 450 pages survive. After the death of the First Lady in 1962, J. Edgar ordered that most of her files be destroyed.

At private parties attended by fellow bigots, J. Edgar had learned to do an almost perfect imitation of Eleanor's high-pitched and rather prim voice. Playing only to a select group, including Clyde, he called his fifteen-minute presentation, "An Evening With the Nigger Lover in the White House." In his attempts at hilarity, J. Edgar, as Eleanor, would expound on the "divine pleasures of cunnilingus," a subject with which he utterly lacked familiarity.

He was always willing to read the most unflattering editorials about the First Lady, and Clyde collected caricatures of her in newsprint. One day Clyde opened a package from W.C. Fields, the comedian appearing in movies with Mae West. At first viewing, they appeared to be merely ugly pictures of the First Lady. But when turned upside down, they looked like anatomical close-ups of some hideous vagina.

J. Edgar sent Fields a letter thanking him for "this most wonderful gift—it made my day."

He encountered Eleanor at functions more frequently than he wanted to, and was once deeply offended while having lunch with Clyde at the Mayflower Hotel. Eleanor attempted to enter the dining room with two black women as her guests. The manager of the restaurant stepped up to her. "Mrs. Roosevelt, we will be honored to accommodate you. In fact, you might like to join Mr. J. Edgar Hoover at table. But I'm afraid we'll have to accommodate your colored guests in the kitchen."

The First Lady said, "If my friends aren't good enough to dine here, I'll invite them to lunch with me at the White House." As J. Edgar watched scornfully, she turned her back on the manager and headed back to her car, followed by the two black women.

As America moved toward war with Japan and Germany, J. Edgar had spies everywhere. He even heard how Eleanor referred to him, at one point calling him "a Fascist bastard," and on another occasion labeling him an "arrogant would-be Himmler."

Two years before her death, J. Edgar was still calling her "the most dangerous woman in America."

Clyde, with the help of three agents, conducted an extensive probe of Malvina ("Tommy") Thompson and Edith Helm, two of Eleanor's chief aides. He even sent agents to their hometowns, digging for dirt on the women. Eventually, news of that reached Eleanor. When she heard of this, she fired off a letter to J. Edgar accusing him of "using Gestapo methods to discredit loyal American citizens."

He didn't like Eleanor before she wrote that letter. But after he received it, the First Lady had made a dangerous enemy for

life. He wrote her a letter of apology and said he would call off the investigation of Thompson and Helm. But he didn't agree to stop probing into her life.

During the war, "Eleanor Clubs" were launched, and J. Edgar observed them closely. These clubs were composed mainly of black domestic workers. He assumed they were planning subversive activities, although their main purpose seemed to be to eliminate segregation.

The clubs were named for Eleanor because of her opposition to segregation. In standing up for African Americans, she received numerous death threats, beginning in 1943 in the middle of the war. These threats were turned over to the FBI.

J. Edgar told Clyde "to file the fucking things. If the KKK gets rid of that old bitch, what a bright world it will be. Imagine a world without Hitler, Stalin, and Eleanor Roosevelt."

His "snoop squad" discovered that Eleanor maintained a secret apartment in New York's Greenwich Village "where she meets with communists and lesbians."

"That's why she refuses Secret Service protection," J. Edgar said. "To conceal her own dirty secrets."

The FBI learned that since 1921 Eleanor had maintained very intimate relationships with Elizabeth Read, an attorney, and Esther Lape, a publicist. Eleanor later recorded in her journal, "No form of love is to be despised."

As First Lady, she became even more intimate with another lesbian couple, Marion Dickerman, a liberal firecracker for the New York State Democratic Committee, and her lover, Nancy Cook, a carpenter and potter. Both were ardent feminists. FDR referred to them as "Eleanor's squaws." Alice Roosevelt Longworth, the outspoken and socially prominent daughter of Theodore Roosevelt, referred to them as female impersonators. Cook and Dickerman nicknamed Eleanor "Muddie."

At one point, so the FBI learned, FDR agreed to construct Val-Kil, a residence in an isolated position on his Hyde Park estate which he called "a shack for my wife's she-males." When at Hyde Park, Eleanor slept with the two women in a single bedroom. When the President learned of that, he renamed Val-Kil "Honeymoon Cottage." All the furniture, silverware, and linen were inscribed with the women's combined initials of EMN.



In a remote section of Hyde Park, FDR's family estate north of New York City, **Val-Kil Cottage** was built as a retreat for Eleanor Roosevelt. She lived here with an entourage that FDR referred to as her "squaws." Members included political activist Marion Dickerman and Nancy Cook, a carpenter and potter.

FDR derided Val-Kil as "my wife's honeymoon cottage." He tolerated her lesbian liaisons because it freed him to pursue his own affairs.

In a letter that still survives, Eleanor wrote to Marion and Nancy: "I feel I'd like to go off with you and forget the rest of the world exists."

J. Edgar and Clyde discovered that, in spite of her "matronly aunt" appearance, she had a fairly active sex life, and not just with state trooper Earl Miller or Lorena Hickok, the lesbian reporter whose beat was the White House.

Whether it was true or not, Clyde revealed to J. Edgar that during the previous four years, she had had sex with her black chauffeur, her own private doctor, David Gurewitsch, a colonel in the U.S. Army, and two rugged officials of the National Maritime Union, both of whom had served in the Navy. They were Joseph Curran, president of the National Maritime Union, and Frederick ("Blackie") Myers, his vice president.

In one bugging, the FBI had listened in to the two union men talking to each other. "God-damn it, Blackie," one of them

said, “My dick has made enough sacrifices to the ugly old bitch. Now is your time to service that flabby cunt!” To make matters even more provocative, Clyde discovered that one of the union men Eleanor had slept with was a member of the Communist Party.

Clyde and J. Edgar focused not on these passing liaisons Eleanor had indulged in, but on her infatuation with a studious young man, Joseph Lash, whom she’d met at a 1939 session of the House Un-American Activities Committee. The young man had just turned thirty but looked much younger.

“Bat Breath [J. Edgar’s name for Leona Hickok] is a 100 percent lesbian, but it seems Eleanor likes a young dick every now and then,” J. Edgar told Clyde and his agents.

An outspoken student radical—“a Communist through and through,” in J. Edgar’s words—Lash remained under FBI surveillance for the duration of the war. The CIC (Counterintelligence Corps) also had Lash under surveillance. During the war, the CIC was known as the “FBI of the Army.”



As First Lady, **Eleanor Roosevelt** (*left*) spent many cozy evenings at the White House with **Marion Dickerman** (*right*), one of her closest friends and a woman who adored her, calling her “Muddie.”

“Muddie” and Marion often talked of their plans to live together, after Muddie’s involvement in the White House, with Marion’s lover, Nancy Cook.

At Val-Kil Cottage, Marion became increasingly annoyed by the visits of Eleanor’s lover, New York State trooper Earl Miller, and her relatives and grandchildren.

In a jealous mode, Marion eventually wrote Eleanor, “Nancy and I feel increasingly abandoned and rejected by your other interests.”

Clyde learned through his agent that Lash had visited “communist cells” on trips to Spain during its civil war and during a journey to Moscow, where he was a guest at the Kremlin.

Eleanor seemed mesmerized by Lash and adopted him as her *protégé*, inviting him to dine with her at the White House. She also contributed \$1,000 toward his education.

Clyde's dossier on Lash grew and grew every passing month. In an illegal move evocative of Richard Nixon's Watergate break-in in the years to come, Clyde directed two agents to break into the headquarters of the American Youth Congress, of which Lash was an officer. The agents discovered intimate letters between Eleanor and Lash, which they photographed.

In the FBI's "bureauspeak," planting a bug or breaking into someone's home or office became known as "surreptitious entry" or a "black bag job." As Clyde said, "We stole only secrets—nothing of material value."

While Eleanor was romantically involved with Lash, she was still carrying on her lesbian affair with Hickok. One night at a Washington party, J. Edgar and Clyde encountered Eleanor's spiteful cousin, Alice Roosevelt Longworth.

J. Edgar quizzed her about Eleanor's relationship with Hickok. "Eleanor Roosevelt is a card-carrying lesbian," the outspoken Alice claimed. "When I was growing up, I didn't know what that meant. It seemed physically impossible, but now I know more about it. They're sleeping together in the White House and having sex."



One of Eleanor Roosevelt's "squaws," (as FDR described her), **Nancy Cook** (*left figure, above*) is characteristically pictured with a hammer in her hand, as she worked as a carpenter and furniture maker. Here, at Val-Kil cottage, she nails up a poster promoting FDR's National Recovery Administration (NRA).

In 1933, shortly after Eleanor and FDR moved in, the First Lady invited Nancy to the White House. Together, they redecorated, hanging pictures and eventually defining Lincoln's bedroom suite as Eleanor's sleeping quarters within the White House.

With Nancy's help, Eleanor moved her own pictures into the Lincoln Suite, with Nancy hammering nails into the walls to hang Roosevelt family photographs. Eleanor complained to Nancy that Lincoln's bed was too large for her, so the two women, aided by two White House staff members, placed a bed for the First Lady into a small adjoining dressing room.

Lorena Hickok, Eleanor's other lesbian lover, referred to Nancy and Marion as "self-absorbed snobs."

Alice wasn't engaged in reckless gossip. Eleanor's steamy love letters to Hickok were published in a 1998 book *Empty Without You*. In one of the letters Hickok wrote: "I wish I could lie down beside you tonight and take you in my arms. I ache to hold you close. Most clearly, I remember your eyes, with a kind of teasing smile in them, and the feeling of that soft spot just northeast of the corner of your mouth against my lips."

After its reviewer read the book, *The New York Times* concluded that J. Edgar had been right—"it was a homosexual affair." *The Los Angeles Times* found that a same-sex involvement was "incontrovertible." The *Washington Post* labeled the Hickok/Roosevelt liaison "a lesbian love affair," as did *Newsweek*.

After the United States entered the war in December of 1941, the patriotic Lash signed up for enlistment in the Navy. Although he was physically in excellent shape, he was turned down, which he later reported to Eleanor. She immediately wrote Attorney General Francis Biddle demanding to know why Lash was rejected.

He sent the letter to J. Edgar, who personally wrote Eleanor that the FBI had not conducted any investigation of Lash, nor had it filed any unfavorable reports about him to the Navy.

Actually, J. Edgar himself had called the Secretary of the Navy, claiming that Lash was a security risk. Even so, the U.S. Army drafted him, and he was inducted. For his farewell party in New York, Eleanor hired a band and paid for the bottles of imported French champagne.

Unrelenting in tailing Lash, FBI agents learned that in the spring of 1943, he had been assigned to Army headquarters in Illinois. On March 5, Eleanor checked into Room 332 of the Urbana-Lincoln Hotel in Urbana, and Lash occupied No. 330. The two bedrooms had connecting French doors. Knowing their arrival details in advance, FBI agents had bugged the room. Later they reported that Eleanor and Lash stayed in their adjoining rooms for thirty-six hours, taking out only forty-five minutes during the evening for a quick dinner in the hotel dining room.

When Clyde and J. Edgar heard the recording at the FBI headquarters in Washington, both men determined that the First Lady and Lash were definitely engaged in sexual intercourse.

On the train back to Washington, Eleanor wrote one of her “Joe dearest” letters. In it, she said, “Separation between people who love each other makes the reunion always like a new discovery. Thanks for such a happy time. All my love, E.R.”

In another brief note, Eleanor indicated she was aware that Lash would be occupying the same bedroom with Trude Pratt, a married woman. Instead of being jealous, she seemed to give the illicit union her blessing. She even placed a call to their hotel room to wish them well.

In a letter to Trude, Lash wrote that Eleanor had taken him shopping in Chicago, buying him garish underwear, “one pair with a tiger on the crotch.”

After listening to details about Eleanor and Trude’s respective sexual encounters with Lash, the young man’s superior, Lt. P.F. Boyer, a colonel, contacted Army officers, claiming that Eleanor, Trude, and Lash were involved in a “gigantic conspiracy,” although offering no evidence. He asked that FBI agents break into the bedroom where Trude, who had journeyed by train from Washington to Urbana, was staying with Lash and arrest him “for having intercourse with the much-married Mrs. Pratt.” Boyer’s superior ignored the request, although J. Edgar thought it would be a valid action to take. Following her divorce, Trude would eventually marry Lash.

On another occasion, J. Edgar and Clyde learned that Eleanor was meeting Lash at the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago. Once again, agents bugged their bedrooms. When J. Edgar and his agents heard the recording, he said, “Horse Face must really have been enjoying herself.”

In the same recording, Eleanor admitted that, “I’m not in love with Franklin but I render him a labor of love by helping him carry out his hopes and dreams. I ask only that I be treated as an equal partner.” She also shared similar feelings in a letter to Hickok. She wrote, “I’m a stranger to Franklin, and I don’t want to be anything else. I realize he is a great man.”

On the train back to Washington, Eleanor wrote lovingly to Lash relating how much she loved stroking him as he slept. Back at the White House, Eleanor continued to write Lash. In one letter, she said, “I feel so excited about the thought of hearing your voice. What will I do when I actually see you?” He wrote back, “You know exactly what will happen when I see you again.”

In many of her letters, she claimed, “I need you so very much.” In one letter, she said, “I want to hold you in my arms during these troubled times.” She slept with his picture encased in a gold locket under her pillow.



Student activists **Agnes Reynolds** (*left*) and **Joseph P. Lash**, as member of the American Student Union, were summoned before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1939 to testify about his communist past.

That same year, he'd met Eleanor Roosevelt on a train, and he became her life-long friend and lover. Later, he would gain his greatest fame as her biographer.

George Burton was J. Edgar's chief liaison with the U.S. Army. He informed the FBI director that the recordings and letters between Lash and Eleanor had been turned over to FDR. After reviewing the material, FDR summoned general officers of Army Intelligence to the White House. He also summoned Eleanor to the Oval Office and confronted her with the evidence right in front of Army Intelligence.

According to Burton, Eleanor fought back, accusing her husband of adultery "many, many times." "It was a terrible argument between these two powerhouses," Burton said.

The next morning, FDR called officials of the Army Air Corps and directed them to have Lash shipped to a dangerous combat post in the South Pacific. "Perhaps a Jap bullet has Lash's name on it," the President said. He also ordered that Army agents directly involved in that intelligence gathering on Lash and Eleanor "also be sent to the South Pacific to confront the Japs."

Eleanor flew to San Francisco to tell Lash good-bye. As he sailed to the Pacific, she wrote to him, "The hard part of loving is that one has to learn so often to let go of those we love."

Even as late as 1960, while Eleanor was still alive, J. Edgar told an agent that she almost caused the FBI to fail in its mission to contain the menace of communism. "I think in her heart she wanted America to go Red."

In spite of the blackmail evidence J. Edgar had compiled on Eleanor, she continued to complain about "the Gestapo tactics of the FBI" throughout the war.

In a private meeting with FDR in the Oval Office, J. Edgar voiced his own complaints about the First Lady and her "left wing activities."

The President sighed. "Edgar, don't get too worked up. Feel some pity for me. I have to live with her. She's going through a change of life, and we'll just have to put up with it."

When FDR appointed Joseph P. Kennedy, the founding father of the political clan, ambassador to Great Britain in 1938, the President suggested he might be discreet to break off his affair with Gloria Swanson, who had been the leading vamp of the silent screen.

The brash Irishman told FDR, "but only if you set a good example and break off your affair with Missy."

He was referring to FDR's second most favored mistress, Marguerite LeHand. Perhaps unknown to FDR at the time, Ambassador Kennedy and Missy had previously been lovers. In Boston, Kennedy had introduced Missy to his oldest son,

Joseph P. Kennedy Jr., and they'd enjoyed a two-week affair. She later wrote Shirley Bassingworth, a long-time friend, "Joe Jr. is far more masculine and a far better lover than dear ol' dad. He's also the handsomest devil of the Kennedy clan."

As Michael John Sullivan wrote in *Presidential Passions*, "Missy shared almost every aspect of the President's daily life. She swam with him, she dined with him, she shared his hobbies with him, and, most importantly of all, she had fun with him and made him laugh, something Eleanor was never able to do."

"She is the unofficial First Lady of the land," J. Edgar told Clyde and his agents. "If the American public only knew. Even on official motor trips, FDR sits with Missy, not Eleanor."

J. Edgar and Clyde had stationed a spy (name unknown) in the White House, who gave them daily bulletins on the comings and goings of Franklin and Eleanor. The two men were informed that Missy was the "Second Lady" of the White House, and that FDR had ordered the staff to treat her "in the same manner in which they would treat Mrs. Roosevelt."

Although Eleanor had abandoned the bed of her husband in 1918 when she discovered his love letters to Lucy Mercer, she seemed to accept Missy as one of the family. In fact, with Missy in charge during her long and frequent absences, she felt no guilt about any abandonment of her husband.

Missy had long ago assumed the duties of a second wife to FDR, giving his sons and daughters their allowances, paying the personal bills for FDR, and even supervising Eleanor's travel budget, which was often exorbitant to tight-fisted Missy.

Around April of 1941, J. Edgar received a call from a doctor to learn news that hadn't even been passed on to FDR. The President's mistress had been diagnosed with a brain tumor. Two days later she suffered a stroke which left her incapacitated.



During Franklin D. Roosevelt's term in the White House, he had both a "Second Lady," Marguerite (Missy) LeHand (center), and an official First Lady, Eleanor (right).

"Missy" was the President's true love, and she performed all the "wifely" duties in the White House, even dispersing the allowances for the Roosevelt children.

She also had an active sex life with FDR. Even though disabled from polio and permanently confined to a wheelchair, he could still maintain an erection.

When FDR went to see her, he found her irrational. She demanded that he move into the hospital suite with her. He told her he couldn't and returned to the White House.

That night she set herself on fire. Eventually he had to send her back to her own family in Massachusetts. Under the watchful eye of her family she was cared for but never had any more contact with FDR. At the age of forty-six, she was hit by a cerebral embolism and died suddenly in the summer of 1944.

After FDR's death in 1945 in Warm Springs, Georgia, when his will was read, his family was shocked to learn that he'd left half of everything he owned to Missy, even though she'd died months before.

Although Eleanor had gotten along with Missy, she could not abide Franklin's first mistress, Lucy Mercer, who had been his lover during World War I. In 1920, Lucy Mercer had married Winthrop Rutherford, an aging North Carolina socialite. After that, she was known as "Mrs. Rutherford."

Eleanor had assumed that her agreement with FDR from 1918 was still in effect. The President could see Missy at any time of the day or night, but he was forbidden to visit Lucy again. Even so, over the years, FDR continued to see her on infrequent occasions, sometimes at the South Carolina estate of Bernard Baruch.

Winthrop suffered a severe stroke in 1941, leaving him so incapacitated he didn't know if Lucy were in the house or not. With Missy dead, FDR began to slip Lucy in and out of the White House when Eleanor was away, perhaps visiting a coal mine in West Virginia or addressing the congregation of a black church in Georgia.

When Eleanor was in Washington, FDR sometimes ordered his Secret Service caravan to take him into the wilds of Virginia where he would have pre-arranged a meeting with Lucy. Standing by the road, she would get into the back of FDR's limousine, and the caravan would drive off.



Marguerite LeHand (above), whom FDR affectionately called "Missy," was the second greatest love of his life, after Lucy Mercer Rutherfurd.

When Eleanor Roosevelt was away somewhere else, Missy lived with the President in the White House, aboard a Florida houseboat, and in Warm Springs, Georgia, helping him recover from polio.

Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr. said that she was "as close to being a wife as my father ever had. For most of Dad's term of office, it was Missy who was actually the First Lady of the land, and the American public had not a clue."

A glass partition was curtained off to afford the pair some privacy from the chauffeur. Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr. later claimed that his father had continued to have sex with Lucy until the presidential election of 1944, when his health began to decline very seriously. Photographs taken of him at the time show him looking very haggard.

FDR Jr. recalled that once he'd walked into his father's library and caught Lucy massaging the President's crippled legs.

On a yacht trip on the Potomac in 1959, the young Roosevelt told John and Jacqueline Kennedy that, "I think the true love of dad's life was Mrs. Lucy Rutherfurd. Through World War II, she was his mistress."

"When Jack becomes president of the United States," Jackie said, "and he slips a mistress into the White House ... well, let me put it this way. I'm an expert manicurist. Can you imagine Jack a soprano?"

J. Edgar spent a great deal of his time during the war years digging up dirt on the Roosevelts, but on many an embarrassing occasion he was confronted with his own misdeeds of yesterday. As revealed in Anthony Summers biography, *Official and Confidential: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover*, Jimmy G.C. Corcoran emerged from J. Edgar's past. He had been one of his chief aides at the Bureau of Investigation back in the 1920s.

He had learned much about J. Edgar while working so intimately with him. Their paths had never crossed since he left the Bureau to become a highly paid lobbyist in Washington. After the United States entered WWII, it became illegal for lobbyists

to solicit money from businessmen hoping to get congressional approval to set up munitions factories.

Using his powerful connections, Jimmy ignored the ban and sought help from some congressmen to open such a wartime factory. For his services, he was to be paid somewhere around \$80,000.

Not being familiar with J. Edgar's link to Jimmy, Clyde carried out a sting operation. Along with two agents, he was going to burst into a hotel room at the Mayflower Hotel and catch Jimmy in the act of accepting the bribe.

The operation was carried out successfully and Jimmy was arrested. But before he could be hauled off to jail, he privately informed Clyde about blackmail evidence he had on J. Edgar.

In New Orleans around 1927, J. Edgar had been arrested in a men's room while fellating a teenage fisherman, son of a local shrimp boat owner. There was a record of that arrest. Jimmy told Clyde he would go to the newspapers if the FBI carted him off to prison.

At the time, J. Edgar was dining at Harvey's. Leaving Jimmy in the custody of two agents, Clyde hurried to the restaurant, informing J. Edgar of Jimmy and his allegations.

"I thought that record was destroyed long ago," he told Clyde. "See to it that it is. Also let Jimmy go and get his \$80,000. I'm sure he earned it. Give him my regards. Case closed."

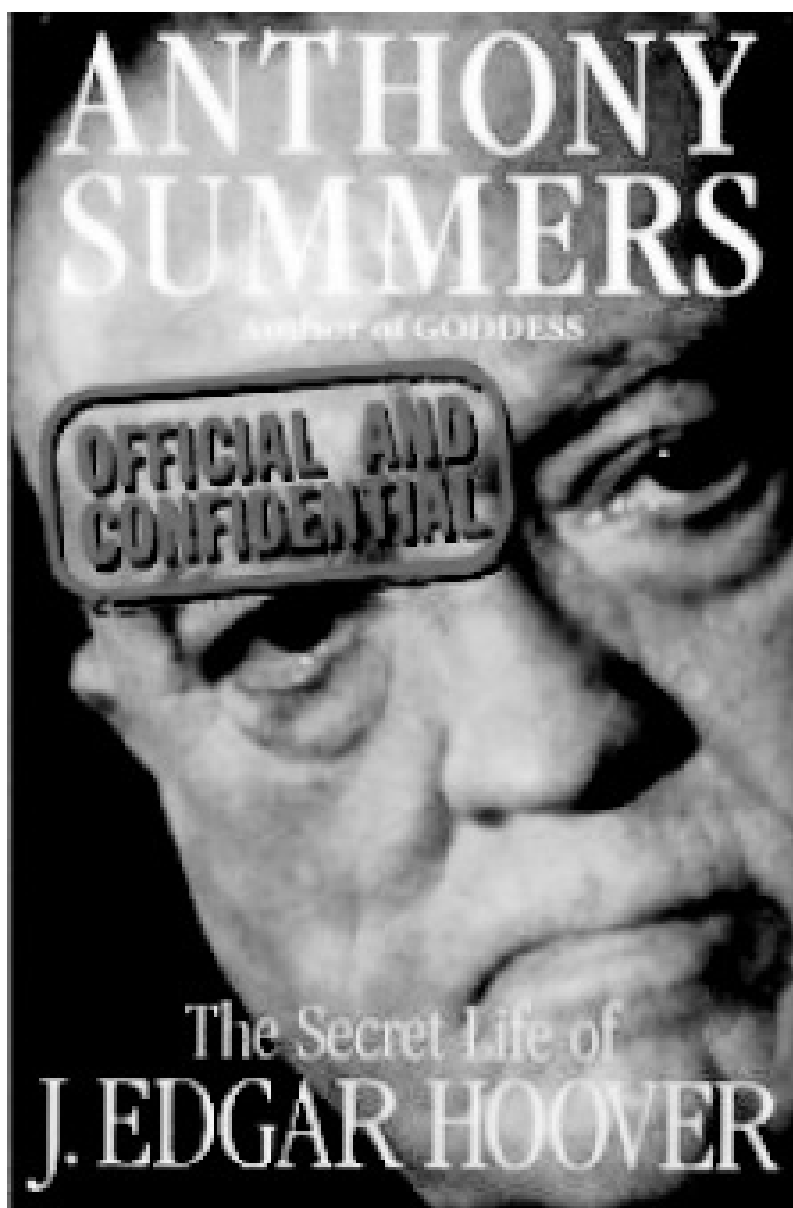
Jimmy continued as a lobbyist until his death in a mysterious plane crash in 1956 off the coast of Spanish Wells in The Bahamas. There were rumors that the privately owned craft had been tampered with by an unknown mechanic before takeoff. In spite of suspicions, no investigation was ever launched. Jimmy's FBI file was destroyed upon his death. Throughout the war there were "other brush fires to put out," in J. Edgar words. "No man is better than Clyde," he said, "in squelching a story."

Other than Clyde, J. Edgar's most loyal agent in the FBI was Louis ("Nick the Greek") Nichols, a corn-fed football hunk from the Middle West who had a powerful, almost intimidating presence except when he was around "The Boss."

Nichols joined the bureau in 1934 around the time of the John Dillinger slaying and would remain there until 1957. His rise within the Bureau was so rapid that most his fellow agents assumed that J. Edgar had taken on another lover, although that does not appear to be the case.

By 1937, Nichols had become head of the Research Division but, in essence, he was the publicity director for the Bureau and the de facto second-in-command after Clyde. His main job seemed to involve the promotion of the "glory and accomplishments" of J. Edgar and to squelch all stories associated with the director's homosexuality.

Often Nichols was tipped off before a story was published, as he seemingly had spies everywhere. Such was the case in the early 1950s when reporter Jack Nelson investigated and wrote a feature for *The Los Angeles Times*, citing mounting evidence that J. Edgar was a homosexual.



If J. Edgar had been alive in 1993 when Anthony Summers published this **controversial book** (*above*), he would surely have had the author arrested.

Summers was the first investigative reporter to establish that the FBI director was a closet homosexual and a transvestite.

Nichols was immediately dispatched to Los Angeles, where he met with the publisher of the newspaper, during which time he presented evidence that Nelson was a serious alcoholic and engaged in “degenerate sex” with underage girls. The article was dropped, but the publisher did not give in to Nichols’ demand that Nelson be fired.

By some means not known, Nichols also prevented *American Mercury* from running an article in which J. Edgar was accused of perversion. Nichols met privately with Lawrence Spivak, the publisher. No notes remain of that meeting, so whatever intimidation Nichols used on Spivak remains a mystery. The feature story was dropped on the grounds that it had not been adequately investigated, although its contents seemed accurate, at least when judged by hindsight. It is believed that Nichols turned up damaging evidence about Spivak’s private life.

Under J. Edgar’s direction, Nichols drew up a list of publications with whom the FBI would cooperate and those whom it would not. On his hate list were *The New York Times* and *Time* magazine. J. Edgar despised *The Washington Post*, but liked *The Washington Star*.

Nichols even sent gifts to reporters on the *Star*, paid for by FBI funds. He liked stories about how J. Edgar rooted out “commie rats” in the U.S. government, and he attacked reporters critical of the FBI, calling them “journalist prostitutes who should be dealt with like a two-dollar Saturday night whore.”

When *The Washington Post* wrote an unflattering story on J. Edgar, Nichols told him, “Had I known, I would have gone over there and hurled myself into the press machines to prevent its publication.”

Nichols seemed determined to respond to J. Edgar’s every whim. A workaholic, he was devoted to his job. To curry favor on the side, he gave J. Edgar expensive gifts that he could ill afford since he had to support a family.

He even named his son “J. Edgar,” which caused Nichols to be ridiculed behind his back. The private joke in the Bureau

was that if the child had been born a girl, “Nichols would have named it Clyde.”

He wrote sycophantic letters to his boss, including one in 1935 when he claimed that “listening to your utterances is one of the greatest experiences of my life.”

Not all allegations about J. Edgar’s homosexuality came from the press. There were other leaks, as in a case in Kentucky, when T.C. Purdue, a carpenter, claimed that once in Miami J. Edgar had had sex with a seventeen-year-old boy, who was in FBI custody at the time. Purdue, who had once hired the boy as an apprentice carpenter in Georgia, went public about this brief liaison. Nichols was ready to have Purdue arrested for his statements until Guy privately admitted the story was true and that he was responsible for having set up the sexual tryst.

Learning that, Nichols switched to a cover-up mode. One doesn’t know what he privately thought, but he spent at least his public life denying stories of the homosexuality of his boss, J. Edgar. To be confronted with this “disconnect” between the private and “official” versions of the story must have caused him much anxiety.

Nonetheless, Nichols ordered M.W. McFarlin, the chief of the FBI field office in Louisville, to track down Purdue and force him to sign an affidavit “confessing” that he had lied.

In his report to J. Edgar, McFarlin wrote: “You may be assured, Mr. Hoover, that so long as there is a Federal Bureau of Investigation, those associated with you will exert every means in their power to protect you from lying attacks and throw the lies down the throats of those who utter them.” He called Purdue “a vile and dastardly bastard.”

In Washington, when Nichols read that, he told Guy, “My God, this McFarlin can be as much of a sycophant as I am. I’d better watch out: he’s after my job.”

In 1936, having put in an extra forty hours week after week, Nichols collapsed from nervous exhaustion and was sent to the hospital in an FBI limousine. The next day, accompanied by Clyde, J. Edgar visited him in his private room. So exhausted he couldn’t even get up to go to the bathroom, Nichols was being given a sponge bath by a male nurse.

After the nurse left, Nichols did not bother to cover his nudity with a sheet, perhaps deliberately putting on an exhibition for his boss.

J. Edgar told Nichols to rest here as long as he needed. When he and Clyde left the hospital after an hour, they headed for an FBI limousine. Guy was waiting in the back seat for them.

He heard J. Edgar and Clyde talking about Nichols. “Did you see the dick on our football hero?” J. Edgar asked. “There’s meat for the poor there. Too bad he’s straight.”

When FDR ran for an unprecedented third presidential term in 1940, it was a tense time in the world. Britain and Germany were at war in the wake of the Nazi invasion of Poland in September of 1939. It seemed inevitable that America would be drawn into that conflict, but millions of Americans emphatically opposed the involvement of the United States. Roosevelt ran on a ticket that insisted that he’d keep the country out of foreign wars. During a private meeting, J. Edgar asked, “What if we’re attacked?” FDR shot back, “then that is no foreign war.”

At the Democratic Convention of 1940, Henry A. Wallace was named as the vice presidential candidate to run on the ticket with FDR, seeking to win an unprecedented third term in office. From the cornfields of Iowa, the controversial Wallace had risen to become the President’s Secretary of Agriculture during FDR’s first two terms. He’d gained recognition when he’d devised the first “corn-hog ratio charts,” indicating the probable course of the markets.

Many voters feared that FDR would not make it through a third term and focused more than the usual attention on Wallace. J. Edgar and Clyde ordered some of their agents to begin an investigation of him. Increasingly, they were hearing rumors that he was a card-carrying communist. Republicans started a smear campaign that he was actually an agent of the Kremlin.

The FBI uncovered what they viewed as an “unnatural relationship” between Wallace and Nicholas Roerich, a Russian *émigré*, painter, and theosophist. “God knows what the Red bastard has implanted in the brain of our upcoming vice president,” J. Edgar told his agents.

During the 1930s, Wallace had written rather adoring letters to Roerich, calling him “Dear Guru” and signing them with a “G,” meaning Galahad. To the Christian fundamentalists of that era, the intimate letters suggested that Wallace was a Buddhist, one of the people of “Northern Shambhalla,” the Buddhist term for the Kingdom of Heaven. When confronted by these letters from his political enemies, Wallace called J. Edgar and asked him what to do. The answer was blunt: “Deny you ever wrote them.”

When the GOP officials called him a liar and announced that they were going to release them to the press, J. Edgar and Clyde summoned them to FBI headquarters.



Henry Wallace was Franklin D. Roosevelt's vice president throughout most of World War II, although he was dropped from the Democratic ticket in 1944 in favor of Harry S Truman. Before becoming Veep, Wallace had been FDR's Secretary of Agriculture. He is seen in his garden, above.

John Franklin Carter, writing in *The New Dealers* (1934), said, "Wallace is as earthy as the black loam of the corn belt, as gaunt and grim as a pioneer."

J. Edgar had a different opinion: "Wallace is a communist bastard working behind the scenes to overthrow the American government. I know for a fact that Wallace and Eleanor are planning to run for the office of President and Vice President in the 1948 elections. They plan to make the United States a colony of the Soviet Union."

Three members of the Republican National Committee were presented with Clyde's evidence that their candidate, Wendell Willkie, was engaged in an extramarital affair with Irita Van Doren, an editor in Manhattan. J. Edgar even presented photographic proof. Before the afternoon ended, he told Clyde, "We've got them at a Mexican stand-off."

The letters were not released, and news of the Willkie/Van Doren adultery was suppressed. FDR was guilty of having a mistress himself and was disturbed at Democrats publicizing his opponent's affair. "In my case," he told J. Edgar, "wouldn't it be like the kettle calling the pot black?"

J. Edgar and Clyde would keep their radar on Wallace not only throughout the war but until his death in 1965. More scandal was on the way.

Technically, since America was a neutral country, any agents working for British intelligence were spies and could be arrested as such. J. Edgar and Clyde set out to have their West Coast agents supply them with data on "the nefarious activities

of both British and German spies in the film industry.”

Clyde drew up a list of stars whom he felt deserved surveillance. Much of the data that J. Edgar’s G-Men collected on these movie stars would be discredited in later years, but in the tense, paranoid, and suspicious months of 1940 and 1941, virtually anyone was suspect.

He divided film stars into three categories—those who were unabashedly pro-American; others who were working strictly for British interests, and the most dangerous of all, pro-Nazis, especially those plotting with Mexican Fascists with the promise that Hitler would cede them California and the Southwest when the Nazis won the war.

Caught up in the whirlwind of espionage and possible sabotage, J. Edgar and Clyde entered one of the busiest and most confused periods of their lives—i.e., the period between Britain’s declaration of war against Germany in September of 1939 and America’s entry into the war in December of 1941 after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.



Wendell Willkie (above), a Republican who opposed “the government waste and inefficiencies of the New Deal,” ran against Franklin Roosevelt, who, in 1940, was seeking an unprecedented third term as President of the United States.

Both men had mistresses, so each could not expose the other’s adultery for fear of retaliation. Even so, the anti-Roosevelt campaign of 1940 was venomous, the most vicious since Abraham Lincoln ran for president before the Civil War.

Much of the abuse centered on Eleanor herself. In secret, J. Edgar was only too willing to supply Willkie with damaging information about the First Lady.

Even so, their fascination with Hollywood continued unabated. Both GMen realized the power of film as propaganda. They were also aware that Hollywood was divided between pro-German and pro-British warring clans, each of which was frantically busy inserting propaganda into movies under production.

“Hollywood, as you know, is controlled by the Jews,” J. Edgar told his agents. “You know those bastards will be trying to lure America into the war.”

In their first reports, G-Men reported a disturbing discovery, claiming that some stars who outwardly presented a strong pro-American stance were secretly meeting and socializing with the pro-Hitler colony. Errol Flynn, whom J. Edgar and Clyde had met in The Bahamas, was singled out as a particularly dangerous individual.

Hedy Lamarr, the sultry MGM star, also attracted the attention of the FBI. Clyde and J. Edgar had first become aware of Hedy Kiesler (her original name) when they saw her first film, *Ecstasy*, in which she’d appeared nude. J. Edgar felt the film should have been labeled as pornographic and not allowed to be shown in the United States.

In the late summer of 1937, Hedy escaped from Austria and the bed of her ruthless and sadistic husband. Fritz Mandl, the wealthy munitions king who supplied arms to Hitler’s Nazi soldiers. An FBI informant in Vienna claimed that unknown to the Führer, Mandl was masquerading as an Aryan, concealing his Jewish heritage. So was Hedy, who was actually the daughter of a Jewish banker in Vienna.

In the most startling part of the report, J. Edgar and Clyde read that Mandl, to win favor with the Fascist dictators, had actually “pimped” his beautiful wife to both Benito Mussolini and Hitler himself.

In the early autumn of 1937, Hedy arrived in the United States, heading for Los Angeles where she’d been granted a contract by Louis B. Mayer of MGM. She told immigration officials that she “detested” Hitler, although they found a gold cigarette case with a diamond-studded Swastika embedded in its center. She admitted that it was a gift from Hitler, and she was only bringing it into the United States to hock in case she ran out of cash. J. Edgar and Clyde were suspicious of her claims, fearing she might be a “plant” taking her orders directly from Berlin.

When interviewed by the FBI, Hedy claimed that Hitler was “posturing” and Mussolini “pompous,” but provided no other details.

On the West Coast, the FBI continued to monitor her nocturnal adventures, discovering that she was a bisexual. One report claimed she was “oversexed,” and noted that she was carrying on affairs with Charles Boyer, her co-star in *Algiers* (1938) and Clark Gable, her co-star in *Boom Town* (1940). Hedy was also involved with another one of her *Boom Town* co-stars, Claudette Colbert, with whom she was engaged in a lesbian affair. She also had flings with Charlie Chaplin, Marlene Dietrich, and Joan Crawford. “That’s one busy Kraut,” J. Edgar told his agents.

During all these months of investigation, agents did not discover one piece of hard evidence that she was reporting sensitive information to the Nazis. On the eve of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hedy redeemed herself. She came up with an idea for a radio-directed torpedo guidance system that was later adapted to modern warfare and remains today an essential part of cellphone technology. Of course, Hedy may have stolen the idea from endless hours sitting with Mandl and his cronies as they discussed Hitler’s plan for wireless communication. She gave her patent idea to the U.S. government for use in the war effort. The device later proved invaluable to the U.S. Navy in its submarine warfare with Germany. Hedy later claimed, “I helped the Americans win World War II by my device.”

During the war, the Treasury Department called J. Edgar to inform him that Hedy had volunteered to sell war bonds. “Is she pro-American or a secret Kraut?”

“She’s clean,” J. Edgar said, “but watch her on tours. She’ll fuck anything that moves.”

Closing the file on Hedy, J. Edgar told Clyde and his agents, “We’ve wasted time on Hitler’s mistress. We must turn to a far more dangerous and diabolical Kraut. I think she’s a double agent.”

He was referring, of course, to Marlene Dietrich.

Alfred Duff Cooper, Minister of Information for the British government, found it vital to set up a spy network in the United States during that 27-month period between Britain’s declaration of war and the American entrance into the conflict in the wake of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.



So far as it is known, the glamorous and sultry Austrian beauty, **Hedy Lamarr** may have been one of only two woman in history who went to bed with both Adolf Hitler and John F. Kennedy.

A nude scene she filmed in *Ecstasy*, released in 1933, propelled her into international stardom. After she fled across Europe to Hollywood, Louis B. Mayer was stunned by her beauty.

In time, it was learned that she was far more than merely Delilah to Victor Mature's Samson. She fulfilled an unexpected role as the inventor of a technological breakthrough that has become a vital part of everything from military weapons to cellphones.

He singled out producer Alexander Korda to be the front man for British espionage in America, instructing him to set up offices in Washington, Los Angeles, and New York. These offices, or so it was hoped, would ostensibly be conducting film industry business but would, in essence, be a camouflage for British agents working in the still neutral United States. "A movie studio would be an ideal cover to mask intelligence operations," Winston Churchill told Korda, who was to become the chief British spy in the United States.

From the very beginning, J. Edgar and Clyde had been aware of these operations. Clyde had even planted informants in each of Korda's offices. J. Edgar in time accumulated enough information on this illegal operation that he could have had Korda arrested, but FDR refused to give him permission. "One day very soon, or so I fear, we'll be fighting side by side with our British friends."

Clyde at FBI headquarters received a report that Korda told British intelligence he was "prepared to take all risks, even the possibility of assassination." J. Edgar was particularly disturbed with one of Korda's reports to London which the FBI had intercepted. Korda asserted that "even Hoover doesn't know the full extent of German foreign agents operating in the U.S."

Clyde presented J. Edgar with another message that Duff Cooper had sent to Korda. "At all costs," Duff Cooper instructed him, "avoid the scrutiny of the FBI and the U.S. Senate." After reading that, J. Edgar told Clyde and some top agents, "We know every move these limeys make."

Lord Lothian, the British ambassador to Washington, called for British movie stars and directors working in Hollywood to remain there to counter anti-British propaganda put out by German interests in the film industry.



Hedy Lamarr's first husband was **Fritz Mandl** (above), with whom she was trapped in a loveless marriage.

An Austrian munitions czar, he was ambitious and ruthless, a friend of Mussolini who sold armaments to Hitler, yet concealed his own Jewish heritage. He didn't see anything wrong in pimping his beautiful young wife to Fascist dictators if it served his advancement as an "honorary Aryan."

Hedy later recalled, "At first I felt like Cinderella, trapped in furs, designer gowns, and jewels, but I was soon locked away, where I had to wait behind seven locked doors for him. He was a sadist. The servants could hear my screams."

The ambassador instructed UK citizens to endorse an aggressive and ongoing roster of charity events, both as a means of raising money for the British war effort and as a means, once again, to offset Nazi propaganda. It was not just the Germans who worked against British interests. First-and second-generation Irish Americans had long held a loathing of Great Britain, and some had even publicly claimed that they'd like to see Hitler win the war.

Before departing for America, Korda spent countless hours being briefed by the SOE, and the men of MI-6, the British Intelligence Service. Established in 1940, the "Special Operations Executive" (SOE) was known as "Churchill's Secret Army." The prime minister called SOE "The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare."

At its peak, the SOE employed some 13,000 recruits, conducting more than a million worldwide secret operations. Actually, they weren't that secret from the FBI. Almost from the day it was established, J. Edgar had his "moles" entrenched within both MI-6 and the SOE reporting on British espionage. As far as it is known, not one of these double agents was ever exposed.

Recruited as a British agent in 1933, Korda became the most important British spy working in the United States. The information the producer collected during the period when England virtually stood alone against Nazi Germany was later viewed as "vital" to British intelligence.

J. Edgar and Clyde were particularly intrigued at the number of homosexuals SOE recruited, even though they were not allowed to join the armed services. Bad conduct records or even criminal files in the armed forces were not a strike against a potential SOE employee.

The hiring of homosexuals actually planted an idea in J. Edgar's head, which he secretly submitted to Clyde and Guy. Guy later claimed that "Eddie came to realize that a homosexual might be useful in some cases, even that of sleeping with the enemy to gain information, a sort of male Mata Hari type for the Second World War."

J. Edgar's official policy remained firm—"no homosexuals in the FBI"—but behind the scenes, Clyde began to privately recruit them, especially closeted homosexuals who had the protective net of a marriage, even children, to conceal their true sexual preferences.

The policy paid off right from the beginning. One of his well-built, attractive homosexual agents managed to get a leading official at the Russian Embassy to fall in love with him. Over pillow talk, the gay G-Man learned many secrets, including that Josef Stalin feared that Hitler would betray him and launch an invasion of the Soviet Union. This information, of course, proved absolutely true.

A homosexual G-Man, through his sexual involvement with a member of the Argentine Embassy, eventually met a valuable contact in the form of an ambitious young man named Juan Peron. A strongly built young boxer and champion fencer of the army, Peron had ambitions to become president of Argentina.

As a military attaché, he had traveled to Europe in 1938 and had been impressed with the rise of the Fascists in Italy and their counterpart, Hitler's Nazis, in Germany. J. Edgar and Clyde learned that he was a secret member of a military group that was plotting the violent collapse of the civilian government of Argentina.

Peron had secretly communicated with Josef Goebbels in Berlin, promising him that when and if his *junta* seized power, he would allow the Nazis to use Buenos Aires as their official headquarters in South America. "Our city can become the Berlin of South America," the future Argentine dictator promised the Nazis.

When J. Edgar and Clyde learned that at least a dozen major officials in Washington's Mexican Embassy were homosexuals, and that they had a preference for blond-haired men, Clyde ordered that six of his men with dark hair dye their hair blond to seduce these Mexicans. Valuable information was learned, especially about Mexico's contacts with Berlin, and even which American movie stars, during their holidays south of the border, were getting involved with Fascists.

Consequently, several Hollywood stars, especially Errol Flynn and Tyrone Power, came under heavy scrutiny.

After only two months of hiring homosexuals as agents, J. Edgar pronounced his new hiring practice a success. He would continue secretly to employ homosexuals throughout his final decades in office. "After all," he asked Clyde and Guy, "how many straight men will volunteer to take it up the ass for their country?"

Korda set about compiling a list of movie industry stars or players suspected of having Nazi links. Within a day, the list reached Clyde's office. J. Edgar read it that night.

Wallace Beery topped the list, followed by Victor McLaglen, Errol Flynn, Gary Cooper, and Walt Disney. J. Edgar also suspected producer Winfield Sheehan, former head of 20th Century Fox, of having Nazi sympathies. He interpreted his

relationship with George Gyssling as “highly suspicious.” Gyssling was the German Consul General for the Los Angeles area, and his headquarters was the center of Nazi activities on the West Coast.

After an intensive investigation that, obviously, was separate from anything Korda supplied, J. Edgar and Clyde concluded that two famous British stars, Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier, were undeclared and unofficial British spies working within the California film colony. As such, he could have them arrested as unregistered foreign agents, even though Britain was a secret ally, at least with the Roosevelt administration.

Unknown to the Oliviers, J. Edgar’s G-Men had them trailed, learning that they had volunteered their services to British intelligence when England had declared war on Germany after its attack on Poland.

Risking imprisonment and even assassination by the Nazis, Olivier became an agent for the SOE in 1940, working out of Los Angeles. Vivien would join later. Korda was later quoted as saying, “If Nazi agents knew the full extent of the activities of Vivien and Larry, I’m sure they would have gone after them. Josef Goebbels would have seen to that.”

“I was a regular Mata Hari,” Vivien told director George Cukor after the war.

The FBI also launched an investigation of Barbara Hutton, the Woolworth heiress. Her code name was “Red Rose.” Because she was about to marry the British star, Cary Grant, he too came under suspicion, even though financially they were doing more for the British war effort than any other couple in Hollywood.

Grant worked with William Stephenson, who was head of British Security, and no friend of J. Edgar, although he had the ear of both FDR and Churchill.



One of their era’s “fun couples,” the Argentine dictator, **Juan Peron**, and his powerful wife, **Eva Peron**, a former prostitute, ruled their country with an iron fist.

Suspecting from the beginning that they were secret Nazis, J. Edgar had them under surveillance during the duration of their power over their volatile country.

J. Edgar learned that Juan Peron hoped to transform Buenos Aires into the Nazi capital of South America, in the mistaken belief that the Fascists would triumph over the Allies.

As for Evita, J. Edgar concluded that, “She wants to look like Lana Turner and fuck Tyrone Power and Errol Flynn.”

After private dinners with Hutton and Grant, Vivien and her husband, Olivier, concluded that Hutton and Grant were under suspicion only because of their friendship with the notorious Countess Dorothy di Frasso, who had been the lover of Gary Cooper. The FBI had accumulated a thick file on her, noting that she was a *confidante* of Benito Mussolini and had even entertained Field Marshal Hermann Göring at her villa near Rome.

Hutton herself continued to entertain Nazi sympathizers, even though there was no evidence the FBI found to label her a spy. One agent reported that she was “incredibly naïve about world politics.” Many of the FBI reports on the heiress were based on false information. Even though she planned to marry Grant in 1942, she was said to be enamored of a certain “German baron with pro-Hitler leanings,” according to her dossier.

The accusation was false and a reference to the dashing Baron von Gramm, a national tennis hero in Germany. Although he was accused in the West of being a Nazi, it was later discovered that he had expressed anti-Hitler views and had been arrested

and imprisoned in March of 1938 for having a homosexual relationship with another male member of the German Davis Cup Team.

Vivien and Olivier soon appeared on the guest list of the Countess di Frasso. The FBI obtained a copy of their report to Korda, in which Olivier claimed that di Frasso was definitely on the side of Mussolini and hoped that he would emerge triumphant from the ashes of WWII. At a dinner party, she said she “detested” Churchill, and asserted that Britain was fighting the war only to hold onto its empire.

The Countess invited Vivien and Olivier for a vacation at her hacienda in Mexico City where Hutton and Grant would later visit as part of their honeymoon. But the invitation was declined because Korda had warned Vivien and Larry that “the Nazis are on to you two. There’s a plot to kill both of you.”



Unthinkable but true: Heathcliff (**Laurence Olivier**) and Scarlett O’Hara (**Vivien Leigh**) operated as British spies.

Risking assassination by the Nazis, or at the very least imprisonment as foreign agents operating on American soil, Olivier became an agent of the “Special Operations Executive (SOE)” in 1940, and Vivien joined Korda’s espionage coterie shortly thereafter.

“I was a regular Mata Hari,” she asserted at war’s end.

On the eve of America’s declaration of war against the Axis, Mexico City was like Lisbon in Europe, a haven for international spy rings, smugglers, and black market operators. On instructions from “The Boss,” Clyde posted several agents there.

Some insiders in Hollywood thought the Countess di Frasso had ended her romance with Gary Cooper, but G-Men in Mexico reported that over a period of six months he’d made three visits to her villa. J. Edgar suspected that Cooper was supplying information to the countess, which she would then turn over to Nazi agents in Mexico City.

“Put that Montana Mule under surveillance,” J. Edgar ordered Clyde.

The reference to the “mule” derived from Cooper’s legendary endowment. J. Edgar had obtained a nude picture of him snapped while he was shaving in his dressing room. He placed it alongside his nude of Errol Flynn.

Cooper had long been under FBI scrutiny, ever since both Clyde and J. Edgar had become fascinated by his conquests of both men and women. As the gay director, George Cukor said, “Cooper found out pretty quick that he could do two things well—ride a horse and fuck.”

Clyde had chronicled a string of affairs Cooper had had in Hollywood, including a long-term relationship with the tobacco heir Anderson Lawler. His list of conquests was impressive: the photographer Cecil Beaton, Tallulah Bankhead, Claudette Colbert, Marlene Dietrich, Clara Bow, and director Edmund Goulding, who was said to have “worshipped” him twice a day. The list went on and on—Randolph Scott, Carole Lombard, Merle Oberon, Lupe Velez, Mae West, and Cary Grant himself.

In Washington, J. Edgar learned that Cooper was a close friend of Wendell Willkie, and that the actor had shared women with the candidate trying to unseat FDR. No one ever accused Cooper of being a liberal. He’d voted twice for Calvin Coolidge and for Herbert Hoover.



“Cash and Cary,” as **Cary Grant** and Woolworth heiress **Barbara Hutton** were called on their wedding day, July 8, 1942.

Despite that label, Grant did not hustle money from his wife, the second-richest woman in the world after tobacco heiress Doris Duke.

Alexander Korda later admitted that Grant was a true British patriot and that Hutton contributed greatly to the British War Relief.

J. Edgar, however, sniped that “they numbered many Nazi sympathizers among their degenerate friends.”

In their investigation of Cooper, FBI agents learned he was a founding member of the “Hollywood Hussars.” Funded by press baron William Randolph Hearst, it was a reactionary group with Fascist sympathies. Actors Victor McLaghlen and Ward Bond were also charter members. Before the war, this right wing club paraded around at social events in fancy uniforms and practiced military drills. Louis B. Mayer referred to them as “Nazi Jew haters.”

Clyde booked a spy to attend their secret meetings. The conclusion of the agent was that these men, including Cooper, ran the para-military organization not for international espionage. The members wanted to “protect” the United States from the New Deal and the “red menace.” The report submitted to Clyde concluded, “They are not a stalking horse for Nazism. They are just corn-fed American Fascists who would probably welcome a dictator instead of a U.S. president.”

Of all the Hussars, Cooper was singled out for special attention as he became the most suspicious, especially when it was learned that he dined weekly with the German Consulate General in Los Angeles.

What really put Clyde on his trail was when Cooper visited Nazi Germany in 1938 when it was not politically correct to

do so. Later, when America went to war against Germany, Cooper was extensively questioned by Clyde himself in Los Angeles. The actor claimed that the trip had actually been ordered by FDR.



The press called them “The Cowboy and the Countess,” referring to **Countess Dorothy di Frasso** (born Dorothy Taylor in Watertown, New York, in 1888) and **Gary Cooper**.

The frequently widowed Dorothy was struck by “love at first sight” when she first met Coop in Italy. As described by Cooper’s biographer, Jane Ellen Wayne, “His clothes were rumpled and hung like a burlap sack. There in the opulence of her palace stood a timid, half-smiling, pathetically thin Adonis. Dorothy promptly fell in love and set out to turn him into her well-dressed and debonair escort. She footed the bill, and he had his pick of sports cars and limousines, which were often seen parked in front of exclusive jewelry stores while the Countess chose the proper gold cuff links, watches, and tie tacks.”

After her first sexual union with Coop, she confided to heiress Barbara Hutton, “I didn’t know American men came in that size.”

Cooper’s father-in-law, Paul Shields, stepfather to Cooper’s wife at the time (Veronica Balfe), was a liberal and an economic adviser to FDR. The President sent him to Berlin that year to investigate the German war machine and its financing. He was actually a spy for the Americans.

Cooper, J. Edgar learned, was sent along as “bait,” because Josef Goebbels was his movie fan and had seen all his films. In fact, Goebbels rhapsodized so frequently about Cooper that many in the Berlin film colony suspected that he had a crush on the American actor.

In the wake of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, Cooper assured the FBI that he was a patriotic American and had abandoned the isolationist view he had endorsed when he confronted the build-up of the Nazi war machine in Berlin in 1938.

Although he eventually dropped out of the Hussars, Cooper and McLaghlen continued their friendship. Both actors were known to make anti-Semitic remarks.

But whereas the FBI dossier asserted that Cooper had turned against the Nazis, they went on to claim that Cooper did not appear to be pro-British either. Korda concluded, “Gary Cooper will not help our cause, but he won’t harm us either, although he holds such right wing views he might be called an American Fascist.”

J. Edgar and Clyde no longer viewed Cooper as a security threat, but they continued to monitor the actor’s love life. Clyde finally concluded, “If it moves, Coop will fuck it.”

In 1940, in a surprise coincidence, J. Edgar and Vivien Leigh, enjoying popularity across the country in the 1939 box office bonanza *Gone With the Wind*, almost simultaneously focused their attentions on Walt Disney.

As a secret British agent, Vivien had been asked by Korda to investigate Disney to determine if he were pro-Nazi. In contrast, J. Edgar wanted to enlist Disney’s help in uncovering communists working in the film industry.

Korda had selected Vivien because he’d received reports that Disney was a great admirer of both Mussolini and Hitler, and that he’d attended meetings of Nazi sympathizers in Los Angeles in the late 1930s.

Further suspicion arose when Disney extended an invitation to Leni Riefenstahl to tour his studio during her visit to California. Reported to be the mistress of Hitler, she had directed the most effective propaganda film in cinematic history, *Triumph of the Will* (*Triumph des Willens*). Released in 1935, it chronicled the 1934 Nazi Party Congress in Nürnberg, glorifying Hitler and the Third Reich.

After her visit, Riefenstahl pronounced Disney “the greatest personage in American film.” The pair had hugged and kissed outside of camera range.

Vivien was selected as Korda’s spy because the creator of Mickey Mouse had sent her a fan letter praising her performance as Scarlett O’Hara. She called Disney, and he invited her to dinner. She later typed up a report for Korda, a copy

of which J. Edgar's "mole" sent to him in Washington.

In it Vivien reported that she could not determine if Disney were pro-Nazi or not. "But he will do nothing for the British cause, however. His position is 'let 'em fight their own wars over in Europe.' I do not think he is secretly funding any pro-German groups. Frankly, his main concern is losing the lucrative German market for Disney films if Hitler goes to war against the West." She added a postscript: "Larry and I have heard rumors that he is a homosexual."

The news of Disney's presumed homosexuality was no thunderbolt to Clyde and J. Edgar, who had long ago figured out Disney's sexual preference. Even so, the two FBI men wanted him to become an FBI informant, keeping them abreast of the infiltration of "reds in the film industry."

In a confidential letter to Disney, J. Edgar had written: "I believe that communists have infiltrated every branch of the film industry, and that it is filled with political subversives who are a threat to the security of the United States, as we inevitably head for war. We need your help in identifying these subversives."

It took a lot of persuasion, but Disney finally agreed to come aboard as an FBI informant, a position he would hold for twenty-five years, although there would be some rough points and some misunderstandings between J. Edgar and Disney. At one point J. Edgar gave Disney a title—"Special Agent in Charge."

On November 10, 1940, Disney clarified his position with the FBI, agreeing to help the Bureau root out communists in the film industry. Over a period of two days, Disney was spotted in Washington. It has since been assumed that he spent most of that time meeting with J. Edgar and Clyde.

Fully aware that he was a closeted homosexual, Guy Hotell arranged a sexual tryst between Disney and a young FBI man who was most willing "to meet my hero" at the Mayflower Hotel. Clyde had the room bugged because he wanted to secure blackmail evidence on Disney if he ever tried to cause the FBI any trouble at some future date.

Having Disney as its special agent presented some problems for the Bureau. Disney had attended "America First" rallies with Charles A. Lindbergh, and he'd previously been accused of being both pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic. One reporter charged he was sending "secret signals" to the Germans through his Mickey Mouse comic strip, claiming that in the final panel of one of the rodent's cartoons appeared a fast-flashing swastika.

In the aftermath of Disney's official designation, J. Edgar was bombarded with letters attacking Disney. He ordered Clyde to file such protests in a drawer marked CASE CLOSED.

Later J. Edgar persuaded Disney to go on a good will tour of South America. Disney was told that by presenting himself as a patriotic American, it would help erase his pro-Nazi image.

The trip went smoothly except for one flaw. J. Edgar sent Disney an urgent telegram, suggesting that he not refer to the people of Brazil as "natives."

At the end of the tour, J. Edgar told Clyde and Guy, "We've got Mickey Mouse in our pocket. He'll cooperate with us from now on. If not, thanks to Guy here, we can blackmail him. In the future, let's use more of our homosexual agents to blackmail politicians to do our bidding. I think most of them are faggots anyway, especially the Democrats."

Arguably, Tyrone Power was the leading matinee idol of Hollywood in 1940, directly competing with Errol Flynn and Robert Taylor, who were his on-again, off-again lovers. Power was also having an affair with the billionaire aviator and mogul Howard Hughes.

As his biographer Hector Arce wrote in *The Secret Life of Tyrone Power*, "Sex with other men wasn't something Ty could either take or leave alone. He risked losing everything should it become public knowledge, and yet he continued having such affairs. He'd not only had to hide this fact of his sex life from the masses, but also from the sedate Hollywood crowd he'd taken up with. A great percentage of the conservative Beverly Hills establishment were Jews, who'd been taught that sex with another man was the ultimate taboo."



Adolf Hitler and his rumored mistress, **Leni Riefenstahl**, the genius filmmaker, met in August of 1934 in Nürnberg to discuss the final logistics for her historic *Triumph of the Will*, a film glorifying Hitler and the emerging Nazi empire.

During its actual filming, her cameras were everywhere in the city, even perched high atop fire ladders. She had a cast of thousands at her disposal.

Propaganda minister Josef Goebbels suspected that Riefenstahl might be Jewish. He harbored the same unvoiced suspicions about Hitler himself.

Many of Power's male lovers, such as Cesar Romero or Noël Coward, felt that their seducer was basically homosexual but had affairs with women to keep up his masculine screen image. He actually married three times, his first wedding to the French actress Annabella, with whom he'd co-starred in the 1938 *Suez*.

Power's longtime "trick," Smitty Hanson, summed it up this way: "Ty was basically gay but liked a girl like Lana Turner from time to time, occasionally marrying one."

Since Power started at 20th Century Fox earning only a hundred dollars a week, he never had much money. Howard Hughes, however, paid most of his bills, buying him, among other things, a new wardrobe and a new car.

Although J. Edgar was voyeuristically intrigued by Power's sexual escapades, what brought him under FBI surveillance in the early 1940s were the people he associated with, especially the Fascist-leaning Countess Dorothy di Frasso coterie. According to FBI files, Power made frequent trips to Mexico City for reasons unknown.

Finally, Clyde, through his agents in Mexico, discovered the reason for the star's frequent trips South of the Border. Power was sexually involved with Maximino Ávila Camacho, the brother of the president of Mexico, Manuel Ávila Camacho. Maximino was a notorious womanizer, known for his carousing, especially with underage *putas*. He was also a four-star general in Mexico's revolutionary forces and was the political boss of his home state of Puebla.

By late 1940 the FBI concluded that Maximino, unlike his brother, the president, was actually conspiring with the Nazis to tilt Mexico into the orbit of the Axis. That way the Nazis could use Mexican ports for an eventual attack on the California coast. The Bureau also discovered that Maximino was a key player in a group known as the National Synarchists, an organization created in 1937 by the Nazis, working in conjunction with the Japanese and the Spanish Falange. Power was frequently seen socializing with Maximino's closest political allies from Axis powers.



Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse welcomed Leni Reifenstahl to Hollywood. Their rendezvous evolved into a mutual admiration society, one artist lavishly admiring the talents of the other.

As Steven Bach, biographer of Riefen-stahl, wrote: “Disney expressed a desire to see *Olympia* in his own screen room, but backed off in the end, citing fears of a boycott of his films by left-wing union projectionists should the screening become public knowledge.”

Olympia was the director’s glorification of the Aryan team’s performance at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin.

Yet the FBI could turn up no hardcore evidence that Power was doing anything to aid the Fascists. In December 1, 1940, he’d hosted a house party in Hollywood for Manuel Ávila Camacho, who had been elected president of Mexico. But that wasn’t incriminating. Franklin D. Roosevelt had done the same thing.

In Hollywood, Power was frequently seen in the company of Laurence Olivier, and Bureau agents concluded the two handsome actors were having an affair. “Tyrone Power is nothing but a boy whore,” one FBI report concluded. “Like Gary Cooper, he will fuck anybody, man or woman.”

Having failed to provide any espionage evidence against Power, J. Edgar and Clyde studied the file that Olivier had submitted to his secret boss, Alexander Korda. Although sleeping with Power, Olivier was spying on his lover at the same time.

In Olivier’s report to British intelligence, which J. Edgar’s “mole” copied for him, it was written that “Tyrone Power is no security risk, it seems. But he has a poor choice of friends and constantly fraternizes with Fascist sympathizers in the orbit of the notorious Dorothy di Frasso. It appears that he has developed some sort of male crush on the flashy Maximino, who has been known on occasion to have sex with very beautiful fourteen-year-old boys, although he seems intent on seducing every young girl in the province of his native Puebla. Power may be politically naïve, or else he is playing on both teams because he also agreed to aid Olivier and others in charity events for British War Relief. A very confused picture here, but typical of homosexuals who find it impossible to make up their minds.”



(left photo) **Tyrone Power**, playing the title role in *Jesse James* (1939), one of his most macho impersonations. Like Robert Taylor, he worked hard to combat rumors that he was a “pretty boy homosexual.”

He indulged in a torrid romance with **Laurence Olivier** (right photo). When it ended, they became lifelong friends. During their affair, Olivier was spying on Power, reporting his activities to master spy Alexander Korda. It was eventually determined that Power was not working for Fascists based in Los Angeles, but merely consorting with them. Later, Power’s heroism during World War II helped remove him from J. Edgar’s list of Nazi sympathizers.

The FBI was fully aware of Olivier’s role as a British spy operating illegally within the then-neutral U.S. before its entry into the war in 1941. But insofar as Olivier was concerned, they consistently maintained a policy of “hands off.”

On May 22, 1942, the Nazi attempt to forge an alliance with Mexico came to an abrupt end for reasons never fully explained. Maximino’s brother, Manuel, declared war on Germany in the wake of a Nazi submarine attack on two Mexican ships carrying oil supplies in the Gulf of Mexico near the port of New Orleans.

Maximino’s Fascist friends hastily retreated from Mexico City. With the outbreak of war, Power joined the Marine Corps as a pilot, seeing action in the South Pacific.

“We’ll take him off the list of suspected enemy agents,” J. Edgar told Clyde and Louis Nichols. “However, we’ll still monitor his private life to learn what important people he is seducing, especially Howard Hughes. This information might be extremely valuable to us in the future.”

Ever since aviator Charles A. Lindbergh had refused to admit J. Edgar into his home during the investigation of the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby, the FBI director had harbored a grudge against this American hero. Clyde was personally in charge of Lindbergh’s FBI dossier, which had grown year by year. Long before Germany declared war on the United States, J. Edgar and Clyde suspected him of pro-Nazi sympathies.

Between 1936 and 1938, Lindbergh began a series of flights to Nazi Germany. With his wife, Anne Morrow Lindbergh, at his side, on July 28, 1936, he accepted the German Medal of Honor. It was presented on behalf of Adolf Hitler.

Lindbergh would make several more trips to Nazi Germany to report on that country’s aviation industry. At the invitation of Hermann Göring, he became the first American allowed to examine the Luftwaffe’s newest bomber, the Junkers Ju 88. He also conducted a thorough inspection of the Messerschmitt Bf109, Germany’s frontline fighter aircraft. In a surprise move, Göring granted him permission to fly the Bf109.

Unknown to Göring and Lindbergh, J. Edgar and Clyde had planted a “mole” within Göring’s entourage. The spy reported on Lindbergh’s activities night and day, including details of his private life.

Lindbergh had nothing but praise for the Nazis, calling the Luftwaffe “the greatest air force on earth.” He also claimed that “Hitler is a great man who has done much for the German race.” In another interview, he said that in Germany “I have discovered a sense of decency and values far ahead of our own.” He also shocked reporters by delivering an anti-Semitic attack, accusing the American Jew of “being the chief agitator urging America into a European war.”

After that interview, Lindbergh’s FBI report accused the aviator of being a “traitor and a Nazi.” Privately, J. Edgar told

Clyde and his agents, “If Hitler had asked Lindbergh to lick the dingleberries off his asshole, I’m sure the *Spirit of St. Louis* would have obliged.”

J. Edgar also monitored Lindbergh’s trips in America, and in California discovered that he was indulging in sexual trysts with Sonja Henie, the Norwegian ice-skating champion that Hollywood had been trying to turn into a movie star.

Perky, blonde, blue-eyed, and a Nordic beauty of sorts, she fitted Lindbergh’s female ideal of the superiority of the white race, as also espoused by Hitler. She’d won the World Figure Skating Championship at the age of eleven, and had followed with Gold Medals at the 1928, 1932, and 1936 Olympics. She’d dazzled the Nazi hierarchy in Berlin. In a skating exhibition, she’d shouted HEIL HITLER! in front of the *Führer*. She’d also perfected the Nazi salute.

J. Edgar and Clyde received a report that in 1938, Lindbergh dined with Göring at the American Embassy in Berlin, where he was introduced to the greatest engineers of the burgeoning Nazi aviation field. Here he was presented with another award by Göring, the Commander Cross of the German Eagle.

After *Kristallnacht*, Lindbergh critics demanded that he return the award. But he refused, claiming, “If I were to return the German medal, given in times of peace, it would be an unnecessary insult. Even if war comes, I can see no gain in indulging in a spitting contest with Germany.”



Franklin D. Roosevelt (*left seated figure, above*) wanted to maintain a good neighbor policy with the president of Mexico, **Manuel Ávila Camacho** (*right*). They met in Monterrey, Mexico, where FDR was entertained with a lavish Mexican banquet and fiesta.

J. Edgar kept the U.S. president informed of the activities of Manuel’s brother, Maximino, and how he was being wooed by political allies of the Axis powers, who wanted to use Mexican ports as part of a possible attack on the United States. That dream faded for the Nazis when Mexico declared war on Germany in 1942.

J. Edgar and Clyde discovered another damaging piece of evidence. Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy, the unpopular U.S. Ambassador in London, persuaded Lindbergh to write a secret memo to the British prime minister. In it, the aviator warned Britain that even though Hitler had violated the Munich Agreement—“peace in our time”—it would be suicidal to go to war with Hitler.

“France is unprepared for any war, and Britain relies too much on naval power. Its ground forces and its air arsenal are hopelessly out of date. Germany would win in any war between the two countries.” He also warned that France was so unprepared it might be overrun by Nazi storm troopers in a matter of weeks, and he advocated a war between Germany and Russia. “The Soviet Union and the growing spread of communism are the true menaces in the world today, not Nazi Germany.”

Late in 1940, one year before America’s entrance into WWII, Lindbergh became the chief spokesman for the America First Committee, urging the country to avoid all involvements in what appeared to be an imminent European War. Heard by millions, his speeches attracted overflow crowds in New York’s Madison Square Garden and Chicago’s Soldier Field. In one of his strongest speeches, Lindbergh claimed that if America attacked Nazi Germany, it might “lay Europe open to rape, loot, and barbarism of Soviet Russia’s force, causing possibly the fatal wounding of western civilization.”

In a speech he delivered in January, 1941, Lindbergh attacked FDR’s Lend-Lease Bill on which Winston Churchill so

eagerly depended. He proposed instead that the United States negotiate a neutrality pact with Germany, evocative of the German/Soviet nonaggression pact that the Soviet Union had previously signed.

FDR fought back, calling Lindbergh a “defeatist and appeaser,” comparing him to Clement L. Vallandigham, Democrat of Ohio, the leader of the “Copperhead” movement that had opposed Abraham Lincoln’s declaration of war on the Confederate States.



Hermann Göring (*far right*) presents “my favorite American,” **Charles A. Lindbergh** with a medal on behalf of Adolf Hitler. **Anne Morrow Lindbergh** (*far left*) stands by her husband, looking on. The ceremony occurred on July 28, 1936.

The U.S. military asked Lindbergh to travel to Germany several times between 1936 and 1938 as a means of getting information about the *Luftwaffe*. Amazingly, Göring didn’t seem to view Lindbergh as a spy, but fed him vital data about the new Nazi bomber, the Junkers Ju 88, and allowed him firsthand views of German aviation facilities. Göring later said, “We viewed him as being on our side, opposing the communist menace to the east.”

Lindbergh resigned his commission in the U.S. Army Corps three days later, following FDR’s speech on April 25, 1941. “Having been accused by my commander and chief of being a traitor, I have no honorable alternative.”

As Lindbergh’s attacks upon FDR and his advocacy of U.S. involvement against the Nazis grew more strident, FDR called J. Edgar. “If I should die tomorrow, I want you to know this,” Roosevelt said. “I am absolutely convinced that Charles A. Lindbergh is a card-carrying Nazi.”

Having passed almost unnoticed by the Bureau, Clyde discovered a Lindbergh essay in *Reader’s Digest* in 1939 that elucidated his beliefs in the superiority of the white race. The aviator praised “our inheritance of European blood,” as opposed to black blood or Asian blood. He opposed the “dilution” of that blood by foreign races. Many Americans at the time echoed Lindbergh’s anti-communism and his belief in “Nordicism” and eugenics.

Even if it meant a political alliance between the United States and Nazi Germany, Lindbergh believed in the preservation of those of European descent. He feared that “My people might be drowned in the pressing sea of yellow, black, and brown.”

Right up until the attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, Lindbergh continued to oppose the war, denouncing the British, the American Jews, and the Roosevelt administration, whom he claimed were “agitating for war.” He cited Jewish influence over American media, including motion pictures, the press, the radio, and even the government in Washington.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Lindbergh sought to be recommissioned in the U.S. Army Corps. FDR ordered Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, to decline the aviator’s request.



Adolf Hitler considered Charles A. Lindbergh, the fabled aviator, and the Norwegian ice-skating champion **Sonja Henie** (both photos above) the Aryan ideal—"the perfect man and the perfect woman." Those who knew Henie intimately, and that included Tyrone Power, claimed that she was possessed by an insatiable passion for money, diamonds, furs, and men.

She liked heroic men, the Nazi ideal, and found lovers in a very young John F. Kennedy and Charles Lindbergh himself.

She once told the aviator, "We could make beautiful babies together, superior babies."

Lindbergh never admitted to an affair with Henie, but JFK confessed to his best friend, actor Robert Stack, "Sonja is a great fuck, sexily adaptable to any position requested. Because of all that ice skating, she's developed vaginal muscles from hell."

Even so, Lindbergh spent six months in the Pacific in 1944 taking part as a civilian in bomber raids on Japanese positions. In all, he flew 50 combat missions and was officially praised by Gen. Douglas MacArthur. All the U.S. Marine, Army, and Air Force pilots who served with Lindbergh had only praise for his innovations in aircraft defense and for his courage in the face of the enemy. They also defended his patriotism.

Regardless of the political spectrum that endorsed or condemned Lindbergh, it was widely acknowledged that the aviator and his wife, Anne, never really recovered from the kidnapping and murder of their infant son, Charles A. Lindbergh Jr. Anne did go on to give birth to five other children—Jon, Land Morrow, Anne Spencer, Scott, and Reeve. To the public they appeared to be one of the most famous and distinguished families of America. Lindbergh was a national hero, and memories of his political platforms prior to the outbreak of World War II faded from the public mind.

At the end of the war, Lindbergh returned to Germany for a tour of Nazi concentration camps. He later said, "I was disgusted. I was angry."

His fascination with Germany and the Germans continued, however. As J. Edgar and Clyde learned, but never exposed to the public, the aviator had three German mistresses and three different families, and visited each of them five to seven times a year from 1957 until he died in 1974.

As the German author, Rudolf Schroeck, revealed in his shocking 2005 book, *The Double Life of Charles A. Lindbergh*, he had seven children in Germany.

Two of his mistresses were sisters, Brigitte and Marietta Hesshaimer. They lived in Geretsried, a small Bavarian town 35 kilometers south of Munich. With Brigitte, he fathered three children, Duyrk (1958), Astrid (1960), and David (1967). The children did not know the true identity of Lindbergh. When he came to visit them, he used the alias of "Careau Kent."

He was also sleeping with Brigitte's sister, Marietta, with whom he bore two sons—Vago in 1960 and Christoph in 1966. None of these children knew their father was an international aviation hero until Astrid read a feature story in a German magazine about Lindbergh's exploits.

An East Prussian aristocrat, known only as "Valeska," had introduced the Hesshaimer sisters to Lindbergh. She was his

private secretary in Europe. With him, she had a son in 1959 and a daughter in 1961. At one time, all three mistresses lived together in the same apartment in Rome until Brigitte admitted she was pregnant, eventually giving birth to Lindbergh's first European child.

J. Edgar learned that on Lindbergh's death bed in August of 1974, he wrote all three of his mistresses, pleading for "utmost secrecy" in not revealing that he had "supplemented" his U.S.-based family with an additional three families in Germany.

In 2008, Reeve, the youngest daughter of the American branch of the Lindbergh family, wrote a book *Forward from Here*, in which she included her discovery in 2003 of the truth about her hero father's three secret European families.

In reading over Lindbergh's file, J. Edgar scribbled a note: "He called himself a Lutheran but with all those wives, he should have been a Mormon."

Clyde discovered a final tantalizing detail to amuse J. Edgar. "I talked to this airman who had become friends with our aviator friend in the Pacific in 1944. He told me that one night Lindbergh confessed to him that he masturbated three times while flying the *Spirit of St. Louis* to Paris."

At the beginning of World War II, the United States had been officially neutral, even though the sympathies of the Roosevelt administration leaned, of course, toward Britain. In a private call to J. Edgar, FDR had asked him to cooperate with British intelligence.

This led to the secret meeting of the FBI director with William Stephenson, a Canadian-born industrialist who became known as the famous British spy "Intrepid," as depicted in the 1979 bestseller *A Man Called Intrepid*.

Reporting directly to Churchill himself, Stephenson was Britain's chief of intelligence in the Western Hemisphere, with particularly far-reaching authority in Canada and the United States, during World War II.

Before he became the master of cloak-and-dagger espionage, Stephenson had been one of Britain's top fighter pilots in WWI. His approval among his commanders reached its peak during his stint as a member of the Royal Flying Corps, when he shot down 26 German planes. Eventually captured and imprisoned in an internment camp by the Nazis, he came across an ingenious can opener that had been patented in Germany. At war's end, he adapted this can opener and obtained patents worldwide for it. In time, this lowly can opener made him a multi-millionaire. He branched off into radio, phonographs, automobiles, airplanes, real estate, and steel. He was also a clever inventor, creating the first device for sending photographs by radio. He even won the European lightweight boxing championship.

Years before his internment, in Germany on business in the months before the outbreak of World War II, Stephenson sent Churchill undercover information on Nazi steel, arms, and munitions production. He sent these secrets directly to Churchill himself, who had not become Prime Minister at the time.

In April of 1940, both FDR and Churchill told Stephenson to meet privately with J. Edgar to coordinate activities, such as the training of potential American spies in Canada.

Stephenson did not want to be seen entering FBI headquarters in Washington, so J. Edgar agreed to meet with him at his home on Thirtieth Place. Stephenson was informed in advance that Clyde Tolson would be present.

Long freed of his mother's control, J. Edgar could decorate his home as he desired. Stephenson later claimed he was stunned when he came in, finding both the house and garden filled with nude pictures, nude statues, and nude figurines, all male. "When I had to take a leak, I found the walls of the bathroom decorated with reproductions of Roman friezes of men sodomizing each other. I was taken aback. I had heard that J. Edgar and Clyde were the most closeted homosexuals in Washington. Yet anybody who came into their home would recognize the place as the abode of a homosexual couple."

At the bottom of his report to Churchill, Stephenson also added that "J. Edgar is a formidable halfback, but I suspect Clyde Tolson is the real coach in this bizarre relationship."

At first J. Edgar was rather leery of Stephenson. As FBI agent William Sullivan later claimed, "Hoover didn't like the British, didn't care for the French, hated the Dutch, and couldn't stand Australians."

The meeting between J. Edgar and Stephenson revealed startling information. J. Edgar was told that England had captured an Enigma machine, the key to decoding Nazi military communications. "With this machine, we can win the war," Churchill had said. "But it is a deadly secret."

Stephenson decided that FDR would be the only non-British authority figure who would be informed of the existence of Enigma and its capture by the British. Even though the United States was still neutral, the summary of German intelligence would be sent to the President.

Churchill had decided that J. Edgar was the man to receive these secret messages, which he would then convey to the White House. Before the night had ended, J. Edgar had agreed to become the liaison between the coded Enigma messages from London and the White House. At the conclusion of the evening, J. Edgar said, "The FBI has just married British intelligence."

It is estimated that in one year alone, J. Edgar at the FBI received some 100,000 secret messages as decoded from the Nazi High Command. Stephenson said, "That allowed us to round up Nazi spies in America, and we let J. Edgar take the credit. At no point did we want it revealed that we were providing the information that led to these arrests."



The debate still rages: Was **William Stephenson** (above) the inspiration for Ian Fleming's James Bond character, or was it Dusko Popov, another master spy?

Fleming once wrote, "James Bond is a highly romanticized version of a true spy. The real thing is William Stephenson."

Standing only five feet, five inches, Stephenson was head of British Intelligence in the Western Hemisphere during World War II. He is best known by his code name, "Intrepid."

In 1976, a writer (William Stevenson) published a biography of the master spy, *A Man Called Intrepid*, which brought international attention to the spy's role during World War II.

In 1979, the spy was portrayed by David Niven in a film (also called *A Man Called Intrepid*), based on the bestseller. Because of the similarities in the names of the book's author and its protagonist, (Stevenson vs. Stephenson), consumers thought the book was an autobiography, which it was not.

At Rockefeller Plaza in New York, Stephenson set up headquarters of the British Security Coordination (BSC). This organization intercepted all suspicious mail between the United States, South America, and Europe. Diplomatic pouches were illegally sent here to be opened. "We became the letter-opening center of the world," Stephenson later said. "We could break almost any code. We shared the fruits of our labor with Hoover." Stephenson, however, found J. Edgar completely uncooperative and of virtually no help in reciprocating with data that was deemed vital to British Intelligence.

Up until July of 1941, J. Edgar believed that he and Clyde were the kingpins of American intelligence and counterespionage. "Then Stephenson betrayed me," in J. Edgar's words.

Stephenson threw his weight behind William J. Donovan in the process of getting him appointed as head of the Office of the Coordinator of Information (COI), which later was renamed Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Donovan was put in charge of an integrated strategic intelligence service, which made him J. Edgar's boss. Stephenson continued to deliver secret messages to J. Edgar, but the Bureau chief reacted vengefully by refusing any further cooperation with Stephenson because of his involvement with Donovan's appointment.

J. Edgar openly criticized the president's appointment of Donovan, calling it "FDR's folly," and never forgave Stephenson for supporting Donovan.

When Churchill was informed of J. Edgar's lack of cooperation, the Prime Minister said, "Our least favorite homosexual in

America is living up to his reputation—a true Anglophobe.”

J. Edgar spent most of the war years involved in espionage against the Japanese and the Nazis, but “my worst enemy” (his words) was William J. Donovan, nicknamed “Wild Bill.” In time, Donovan, not J. Edgar, would be known as the “Father of Central Intelligence.” His OSS was the forerunner of today’s CIA.

“Wild Bill” earned his name when he led a cavalry troop of the New York State Militia in the 1916 Pancho Villa campaign along the Mexican and U.S. border. FDR admired him greatly, even though he was a Republican and had run unsuccessfully in 1932 in a bid for FDR’s former office as governor of New York.

In the summer of 1941, the President assigned to Donovan the almost impossible task of coordinating the intelligence divisions of the Army, Navy, State Department, and the FBI. These warring factions were not pulling together, and not presenting a solid front against their Fascist enemies. J. Edgar didn’t want to share his organization’s intelligence with the other branches.

From the beginning, Donovan found roadblocks along the way, as J. Edgar insisted on retaining the autonomy of the FBI in South America, and the OSS was blocked from the Philippines by the opposition of General Douglas MacArthur, the commander of the Southwest Pacific Theater.

The FBI director was especially concerned with what he feared was “the increasingly dangerous theater of South America.” He also seriously doubted Mexico’s loyalty, and uncovered a secret Nazi memo written to the Mexican president. Hitler agreed to return the lands Mexico had lost to the United States if that country would allow Germany to use its ports for an eventual attack on the north.

J. Edgar was convinced that Hitler was plotting to first subdue South America and then use it as a launching pad for an invasion of the United States, with enemy troops landing first in Mexico. In reaction, the Bureau’s agents poured into Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and especially Argentina.

British agents always received a dubious reception from J. Edgar at the FBI. Commander Ian Fleming, who later created the James Bond stories, recalled one of his visits to the office of J. Edgar. “He was a chunky, enigmatic man with slow eyes and a trap of a mouth who received us graciously, listening with close attention to our exposé of certain security problems. His assistant, Tolson, stood up during the entire time, taking in our every move with his judgmental black eyes. Hoover made it perfectly clear he had no interest in aiding British intelligence in the United States. His negative response was soft as a cat’s paw. With a firm, dry handclasp, we were shown the way out.”

When Churchill himself read Fleming’s wartime report on J. Edgar’s reception, he told his aides, “That old sod Hoover thinks like a cop. He doesn’t know how to make use of the intelligence supplied by the British.”

“Had Hoover not shown such hostility toward us, maybe Pearl Harbor could have been prevented,” Stephenson later recalled. “Does that god damn pansy think he’s still fighting the Red Coats on Bunker Hill? Does he not know Britain is an ally of the United States?”

J. Edgar conceived of the Special Intelligence Service (SIS) that kept Axis spies from winning countries in South America to their side. To hold onto his South American turf, J. Edgar bombarded FDR with reports of his success in such Fascist-leaning countries as Argentina. Somehow the FBI obtained copies of secret letters that Juan Peron in Buenos Aires was sending to Hitler in Berlin.

The FBI had begun operating in Central and South America in the summer of 1940. From then on, they systematically rounded up Axis agents, arrested saboteurs, disrupted the smuggling of strategic war materials, and confiscated funds the Nazis planned to use to finance their infiltration of South America.

Before war’s end, J. Edgar’s G-Men would shut down three dozen clandestine radio stations broadcasting Spanish and Portuguese-language Nazi propaganda within South America. J. Edgar ordered that Nazis agents be captured as far away as Chile or Brazil and held in prisons in the U.S. Canal Zone. A roundup of Nazi agents in just one city, Rio de Janeiro, resulted in some five hundred arrests.

In time, J. Edgar was so proud of his achievements South of the Border that he hoped to head all divisions of U.S. intelligence at war’s end, although the rise of the CIA would burst that dream balloon.

Throughout the war J. Edgar consistently sabotaged Donovan. When OSS men were breaking into the Spanish Embassy in Washington, two FBI cars arrived outside with dome lights flashing and sirens sounding an alarm. Donovan’s men were arrested and Spanish officials, sympathetic to the Nazis, alerted.

Since Donovan viewed this OSS attempt at intelligence gathering vital to the Allied war effort, he called FDR and accused J. Edgar of “committing treason.” The President agreed and was furious at the FBI director. “The only way I’ll get rid of the fart is if you guys break into FBI headquarters and steal the files on Eleanor and me.”

Donovan guaranteed that J. Edgar would be his enemy for life when he ordered his agents to conduct a very private investigation to determine if J. Edgar and Clyde were homosexual lovers. He suspected strongly that they were, and Stephenson firmly believed that the two men were lovers in the wake of his visit to their home with all those male nudes and erotic drawings.

When Guy Hotell became inebriated, and that was almost nightly, he was “loose-lipped,” in the words of J. Edgar. But Guy

knew far too much to be fired.

One night, Donovan employed a very attractive, well-built blond OSS agent of Scandinavian ancestry. His assignment was to pump all the information he could out of Guy and learn what he knew about the intimate details of the sex lives of J. Edgar and Clyde. Donovan even got the agent to agree to allow Guy to seduce him if he provided the right kind of information.

The OSS dressed the agent like an *homme fatale* and sent him to the tavern in Georgetown that was frequented by Guy. Guy did not show up on the first or second nights but came into the bar on the third night. The agent found that Guy was only too willing to sit drinking with him in a private booth.

The agent admitted that he'd recently divorced his wife and was horny now that his sex life had been cut off. "I think I know how that can be remedied," Guy told him. He also bragged about his close relationships with J. Edgar and Clyde, hinting at great degrees of intimacy between them when they went on vacations together.



William ("Wild Bill") Donovan, an Irish/American doughboy during World War I, is best known as the wartime head of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), which technically made him J. Edgar's boss, a designation which led to the FBI director's massive resentment.

Dead by 1959, Donovan today is known as “the Father of Central Intelligence.”

Harry S Truman also disliked Donovan, and although Donovan laid the framework for what became the modern-day CIA, he never actually ran it. In its early days, it was denounced as “An American Gestapo” by its critics.

At the Nürnberg trials, Donovan had the satisfaction of seeing some of the Nazi leaders responsible for the torture and murder of his OSS agents brought to justice. President Eisenhower referred to him as “The Last Hero.”

Somehow, Clyde learned about this possible entrapment, and immediately sent an FBI squad car to the bar, where Guy was escorted out of the tavern and placed under FBI custody until he sobered up. He later admitted, “I faced the worst scolding of my life from Eddie. He used every word he could think of to denounce me, but he had no choice but to keep me on the force. I knew where all the bodies were buried.”

Even though Guy did not provide as much private data on the two FBI lovers that Donovan wanted, he had enough to file a report that was sent directly to the Oval Office. In his report, Donovan pointed out that both J. Edgar and Clyde, as homosexuals, were in danger of being blackmailed and compromising the work of the FBI.

The President chose not to take any immediate action in the wake of Donovan’s allegations. Actually, Donovan’s charges were well known to FDR. In fact, from various sources he’d long ago been alerted to those “she-males” who ran the FBI.

Dusko Popov, the playboy son of a rich Serbian family, became the most famous double agent of World War II. His cryptonym was “Tricycle,” a nickname he earned for his sexual preference of sleeping with two women at the same time. Actually, he preferred that these two women be identical twins, and he spent a life of sexual frustration because he could not often arrange such a tryst.

When he died in 1981, he claimed that he had achieved his sexual fantasy with some two dozen twins, but that he would have preferred “so many more.”

Author Ian Fleming ripped off the life of Tricycle, who was one of the inspirations for the creation of his James Bond character.

Fluent in German, Popov was approached in 1940 by Nazi agents of the Abwehr, Hitler’s high command espionage service. He did so well in their intensive training program that he was asked to become a master Nazi spy. He’d survived torture better than any agent the Abwehr had recruited before. Part of his endurance training had been an intensive assault of his testicles, which according to reports, were quite large and made an easy target for Abwehr interrogators, who had been recruited from a bar in Berlin catering to sadists.

Unknown to the Abwehr, Popov detested Hitler and his Nazis. Flown to London, he immediately contacted MI-6, telling him he was sent to England to spy on the British war effort. Without the torture, the British also subjected him to an intensive interrogation and came to believe he was telling the truth and was not a “plant.”

MI-6 agents fed Popov “useful but relatively harmless” military secrets to funnel back to Abwehr headquarters in Germany. In some cases, these secrets led to the loss of British lives, but the agents of MI-6 felt the sacrifice was worth the price to establish the validity of Popov and not let the Nazis know he was a double agent.

Abwehr was so impressed with the military data Popov collected in Britain that in the summer of 1941 he was dispatched to New York on a secret mission which the Germans viewed as vital to their espionage work in the Western Hemisphere.

Before leaving London, MI-6 was apprised of Popov’s mission. The Nazis had arranged to provide him with an initial \$50,000 in American currency which would be waiting for him in New York. He was told that his contact in America could supply him with an almost unlimited budget on an as-need basis, because they wanted him to set up Nazi spy cells that stretched from New York to California and on to Hawaii.

Prior to his departure for his clandestine assignment in the U.S., Popov was given an “intelligence questionnaire,” with instructions to fill in the blanks within a reasonable time of his arrival. Popov passed it on to British intelligence, where it was studied by J.C. Masterman, chief of the British XX Committee, the XX standing for “Double Cross.” Masterson ascertained that one third of the questions concerned logistics associated with Pearl Harbor. Where was the mine depot on the Isle of Kishkuma? How far had the dredging at the entrance to Pearl Harbor proceeded? What was the depth of the water in the main harbor? How many airplanes stood at Hickam, Wheeler, Luke, and Kanehe airports?

German spies in the United States were sending reports about the extension of American airfields and troop movements throughout the U.S. The routes ammunition ships used as they headed for England were deemed of vital importance. The most sensitive queries demanded information about the U.S. atomic energy program. As early as 1940, Germans suspected that the Americans were trying to develop an atomic bomb. There were many questions about enriched uranium.

A spy had reported that Hitler had told Göring’s chief aides that, “If we can build an arsenal of atomic bombs, we will dominate the planet. With three bombs, we could destroy London, Washington, and New York.”

When Popov arrived in New York, he later told London that the FBI was picking up perceived Nazi sympathizers “like whores off the Reeperbahn,” a reference to the bordello district of Hamburg.

Popov had two major goals to achieve in America. First, he wanted to meet with J. Edgar at FBI headquarters in Washington. To clear his pathway to J. Edgar, he was given letters of introduction by British intelligence, who stated that he was a double agent of the highest importance.

Before heading to Washington to meet with J. Edgar, Popov decided to spend some of those lavish dollars bestowed on him by the Germans. He checked into a suite at the Waldorf-Astoria in Manhattan.

During a secret mission to France, he'd met a beautiful French film actress, Simone Simon, who had been a singer, model, and fashion designer. She'd made her screen debut in Paris in 1931 and became so successful that she was brought to Hollywood by Darryl F. Zanuck in 1935. The cigar-smoking producer immediately seduced her after warning her that his penis was so large "I might split you in two."

In Hollywood, she'd faced one career disaster after another. Cast in *A Message for Garcia* (1936), she was replaced by Rita Hayworth. In 1936, she was cast as the female lead in *Under Two Flags* but was discharged for being too temperamental. She later claimed that she'd taken the advice of Marlene Dietrich, who had told her, "To be a star, you must make yourself behave like one every day on the set. You have to be imperial. You can't walk out of your dressing room like Minnie Mouse."

Although a nymphomaniac, seducing one male after another, Simone also had a lesbian streak and was involved in a torrid affair with Marlene at the time.

Simon did make *Seventh Heaven* in 1937 with Janet Gaynor, at which time she had affairs with both of its stars—not only with Gaynor but with James Stewart, who always said, "I polluted myself" after having sex. Cast in *Danger—Love at Work* (1937), she later lost the part to Ann Sothern because the director found her French accent too thick.

Abandoning Hollywood, embittered, she returned to France but came back to New York at the outbreak of the war, heading for Hollywood. When Popov learned she was in Manhattan, he resumed his affair with the actress.

Unknown to both Simone and Popov, Clyde had assigned FBI agents to watch their every move. Both lovers already had a dossier at the FBI.

During her years in Hollywood, Simone had become one of Clyde's "persons to watch." She'd scandalously been known as "The Lady with the Golden Key," and was said to have given any man she desired a gold-painted key to her boudoir, including Robert Taylor, Errol Flynn, George Gershwin, Johnny Weissmuller, Tyrone Power, and Charlie Chaplin. She had also involved herself in a number of lesbian affairs.

Knowing that Popov liked three-ways, and reading that Marlene was in New York, Simone called her and invited her to spend a night at the Waldorf with Popov and her. Apparently, she told Marlene that Popov was romantically devilish and "has the largest pair of testicles of any man in Europe and a penis that doesn't seem to end." She made that claim to several women with whom she arranged threesomes with Popov.

At the time of Simone's wartime hookup with Popov, the actress had just achieved her greatest success in English language cinema with the release of *The Devil and Daniel Webster* (1941). She had also signed to star in two films that would become cult classics in the horror genre—*Cat People* (1942) and *The Curse of the Cat People* (1944).

When Clyde informed J. Edgar that Marlene Dietrich was sleeping with Simone and Popov, the director said, "My suspicion is confirmed. I think that Dietrich, though pretending to be anti-Nazi, is using Popov as her secret agent to supply data directly to the Abwehr. We must increase our surveillance of this blonde Kraut whore, who, no doubt, like Hedy Lamarr, has been fucked by Hitler's paltry three and a half inches."

Before leaving New York, it had been understood that Popov would meet with Percy Foxworth, who worked in the FBI's Manhattan office. J. Edgar wanted Foxworth to review the double agent's data before he met with him.

Caught up in FBI red tape, Popov learned that his information had also been forwarded to Earl Connelley, assistant FBI director in New York. The officer found Popov's reports "too detailed, far too precise and well organized. It sounds like a trap to me. The British may be taken in, but I think he's a loyal member of the Abwehr. He's fucking us, getting information from us. But I'll send his reports along to see what Hoover thinks."

At the Waldorf, Popov received an invitation to visit the FBI in Washington. In an assessment he shared with MI-6, he felt his data was of major importance to J. Edgar, because it suggested that an attack on Pearl Harbor might be imminent.

Popov had also been sent data from the Nazis which confirmed that Japanese naval officials had visited Taranto, Italy, at that country's southern tip. The Japanese had wanted to learn how British torpedo planes, launched from an aircraft carrier, had nearly obliterated the Italian fleet.

Reaching Washington with his vital data, Popov was told that J. Edgar along with his associate director, Clyde Tolson, had gone on a business trip to Miami. Guy Hotell had accompanied them.

Guy later recalled to his would-be biographer, James Kirkwood, "While the Japs were warming up their airplane engines to fly to Hawaii, Eddie, Clyde, and I were chasing after young dick in Florida."

Since J. Edgar was in Florida and would be there for at least two weeks, Popov, ever the playboy, found two Chinese teenage twins. Offering them \$2,000 each, he drove them to Florida for a bacchanalian holiday, checking into a suite at the Roney Plaza on Miami Beach.

Weeks later, he learned that J. Edgar had considered having him arrested for violation of the Mann Act for taking a woman

across state lines for the purpose of seduction. He also learned that Clyde had ordered agents to bug his suite at the Waldorf, and J. Edgar had personally listened to a tape of him having sex with Marlene and Simone.

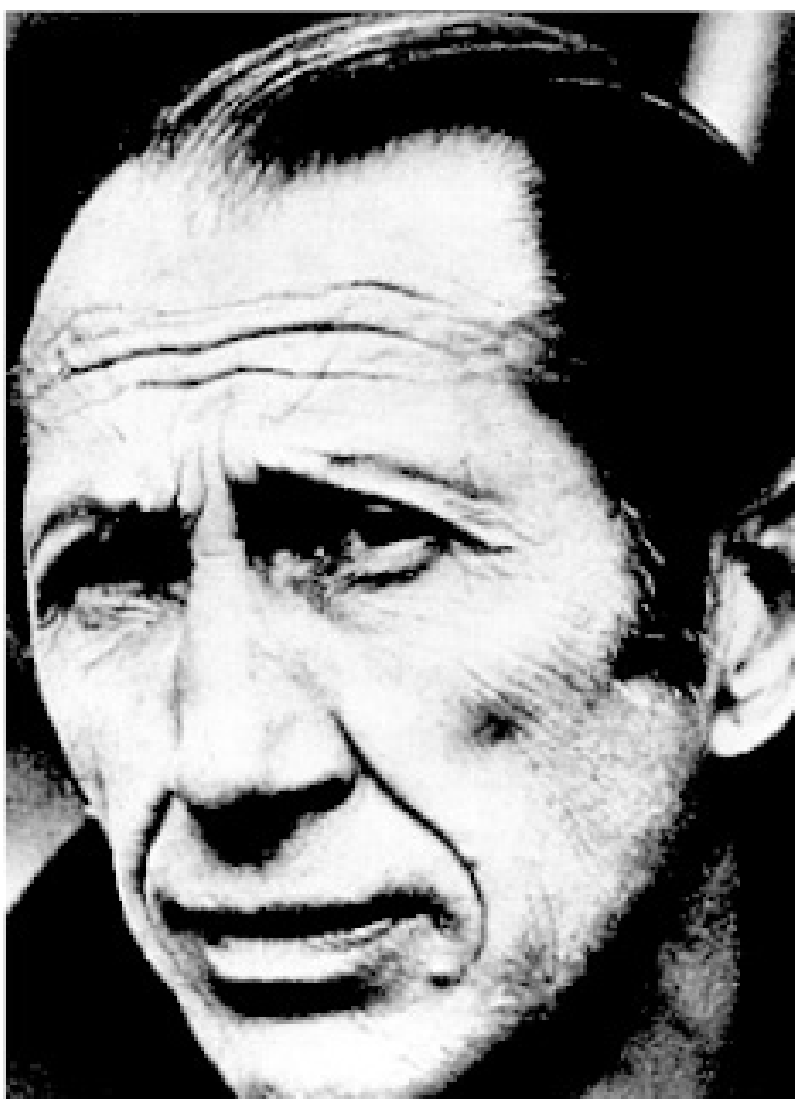
J. Edgar suspected the French actress of being a Nazi agent. “She is known in homosexual circles in Paris where she has many friends including the pervert Jean Cocteau,” Clyde claimed. “From what I’m told these boys are willing to be deflowered nightly by Nazi soldiers in Paris. It’s called sleeping with the enemy.”

Popov very accurately assumed that the information he was providing was important enough to alter the course of World War II and was vital information for the United States. He had told MI-6, “Instead of going through pansy boy Hoover, I should be dealing directly with Franklin Roosevelt, warning him of an imminent attack on Pearl Harbor.”

Finally, after endless delays, Popov was ushered into the office of a suntanned J. Edgar. Clyde stood ten feet away, looking out the window. Neither man shook his hand. Popov later recalled that the face of J. Edgar looked “like a sledgehammer in search of an anvil.”

“Sit down, Popov,” J. Edgar virtually shouted at him. The spy would later recall, “I was greeted with the enthusiasm of a fresh dog turd which had had the audacity of placing itself beneath Hoover’s polished patent leather shoes.”

Instead of listening and digesting his information, J. Edgar astonished Popov by attacking him as a bogus spy. “Ever since you’ve arrived on our shores, you’ve fucked movie stars, drank too much champagne, ate too much at the Waldorf, taken teenage girls across the state line to engage in sexual intercourse, and patronized low-grade prostitutes. In Miami you were caught running nude around the pool area chasing after a married woman.”



Codenamed “Tricycle” because he liked to sleep with two women at the same time, **Dusko Popov** was the most extraordinary spy of World War II.

Recruited by Nazi Intelligence (*Abwehr*) in 1940, the 27-year-old became a turn-coat, working secretly for the British. He fed the Germans a constant stream of military “intelligence” after it had been vetted by MI-6.

Sent to the United States to establish a Nazi spy network, he met with J. Edgar Hoover late in 1941, warning him of an imminent attack on Pearl Harbor. The FBI director failed to heed his warnings and spent a great part of the rest of his life trying to cover up a fatal mistake that virtually wiped out the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

“My high life was paid for by the Germans,” he claimed. “They’re giving me an endless supply of the Yankee dollar.”

“In America, and especially from our agents, we believe in good clean living. We are a much more moral country than you people over in London. I think you’re just playing the British against the Nazis. Probably feeding misinformation to both sides.”

He pounded his fists on the desk. “You’ve done nothing but behave like a degenerate. Who do you think you are? Porfirio Rubirosa?”

“I have valuable information about a possible Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.”

“I get all sorts of crank information like that every day,” J. Edgar said. “Do you think I need you to teach me how to do my job? If Japan plans to attack Pearl Harbor, I will be the first to know about it. General Douglas MacArthur and I have spies in the Japanese High Command.”

“Roosevelt must be alerted,” Popov protested. “Your Pacific fleet is a sitting duck for a surprise attack. Abwehr believes that what they call their ‘yellow allies’ will attack sometime between your Thanksgiving and the Christmas holiday of this year, maybe sooner.”

“If such a move is planned, I assure you I’ll be the first to know. I do want to know something from you. Did Marlene Dietrich quiz you about any information about an attack on Pearl Harbor?”

“She did not,” Popov said defensively. “She’s loyal to the Allies. All that stuff about Hitler and her is pure crap.”

“Or so you say,” J. Edgar said.

Realizing how hopeless the meeting was, Popov rose to his feet extending his hand. J. Edgar ignored it and remained seated. Clyde had never left his position at the window and had not said a word during the all-too-brief interview.



A relatively forgotten actress today, **Simone Simon** was a French film star who began her movie career in 1931. She is remembered by American audiences, if at all, for the cult classic *Cat People* (1942) and *The Curse of the Cat People* (1944).

She was brought to the attention of the FBI because of her affair with Dusko Popov, code name “Tricycle.”

The agent submitted a request to J. Edgar for the rental of a summer cottage and for the payment of a \$2,000 “bonus,” payable directly to Simone.

In the aftermath of this request, the FBI tapped Simone’s phone calls. As Guy Hotell reported, “Those two hot tamales invented phone sex.”

After the meeting, Popov sent a coded message to MI-6 in London. “Meeting with Hoover a disaster. Churchill should address FDR directly with this.”

After Popov left FBI headquarters, J. Edgar called Donovan and demanded that the double agent be deported from the United States. “I am not prepared to turn over our dossier on him at this minute, but we have proof he’s lying to the British and feeding them false information. He’s not a double agent working for Britain and Germany. He’s a Nazi spy through and through—no doubt about it.”

It was a peaceful early afternoon in New York on Sunday, December 7, 1941. J. Edgar and Clyde were having lunch in their complimentary suite in Manhattan's Waldorf-Astoria. The time was 1:25. J. Edgar had just finished a sirloin steak and was savoring his cherries jubilee when the telephone sounded. It had an urgent ring.

A frantic call had come in from SAC Robert Shivers in Honolulu. He was connected to the switchboard in FBI headquarters in Washington, where the operator was able to link him to J. Edgar and Clyde at the Waldorf.

Clyde picked up the receiver to hear Shivers' hysterical voice. The sound of exploding bombs could be heard in the background.

Across the static-filled wire came the news. "The Japs are bombing Pearl Harbor. Hundreds of our men are dying. The Pacific fleet has been wiped out."

Clyde turned to J. Edgar who was looking up from his luscious dessert, noting the panic on Clyde's face, which was usually devoid of emotion.

He handed the receiver to J. Edgar. "Boss, you're not going to like this call."

Nervously coming onto the line, J. Edgar listened for an entire minute before turning to Clyde. "We're at war with the Japs."

CHAPTER SIX

In their suite at Manhattan's Waldorf-Astoria, J. Edgar hastily packed his possessions. Already packed, Clyde was on the phone, chartering a plane at La Guardia airport to fly them at once to FBI headquarters in Washington. All of their employees in the District of Columbia had heard the news and were waiting for the pair to arrive.

By midnight J. Edgar was still waiting for an authorization from FDR to begin arresting "enemy agents." Finally, it arrived, and he gave the orders through Clyde. "We'll get them even if we have to drag the bastards naked from their beds. By tomorrow these spies won't be sleeping on soft beds but on cold concrete floors with a gun pointed at their heads."

At FBI headquarters, J. Edgar and Clyde worked throughout the night, ordering the compilation of a list of all aliens, especially Japanese ones. The director feared massive sabotage. As soon as approval was granted, he directed law enforcement officials to take into custody all Japanese. In less than 72 hours, 3,846 aliens were arrested. Before 1945, J. Edgar would have as many as 16,000 enemy agents in custody. Clyde sent out a memo to all airlines not to fly Japanese passengers.

As the war proceeded, the number of prisoners reached beyond the 400,000 mark. Every month some seventy of these aliens escaped, and the FBI's job was to round them up. Not only that, but the Bureau was assigned the task of rounding up draft dodgers. In a sweep in one night in New York, 150 potential soldiers were arrested.

FBI laboratories also worked overtime to discover faulty military material supplied by war contractors, including defective hand grenades with insufficient charges.

Early on the morning of December 10, 1941, J. Edgar and Clyde were rushing into FBI headquarters. Mary MacNaulty, a housewife from Baltimore, stood on the sidewalk wearing a heavy black overcoat. "You killed 2,400 men," she shouted at J. Edgar. "My son was killed because of you."

She reached into her coat and pulled out a pistol, aiming it at J. Edgar. The highly trained Clyde quickly subdued her, knocking her to the pavement. Two FBI security guards apprehended the woman and took her into FBI custody. But later in the day J. Edgar ordered his agents to release her because he didn't want the publicity.

The pistol that had almost been the weapon to assassinate him was brought to his office where he kept it. Clyde checked and found that it had been legally registered in the name of her dead son.

Usually J. Edgar did not drink on the job. But on this particular day he had several hefty shots from a bottle of Old Grand Dad that rested nearby in his liquor cabinet.

A call came in later that day from Francis Biddle, a Harvard-educated lawyer and judge who had been appointed Attorney General. Technically, he was J. Edgar's boss, although the FBI director often went over his head, reporting directly to FDR himself. Biddle informed him that he had no objection to that. Without saying so, Biddle more or less green-lighted "any tool necessary to discover America's enemies working within the country."

J. Edgar accepted that as authorization to do anything he wanted, legal or otherwise. "We're at war," Biddle told him. "Desperate times call for desperate measures."

Biddle informed J. Edgar that FDR wanted him to be in charge of wartime press censorship. It was a position J. Edgar didn't want. He managed to maneuver his way out of that job, the position eventually going to Byron Price, executive news editor of Associated Press.

"The FBI doesn't have time to get into the censorship business," J. Edgar informed Biddle. "We need to devote all of our energy to counterespionage."

With Price, Biddle worked to suppress "vermin publications."

In the week that followed the attack on Pearl Harbor, J. Edgar had a major conflict with Clyde, who usually gave in to nearly all decisions made by "The Boss." Clyde was a reserve naval commander, and, as a super patriot, he wanted to go on active duty "to serve my country in its hour of need. If Hitler wins this war, we'll be herded into a concentration camp or the gas chamber."

J. Edgar adamantly refused his request, and appealed directly to Henry Stimson, the Secretary of War. The next day Stimson sent Clyde a personal letter, asking him to resign his commission. He was told he would contribute more to the defense effort by remaining at his post at the FBI.

"There is no way in hell I'm ever going to let Clyde Tolson leave me," J. Edgar told Frank Knox, the Secretary of the Navy.

Knox later recalled, "I was stunned by such a statement. It convinced me that Hoover was in love with our boy Tolson. That was fine with me because we didn't allow homosexuals in the Navy anyway."

Even in wartime, Knox was not the only one wondering about the private lives of J. Edgar and Clyde. Over the years J. Edgar had been asked many times why he never married. Before the war, a Washington woman's page editor ran an article on the confirmed bachelor, entitled "J. Edgar Hoover Wants an Old-Fashioned Girl."

In the feature he said, "Every time I find a girl I'd like to marry, she is already married to someone else. I will meet a girl

and think, ‘Now there’s a girl for me.’ And what happens? She is either the hostess or the wife of someone else. Someone always beats me to the girl. If I ever marry and the girl fails me, ceases to love me, and our marriage is dissolved, it would ruin me. I couldn’t take it and I would not be responsible for my actions.”

But except for a rare voice raised here and there about his sexual preference, most of the FBI director’s critics focused on why Pearl Harbor had to happen and who was to blame for America’s all-time biggest naval disaster.

In the days, weeks, years, and decades that followed Pearl Harbor, J. Edgar came in for severe attacks when politicians looked for scapegoats. On the very night of Sunday, December 7, 1941’s surprise aerial bombardment, Senator Tom Connally of Texas arrived enraged at the White House. As head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he was called to an urgent meeting with FDR and other officials.

At the meeting Connally pointedly asked, “Why did the Japs catch us with our pants down so they could stick a firecracker up our ass? Didn’t Hoover have some warning from his so-called far-flung spy network?”

John O’Donnell, writing for the McCormick chain of newspapers, claimed that, “The nation’s super Dick Tracy, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, is directly under the gun. The blame for Pearl Harbor rests in his lap.”

In his book, *J. Edgar Hoover, The Man in His Time*, Ralph de Toledano wrote: “The question arises, where was the FBI in those critical days in December of 1941? Why did they not alert the President, the Army, and the Navy of the impending attack on Pearl Harbor? Was its counter-intelligence force asleep or incompetent?”

An enraged Admiral Edwin Layton, the fleet intelligence officer at Pearl Harbor, charged that “Hoover’s ego got in the way. He wouldn’t share intelligence with other agencies. He dropped the ball completely just when America was depending on him. He seemed more interested in who Dusko Popov was fucking than he did in the upcoming Japanese surprise air attack. That fumble of his put us on the road to hell. Hoover literally sacrificed the lives of all those poor boys.”

Master spy Popov, who had tried to alert J. Edgar and the United States about an imminent attack on Pearl Harbor, called J. Edgar “A god damn fool. If Hoover had cooperated, and I had been allowed to set up spy cells across America for Abwehr, the shithead would have known everything going on in German espionage in America.”

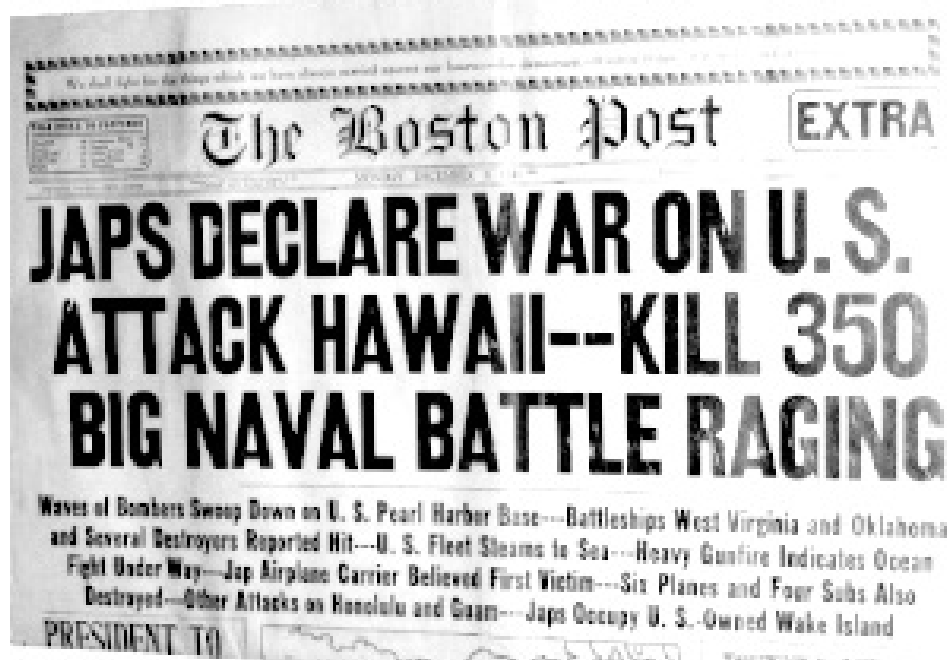
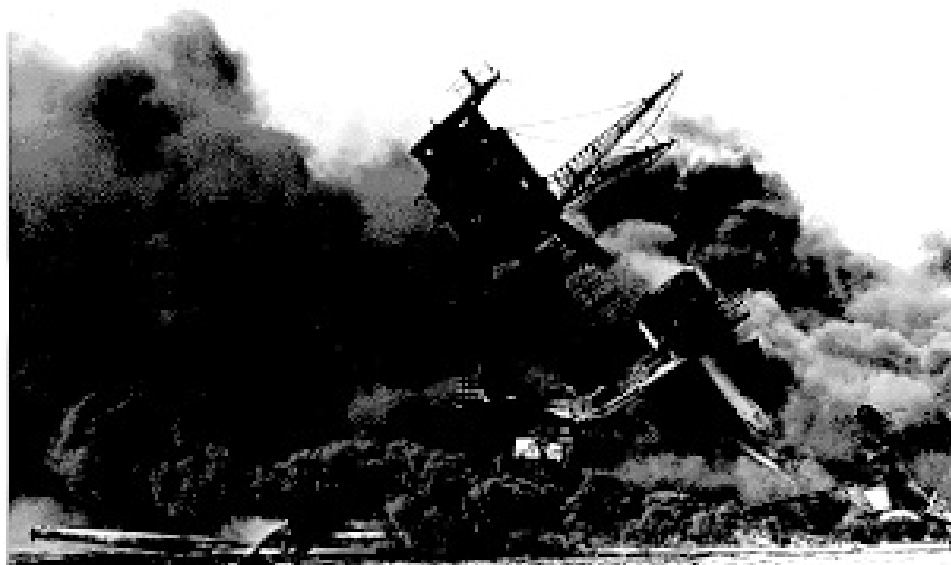
“Hoover knew he’d made a mistake and attempted to cover up his guilty tracks,” Popov also claimed. “I hope the history books will catch up with him. He didn’t even share my information with Donovan.”

William J. Donovan, assigned the task of coordinating all American intelligence, also attacked J. Edgar. “Hoover should have digested the data and brought it to my immediate attention. I would have gone to Roosevelt within the hour. Thousands of American lives could have been saved, not to mention the U.S. Pacific fleet. Damn him!”

Speaking privately for British intelligence, William Stephenson said, “Hoover failed to pick up what Popov was trying to tell him about Pearl Harbor. The consequences were disastrous for the United States. Roosevelt should have fired him on the Monday that followed the Japanese attack.”

In 1941, the CIA, of course, had not come into existence, but even its future director, William Casey, was still blaming Hoover for Pearl Harbor. “The director showed a total incompetence for sophisticated wartime intelligence. The way he handled Popov showed that he should have been reassigned the job of a cop on the beat. Pearl Harbor was but a tip-off about Hoover’s future legendary secretiveness and oversimplified way of thinking.”

Over the decades, many historians have come down hard on J. Edgar, especially Leslie Rout and John Bratzel in their *American Historical Review*. They blamed J. Edgar for failing to share information with the White House and Army and Naval intelligence agencies. Their claim was that J. Edgar “showed both a poverty of judgment on his part and the crippling consequences of rivalry among those government agencies charged with gathering and evaluating information essential to the United States at a critical time in its history.”



Both J. Edgar Hoover and Clyde Tolson received warnings that a Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was imminent, but they chose to ignore them.

Many historians and military experts blamed J. Edgar for the tragedy that wiped out most of the U.S. Pacific fleet, including the *USS Arizona* (whose wreckage is depicted above), going down.

An hour before the actual attack, a mysterious call came in from “somewhere in the islands,” stating that a large fleet of planes with the rising sun on their bodies was heading toward Honolulu. At FBI headquarters, a memo was typed up and placed on J. Edgar’s desk, where he discovered it Monday morning.

The attack had occurred on the previous day, Sunday.

J. Edgar tried to distance himself “from Pearl Harbor blame,” claiming at one point to Assistant Attorney General Joseph Keenan that Roosevelt “suppressed vital Pearl Harbor intelligence.” On another occasion he suggested that Winston Churchill withheld last-minute intelligence warnings that an attack on Pearl Harbor was imminent.

“That was the fucker’s way of luring us into a war,” J. Edgar charged.

Many Americans at the time were not familiar with J. Edgar’s role in Pearl Harbor and lavished praise on him for his wartime surveillance activities on the home front. But his overzealous tendency to find a possible spy around every corner also made enemies for him on the left. Senator George Norris of Nebraska accused him “of overstepping and overreaching” his authority, claiming “J. Edgar Hoover is the greatest publicity hound on the North American continent.”

The New Republic wrote that J. Edgar’s “chief support comes from those who go to gangster movies and purchase

detective magazines for a dime.” J. Edgar’s major enemy in Congress, Vito Marcantonio, ridiculed the director as “the Stork Club detective.” In all seriousness, on the floor of the House of Representatives, he called for the “decapitation” of J. Edgar Hoover.

Through the years, the FBI file on Marcantonio grew to 1,000 pages before the congressman’s death in 1954. When J. Edgar learned of the passing of his enemy, he said, “The biggest Communist in America is burning in hell tonight.”

The only attacks that J. Edgar relished were those that accused him of being a womanizer. *Time* magazine claimed that “his dread is that someone, someday, somewhere, will plant a naked woman in his path to try to frame him.”



J. Edgar’s worst enemy in Congress was the dapper, flamboyant, **Vito Marcantonio** (*two photos above*), who represented New York City’s East Harlem. He’d graduated from New York University’s Law School and evolved into the populist champion of the working-class poor in his district, where he built up a loyal following.

His denunciations on the floor of the House of Representatives against J. Edgar Hoover were the most violent ever delivered in Congress. He virtually wanted to bring back the guillotine to cut off J. Edgar’s head for the failure of his intelligence regarding Pearl Harbor.

When Marcantonio was finally defeated in 1950, Italians were enraged. They blamed the newly arriving Puerto Ricans for the defeat of “our beloved Vito.”

As a cop in East Harlem admitted, “All the Italians were jumping every Spic they saw.”

Winchell in his column wrote, “The only girl he really adores and sends gifts to is a famous movie star who makes more in a fortnight than he does in a year ... Shirley Temple.”

J. Edgar and Clyde became key players in the great sex scandal of the Roosevelt administration. Sumner Welles, FDR’s Undersecretary of State, had already learned that J. Edgar and Clyde were homosexual lovers. Both these FBI men knew that Welles liked to perform oral sex on black men, whom he would pursue indiscreetly when intoxicated. His love of fellatio had already gotten him kicked out of Cuba.

America’s two top G-Men were not the only ones who wanted Welles eliminated from government. His official boss, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, despised him. The ailing Secretary loathed the thought that Welles was set to replace him. Hull’s health was failing, and he feared he might have to step down.

Over the years, FDR had heard many scandalous stories about Welles. Through it all they had remained friends.

FDR felt that Welles could hide his homosexuality behind the cloak of marriage to Mathilde Scott Townsend, a noted international beauty whose portrait had been painted by John Singer Sargent. Mr. and Mrs. Welles lived in a 49-room mansion outside of Washington on a 245-acre estate. FDR often used their home, Oxon Hill Manor, for weekend escapes with one of his mistresses.

The Welles family and the Roosevelts were very close. A twelve-year-old Welles was a page at FDR’s wedding to

Eleanor in March of 1905 and had even carried her bridal gown. At Groton, Welles had roomed with Eleanor's brother, and she'd always been his major champion in the Roosevelt administration.

J. Edgar told Clyde, Louis Nichols, and Guy Hotell that he wanted to bug the hotel rooms Welles occupied. "If we could secretly film him performing fellatio on a Negro, that would do it. Nothing could be more incriminating than that, except filming him getting fucked by some black buck. I detest people who have sex outside their race. We need stronger laws against that."

The first chance to entrap Welles having illicit sex had manifested itself back in September of 1940. Senator William Bankhead, the Speaker of the House, had died. He was the father of actress Tallulah Bankhead, who detested J. Edgar. Several government dignitaries, including Welles himself and Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, traveled by train to Jasper, Alabama, to attend the funeral.

J. Edgar sent Clyde and Guy to accompany the party. While Welles was at the funeral, supporting a grieving Tallulah, Clyde bugged his compartment on the train.

En route back to Washington, Clyde and Guy paid two good-looking black Pullman porters to make themselves sexually available to Welles. "He'll take the bait," Guy accurately predicted.

Clyde paid each of the porters one hundred dollars, which was more money than either of them had ever seen before.

When the porters visited Welles' compartment, they found him drunk and willing to sexually take on both of them simultaneously. It was all caught on the secret recording, which Clyde and Guy almost gleefully transported back to J. Edgar for his listening pleasure.

Through other congressmen attending the Bankhead funeral, and not through the FBI, William Bullitt became aware of Welles' seductions of the black men on that funeral train. Bullitt had a motive. He'd been FDR's ambassador to France but left Paris in the wake of the Nazi invasion. He wanted to become the new Secretary of State when Hull stepped down. To achieve that goal, he had to eliminate Welles, his major competitor.

A self-promoting political opportunist, Bullitt was called "the Iago of Iagos" by columnist Marquis Childs. Roosevelt had a personal reason to dislike Bullitt. Privately he referred to FDR as "that cripple in the White House," and he had even seduced the President's mistress, Marquerite LeHand ("Missy"). He bragged to Hull and others, "At least she knew what it was like to have a real man, not someone in a wheelchair."



As one of Franklin D. Roosevelt's chief aides, a "peacemonger" like **Sumner Welles** had maintained close ties to the Roosevelt family since his childhood. Some experts defined him as "the number three man in FDR's administration," with special expertise in U.S. relations with Latin America. As such, he was honored on the cover of the August 11, 1941 edition of *Time* magazine.

But by 1956, Welles had fallen into disgrace, and as such, appeared in a scandalous cover story of *Confidential* magazine. His habit of performing fellatio on study African-American and African-Hispanic men became common knowledge during the Eisenhower era.

Bullitt met with J. Edgar and pleaded with him to turn over the FBI report on Welles, but J. Edgar refused the request. He wanted to collect far more incriminating evidence before he had his own meeting with the President. Rebuffed, Bullitt decided

to go to FDR himself and present his case against Welles.

FDR didn't want to hear it. "I never want to hear what a man does when he's drunk," he told Bullitt. However, he appointed a "bodyguard" for Welles the next day. But after their second night together, J. Edgar learned that Welles was getting drunk with his bodyguard and seducing him as well.

When Eleanor learned of the charges against Welles, she intervened with her husband, claiming that he would surely commit suicide if he lost his post.

Bullitt then wrote FDR a confidential letter, asking "What if America's brave fighting men learned that the Number Two man in our State Department was a criminal and a sex deviate?"

Pressure mounted on FDR, as Bullitt was threatening to go to some Republican members of Congress to launch an investigation.

Louis Nichols and Clyde came up with another damaging report that occurred on a train ride Welles took to Cleveland. A very rich man, Welles had spread the word that any black man on the train who wanted to make a hundred dollars could knock on the door to his compartment. "All he asked was for me to take it out so he could suck it," one of the porters had claimed. "A lot of my brothers went for that kind of money since that was all they had to do to earn it."

When Hull heard these reports, he too wanted an audience with the President. But first the Secretary of State called J. Edgar asking for him to turn over his file on Welles. Seeing no advantage in helping Hull, J. Edgar refused. He personally wanted to break the case on him.

J. Edgar, Guy, and Nichols continued to accumulate more evidence. Around Christmastime of 1942, Welles almost froze to death, having stumbled and fallen into an icy stream on his estate. He was so drunk, he passed out. He was pursuing a very reluctant black workman on his property.

Another report reached J. Edgar's desk. On a visit to Paris in 1939 before the Nazi invasion, Welles had been seen in a bar right off the Champs-Élysées. This incident later became so gossiped about in Washington that it appeared as a passage in *Answered Prayers*, the novel that the gay author, Truman Capote, was working on (or pretending to be working on) at the time of his death.

The passage reads:

It was after midnight in Paris in the bar of Boeuf-sur-Le Toit, when he was sitting at a pink-clothed table with three men, two of them expensive tarts, Corsican pirates in British flannel, and the third none other than Sumner Welles—fans of CO, FIDE, TIAL will remember the patrician Mr. Welles, former Under-secretary of State, great and good friend of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. It made rather a tableau, one especially vivant, when His Excellency, pickled as brandied peaches, began nibbling those Corsican ears.

J. Edgar finally descended on the Oval Office with a very detailed and damaging report on "how dangerously and indiscreet Welles had behaved." With a 1944 re-election campaign coming up, FDR finally capitulated, especially when Hull was told that a congressional investigation was about to be launched. It was August of 1943 when FDR painfully called Welles and asked him to resign, suggesting he cite the ill health of his wife.

Back at his office, J. Edgar told Clyde and Guy, "That old biddy, Horse Face herself, can't protect her boy anymore." He was referring, of course, to Eleanor Roosevelt.

Author Ted Morgan in his book *FDR: A Biography* maintained the resignation of Welles had a devastating effect on Pan American solidarity and the Good Neighbor Policy. Not only that, but Welles was the most sympathetic person in the Roosevelt administration to the plight of Jews fleeing the terror of Hitler's Germany. Some historians credit Welles with the design for the future United Nations.

Welles had appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1941, and had been profiled in *The New York Times* that same year. The paper called him, "Tall and erect, never without his cane. He has enough dignity to be a Viceroy of India and enough influence in this critical era to make his ideas, principles, and dreams count."



Secretary of State **Cordell Hull** (*left*) takes a walk with his undersecretary, **Sumner Welles** (*right*), who wanted to replace him. Hull was in ailing health and could hardly withstand the awful tension of being Secretary of State during a World War. But as Hull knew all too well, thanks to reports from J. Edgar Hoover, Welles was a notorious homosexual, specializing in sex with black men. His career within the Roosevelt administration was doomed.

Welles died a broken man in September of 1961, but lived long enough to see his homosexual secret life exposed in *Confidential* in 1956. The tabloid scandal magazine published a story about the train incidents with the black Pullman porters.

Sir Winston Churchill once said, "I learned one thing from Sumner Welles. He made the phrase 'no comment' famous."

In the case of Sumner Welles, J. Edgar and Clyde perfected their technique of rounding up incriminating evidence on presumed homosexuals. They would carry on such secret missions for the rest of their lives, involving allegations against such men as Adlai Stevenson and Martin Luther King, Jr.

By the spring of 1942, there were many letters reaching J. Edgar's office, asking why Errol Flynn had been deferred by his draft board. Many of his friends and or male lovers were already in uniform, including Clark Gable, David Niven, Tyrone Power, and Robert Taylor.

An outcry was heard on June 19, 1942 when Igor Cassini published a blurb in the *Washington Times Herald*:

"Errol Flynn was deferred by his H'wood draft board because of a heart condition. Funny that this should happen to the hero of the greatest screen battles, to the tennis champion of the movie colony, to an ex-boxer, and to the greatest athlete of all Hollywood. Flynn's friends, however, say that he's burned up about criticism and that he wants to get into the army at all costs. We'll see. Errol looks healthier to us than many men they take every day. If it's his heart that is weak, Flynn should have been buried a long time ago."

A draft dodger himself in WWI, J. Edgar ordered an immediate investigation. To his special agent in Los Angeles, Richard Hood, the director wrote: "You should furnish the Bureau with the complete facts concerning Flynn's deferment within seven days. This inquiry should be conducted in a very discreet manner so that the fact it is being made will not be publicized."

To Guy and Clyde, J. Edgar said, "He looked pretty healthy to me when he emerged from that pool in Nassau."

Hood's report was complete, claiming that in spite of his outward physical appearance, Errol was "a very sick man," suffering from infectious tuberculosis, a condition worsened by his "excessive" lifestyle, including chain smoking." In New Guinea, he'd contracted malaria and still suffered from recurring bouts of this disease.

That was not all: It was determined that he had a dangerous heart murmur, and he also suffered from sinusitis, a serious

inflammation of a sinus within his skull.

His examining physician, Joseph Szukalski, allegedly said, “The only thing about Mr. Errol Flynn that seems in working order is his penis.” Errol was said to have produced an erection when his testicles were being juggled by a physician.

In 1937, under instructions from J. Edgar, Clyde had begun an FBI file on Errol Flynn whom they had met with Axel Wenner-Gren in The Bahamas. The trip the movie star had taken to Spain in 1937 was cause for alarm, since Flynn’s traveling companion was Dr. Hermann Erben, who had strong and sinister links to the Nazi Party.

J. Edgar feared Erben might be a possible espionage agent, and that Flynn was dangerously linked to him. Errol was questioned by an FBI agent, Richard Hood, at Warner Brothers in September of 1940 but he claimed that Erben was merely a longtime friend and denied that his associate had any Nazi ties.

Biographer Charles Higham claimed that Erben was a soldier of fortune and an adventurer of the seven seas. “His anti-Semitism and love of Hitler were the overpowering impulses in his life.” In his youth, he bore a marked resemblance to the Führer himself.

In 1933, in a letter to Erben, Flynn had written: “A slimy Jew is trying to cheat me. I do wish we could bring Hitler over here to teach these Isaacs a thing or two. The bastards have absolutely no business probity or honour whatsoever.”

In Errol’s memoirs, *My Wicked, Wicked Ways*, he changed Erben’s name to “Dr. Gerrit H. Koets,” because at the time he didn’t know if his long-ago friend were still alive and might sue for libel.

In the book he described Erben as he looked upon their first meeting in 1933: “He wore a broad, Dutch grin, showing enormous teeth parted. His ears were monsters that stood out at about the angle of an enraged elephant about to charge. His face was covered with blond hair. His bare legs and thighs showed the same hirsuteness, so that he looked like an amiable orangutan in a mink coat.”

In 1933, Erben, a specialist in tropical diseases, became a U.S. citizen by falsifying his application. The FBI had recommended the suspension of Erben’s U.S. citizenship because he had been arrested for “nefarious activities” in Spain. Errol had driven him from a point within the U.S. to the Mexican border as a means of escaping arrest. Even so, after Mexico, he arrived in Shanghai in 1936, where he was arrested and imprisoned by the U.S. Army, which suspected him of being a double agent. His U.S. citizenship was rescinded and he was forbidden to return to the United States.

In a surprise move, Errol then intervened with Eleanor Roosevelt to help Erben. She’d met Errol in Miami in the spring of 1940 when both of them were raising money for the March of Dimes. Errol was also a friend of her son, Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr., who used to go fox hunting with him in the wilds of Virginia.

Errol appealed to her concern for the underdog, and claimed that Erben was only appearing to be a Nazi under a threat from Berlin of killing all the members of the family he’d left behind in Germany if he didn’t cooperate. Eleanor believed Errol and intervened in the case. Back in Washington she called J. Edgar and demanded that surveillance of Erben and Errol be suspended, and that Erben retain his U.S. citizenship.

J. Edgar also learned that Errol had written a five-page letter to William J. Donovan at the Office of Strategic Services, requesting an assignment as an informal and unofficial ambassador of good will to Ireland. He was, of course, immediately turned down. J. Edgar suspected he wanted to use that post to gather Allied secrets to turn over to his Nazi friend Erben.

In the midst of all his other troubles, Errol was indicted in Los Angeles on three counts of rape. The district attorney’s office filed a complaint on November 20, 1942, outlining the charges.

Although the case was not within the jurisdiction of J. Edgar and Clyde, they voyeuristically followed the trial, adding details about its progress to Errol’s FBI file.

Trouble began with Betty Hansen, a fifteen-year-old girl from Nebraska, claiming that Errol raped her. The second and third counts alleged that he also seduced Peggy Satterlee aboard his yacht, the *Sirocco*, on August 3, 1941. She was rather late in filing her complaint.

As events in the trial unfolded, it was discovered that she had worked as a dancer and showgirl at the Florence Gardens Burlesque House in Los Angeles, and she’d been an extra on Errol’s film, *They Died With Their Boots On*. Unlike Betty, whose case qualified as statutory rape of a minor, Peggy was twenty-one years old at the time of her grievance.

One of Errol’s most venomous attackers was Peggy’s father, William C. Satterlee, who accused Errol of “degrading American womanhood.” Clyde later learned that her father had previously been charged and convicted of molesting two underage girls himself.

During his trial on charges of rape, Errol had “to lay low,” as he put it. To supply him with young boys and young girls in the interim, he turned to his stuntman friend, Buster Wiles, who subsequently pimped for the star. When either a gay boy or a straight girl was asked if they’d like to go to bed with Errol, nearly all of them volunteered.

As J. Edgar learned, Errol during his trial became intrigued with a beautiful young girl, Nora Eddington, who ran the tobacconist’s kiosk at the Los Angeles County Courthouse. He demanded that Wiles find out if she were a virgin, although how the stuntman was expected to do that was never explained.

Errol finally concluded that she was a virgin, and may—just may—have been of legal age, which was eighteen. Hood, functioning as J. Edgar’s ears and eyes in Los Angeles, filed a report stating that Nora had “just turned sixteen.” This was not

accurate. She was nineteen.

Right in the middle of his trial, Errol was alleged to have raped Nora, at least according to an interview she gave Flynn's biographer, Charles Higham, in 1978. She charged that, "I was terrified. Suddenly, he was thrusting into me. It was like a knife. I felt I was being killed. I screamed and screamed."

The act may have been brutal, but as Nora confessed in her own autobiography *Errol and Me*, she agreed to go on a trip to Mexico with him. Unknown to the pair, J. Edgar's agents had them spied on throughout the entire trip.

Amazingly in the middle of World War II, J. Edgar spent time and money trying to entrap Errol for being in violation of the Mann Act, which prohibited a man from taking a woman across a state line for the purposes of seduction.

The rape trial and other rumors were seriously damaging Flynn's popularity in the public eye as a screen swashbuckler. Even though he seemed to be winning World War II single-handedly on the screen, his clout at the box office had begun to wane. It seemed to his fans that he was inclined to do almost anything for his sexual gratification.

After the investigation, the FBI filed a memorandum on Errol regarding his "moral turpitude and publicity lies."

"Errol Flynn, movie actor, was held for trial on two charges of rape, after hearings in Hollywood. One of the accusers said she was 15 when Flynn raped her on his yacht; the California law protects children by making the age of consent 18.

Behind the news: In 1937 Errol Flynn came to Madrid, saying he was bringing a large sum of money and the good will of the movie colony to the Loyalists in their fight against Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco, the Axis. This was a falsehood.

One night Flynn disappeared. Next morning he left for Valencia. The same day the entire American press front-paged a thrilling story of how Flynn was wounded in the frontline trenches of Madrid.

This story was a lie. Madrid censor, Constancia de la Mera, stated officially that Flynn had filed an innocent-looking telegram to Paris, that this telegram was the tipoff to release the news, and that the hoax was one of the most foul and callous actions ever admitted by a Hollywood actor to gain publicity at the expense of the fight against world fascism. Associated Press, United Press and other news agencies phoned their man in Valencia who confirmed fact Flynn was there without a scratch."



Dr. Hermann F. Erben , a close friend of Errol Flynn, was a dedicated member of the Nazi Party. In 1935, he embarked on a zoological expedition to study monkeys, with implications for their role in inoculations against leprosy.

Years later, in a description of his friend, Errol claimed that Erben revealed to him “in a humorous, bawdy, Rabelaisian, tough, rough way the difference between a man with no soul and a man with one, even though neither of us knew what a soul was.”

Erben was less charitable when describing Flynn to his Nazi associates: “Flynn is weak, easily bamboozled. His trust and friendship can be ruthlessly exploited.”

On February 6, 1943 the jury returned a verdict of not guilty on all three counts of rape. Leslie Still, the presiding Superior Court judge, claimed, “I have enjoyed this case.” Looking over at the jury, he added, “and I think you have, too.”

In November of 1942, back when Errol was still facing an indictment on rape charges, he became involved in an extortion case, which did involve the FBI. Richard Hood, the special FBI agent in Los Angeles, sent J. Edgar and Clyde the threatening letter. The writer of the letter threatened the life of Errol if he did not deliver ten-thousand dollars in cash to an address in San Bernardino. The money was to be delivered to “Jack Gelstrom” at a malt shop at 383 East Street.



Errol Flynn (right) met his second wife, **Nora Eddington (left)**, a teenager, when she sold him a glass of cold cider in the courthouse where he was being tried on rape charges.

Not having learned any lessons, he soon proceeded to rape Nora. As she confessed in her memoir, “I was impaled on the end of a sword. The pain was unbearable. ‘Oh, no, no!’ I shrieked.”

After the act, she lay there “sobbing and sobbing on a mess of bloodied sheets.”

The FBI trailed Errol during his romance and eventual marriage to Nora.

J. Edgar ordered his agents to place the malt shop under surveillance. The extortionist turned out to be Billy Seamster, age 13. He was photographed and fingerprinted, but the District Attorney’s office in Los Angeles decided not to prosecute Seamster because of his age.

On February 23, 1943, Errol received another extortion letter which claimed, “If you know what is good for you, you will pay attention to them girls you raped. I know you did it. You can’t fool me so you better fork over some dough.” Errol was told to answer the threat in the *Boston Daily Record* near Walter Winchell’s column. The extortionist had demanded \$15,000.

J. Edgar ordered his agents in Boston to place an ad as instructed. It read simply, “Received your letter, Mr. Flynn.”

Eventually the letter was traced to a man called Robert Street, who claimed he hated Errol. He was never prosecuted by the FBI. J. Edgar had bigger game to pursue, and that was Errol himself.

FBI agents in Mexico had failed to nail Errol on any white slavery charges concerning Nora Eddington.

In 1943, Errol would marry Nora, although he was never faithful to her. On that trip to Mexico with her he spent as much time with a very good-looking beach boy, Apollonio Díaz, as he did with Nora. Several times he left Nora back in their hotel room while he went sailing with the boy he’d affectionately nicknamed “Apollo.”

From Los Angeles, Errol had flown to Mexico with the notorious Freddie McEvoy, his “second best friend” after Dr. Erben. Hoping to throw the FBI off his trail, Errol had booked Nora on a separate flight.

Errol’s friendship with McEvoy dated from their boyhood days growing up in Australia. In Mexico, McEvoy vied with Porfirio Rubirosa for the title of “Playboy of the Western World,” both studs known for their legendary endowments.

As J. Edgar learned, McEvoy and Rubi were not competitors, but instead, actively pimped for each other. In fact, McEvoy in later life charged Rubi a fee of \$100,000 for him to arrange an introduction to Barbara Hutton, the Woolworth heiress whom Rubi eventually married. Before Rubi, Hutton had indiscreetly proclaimed to her friends that superstud McEvoy was the only man in the world who’d ever given her an orgasm.

Weighing 175 pounds, McEvoy bragged about his thick twelve-inch penis, referring to it as “one of the wonders of the world.” As dozens of wealthy women in both Europe and North America could testify, he did not exaggerate. He became history’s highest paid gigolo.

He’d also seduced such Hollywood stars as Mae West, Joan Crawford, tobacco heiress Doris Duke, Hedy Lamarr, Merle Oberon, Marlene Dietrich, and Judy Garland.

FBI agents in Mexico diverted their surveillance of Errol to concentrate on McEvoy, after a tipster revealed to J. Edgar that he was a Nazi collaborator.

An expert spy and master of intrigue and espionage, McEvoy had become involved with the Nazis in 1936 when he visited Berlin as captain of the British bobsled team.

On his second night in the Nazi capital, he was seen dining with Josef Goebbels himself. Somewhere along the way, he was recruited as a spy for the Nazis. Since he moved in exalted circles around the world, McEvoy was able to supply the

Nazis with valuable information.

Errol had made Mexico his weekend retreat, attending bullfights in Mexico City, going spear fishing in Acapulco, visiting the spa and “sin palaces” in Cuernavaca. Among the *gringo* celebrities, he was the best known of the Hollywood crowd, a familiar face to bordello owners, who rented out a bevy of handsome boys or beautiful girls. Errol preferred them underage.

As a sideline, McEvoy recruited about two dozen of the handsomest and most virile men in the world, with origins ranging from Senegal to Norway. He established stud services for rich women in various countries, pocketing fifty percent of the earnings of his male prostitutes. As such, he was said to have been the most successful pimp of the 20th century.

During some of his visits to Mexico, Errol was the guest of the American heiress, Beatrice Cartwright, who was confined to a wheelchair. McEvoy had agreed to marry this disabled woman for her money, with the stipulation that he could have other women on certain nights of the week.

He confided to Errol that, “Beatrice is the most sexually demanding partner I’ve ever had—night and day, the bitch can’t get enough deep dicking. And I’m a sexual athlete. I’ve got a foot of dick, as you well know, and even that is not enough to satisfy her.”

Other evenings with the McEvoyes were spent at the Mexico City mansion of the American-born Countess Dorothy di Frasso, who was a vivacious friend of everybody from Mussolini to gangster Bugsy Siegel. J. Edgar ordered that she remain under constant surveillance.

At one party at her home, McEvoy proclaimed, “I avoided the draft. There’s no way the British will get me to fight the Nazis.”

During the war, McEvoy shared a secret and very dangerous plan with Errol. The Nazis wanted his aid in setting up U-boat refueling bases off the Pacific coasts of Mexico and Central America.

Learning of this plot, an FBI agent went over J. Edgar’s head and reported this startling information to U.S. Naval Intelligence. When the F.B.I. director learned of this insubordination, he immediately fired the agent in Mexico City.

In Mexico City, McEvoy arranged for Errol to have a brief fling with the reigning *femme fatale*, Tara Marsh. J. Edgar’s agents unraveled the details. Marsh, a Nazi agent assigned to Mexico, claimed she’d been to bed with both Josef Goebbels and Hitler in Berlin. To Errol, she denied reports that the Führer was impotent but did confirm that he’d lost one testicle which was shot off during World War I.

McEvoy had also introduced Errol to the pleasures of Cuernavaca where he flew for secret visits. He stayed at the mansion of Harry Carstairs, a British homosexual and Nazi spy. With some accuracy, this heir to a bakery fortune billed himself as “the handsomest man in Cuernavaca.”

Installed in his mansion, Errol enjoyed all twelve of Carstairs’ “special employees,” a series of beautiful young boys from all over the world, from Germany to Brazil. The nude boys arranged themselves on chaises longues around Carstairs’ pool, and Errol made his choices.

Carstairs also took Errol to a club where he could watch women have sex with horses and large dogs.

After one of his wild weekends in Cuernavaca, Errol flew back to Warner Brothers to finish *Santa Fe Trail*. He was accompanied by his pimp, Johnny Meyer, who had, among other assignments, arranged a sexual liaison between him and the billionaire aviator Howard Hughes.



In October of 1950, **Errol Flynn** (left) and the notorious playboy and gigolo, **Freddie McEvoy** (right) are all dressed up for Errol's third and final marriage, this time to the beautiful actress Patrice Wymore.

McEvoy and Flynn went way back, and shared many dark secrets. None was as notorious as an event that occurred at the Helen Mar Hotel on Miami Beach early in 1950. McEvoy had arranged for a half-brother and his half-sister, both immigrants from Cuba, to spend the weekend at their hotel suite.

They had arrived in Miami with their mother, who shortly thereafter died. They were supporting themselves through prostitution, renting themselves out, usually as a team, to bisexuals. The girl was only fourteen, her half-brother, sixteen. The story has never been completely revealed, but McEvoy and Errol wanted to conduct some pseudo-scientific experiments to determine "if certain acts were better with a girl or a boy."

On the Monday that followed a weekend of debauchery, the girl was found dead in bed. A lot of money passed hands in the form of a bribe, but the investigating officers from the Miami Beach Police eventually declared that the girl had died of a heart attack. Errol paid for her funeral.

As part of the Good Neighbor Policy arranged by the U.S. government and Errol's P.R. staff, which included Meyer, Errol had been persuaded to embark on a trip that incorporated stopovers in twenty-one Latin American countries. It was understood that Meyer would accompany him on this trip. Major stopovers included Buenos Aires where Errol had an affair with the beautiful, elegant Evita Peron, a former prostitute. During his stopover in Rio de Janeiro, Meyer arranged for Errol to seduce some of that city's most beautiful boys and girls.

Dr. Erben had warned Errol to denounce Nazism at the same time that he was gathering secret information for them.

Charles Higham, in his controversial biography, *Errol Flynn, The Untold Story*, interviewed Meyer years later. The former pimp confirmed that Errol had met Gestapo agents in South America, especially in Buenos Aires, "at the highest level in the Nazi hierarchy."

As a visiting American film star, Errol was the guest of American ambassadors and was allowed to tour secret U.S. Army and Naval installations. He was even invited aboard American warships in the area. According to Meyer, Errol accumulated a great deal of secrets to turn over to Erben.

Back in the States, Erben once again confronted immigration authorities. J. Edgar had convinced them that Erben was a dangerous Nazi agent. Without the protective umbrella previously provided by Eleanor Roosevelt, he was deported from America for the final time.

To throw the FBI and other detractors off his trail, Errol gave interviews upon his return to California. The most famous of

these was published in *Photoplay* magazine.

"I did not go down there on a binge. They—Germany and Italy—are getting ready to fight the United States, not just the British Empire, and they want to fight us in our own back yard, South America. I know, I was there and saw the preparations, the 'tourists,' the Fifth Columnists, the huge radio programs, the saboteurs. I fought them every way I could. That's why I went! They gave me quite a write-up. According to Virgie [Virginio Gayda, editor of GIORNAL D'ITALIA and an ardent supporter of Mussolini] I'm the tops, the deadliest, dirtiest, conniving son of a macaw that the unspeakably cunning British Propaganda Minister has ever sent out!"

J. Edgar and Clyde read that article with complete skepticism. "He's not fooling us," J. Edgar told his agents. "We're on to him. But he's a tricky one. I hear he's even working for British intelligence, a true double agent."

In spite of wasting what was a vast fortune of government money, J. Edgar and Clyde never nailed any concrete evidence on Errol that confirmed his role as a Nazi spy. A British patriot and fellow actor, David Niven, who once shared living quarters with Errol, denied that he was an actual spy for the Nazis.

"This pro-German crowd simply entertained Errol with the best sex he'd ever had," Niven said. "If the party was good enough, Errol didn't give a damn whether the party was thrown by a friend of Roosevelt or Churchill or even Mussolini and Hitler. He once told me, 'There isn't that much difference between a Nazi pussy and an Allied pussy, especially when the lights are out.'"

Shortly after Flynn's death in 1959, J. Edgar and Clyde had answered what they viewed as two very important questions about the former swash-buckler.

At the tender age of twelve years, he'd lost his virginity to the family maid. They also discovered the secret of Errol's sexual prowess: Before intercourse, he smeared a film of cocaine on the tip of his penis.

J. Edgar and Clyde never trusted Marlene Dietrich, whom they suspected of being a double agent during World War II, secretly spying for the Nazis while entertaining American troops in the trenches of Western Europe.

The FBI file on her dated from May 17, 1924, years before she starred in *The Blue Angel*, a film that catapulted her into international stardom in 1930.

In the *Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche* in Berlin, she and Rudolph Sieber ("Rudi") were wed. During her early years in Berlin, while married, as always, to Rudi, Marlene entered into a number of affairs with both women and men, most notably Greta Garbo during the Swede's years in Berlin.

J. Edgar learned that at the time of her marriage, Dietrich occupied the same apartment building as Leni Riefenstahl, the German film star who later became Adolf Hitler's favorite filmmaker for works that included her masterpiece, *Triumph of the Will*. Marlene was seen coming and going from the Riefenstahl apartment at 54 Kaiserallee in Berlin.

Through introductions by Riefenstahl, Marlene was seen at various parties which were attended by the hierarchy of the fast-rising Nazi party. Among others, she was introduced to Josef Goebbels and Hermann Göring.

Even before she left Berlin for Hollywood, Goebbels approached her, telling her she should stay in Germany where she could become "Queen of UFA," the German film studio. She was said to have spat in his face, but that could have been a later invention of her biographers.

On hearing these stories about how Marlene turned her back on Hitler and the Nazis, J. Edgar was suspicious. "It could be just an act to throw us off her trail," he told Clyde and his agents. "A clever espionage trick on the part of the Nazis."

As reports came in from the Hollywood of the 1930s, J. Edgar came to view Marlene as "an international slut. She'll sleep with anybody, man or woman, from Gary Cooper to Tallulah Bankhead."

Although her own sexual record was one of the most tarnished in Hollywood, Joan Crawford took delight in feeding J. Edgar and Clyde the latest scandals revolving around Marlene. Crawford was confident that if she ever got involved in a major scandal that threatened her own career, J. Edgar and Clyde would rescue her.

While making *Knight Without Armour* (1937) in London, Marlene was approached by the German actress, Mady Soyka, who delivered a message from Goebbels. He'd orchestrated vicious attacks on Marlene within the German press, accusing her of being a traitor for her allegiance to the United States. However, Soyka claimed that he'd call off his attack dogs if she'd agree to return to Berlin and make just one film in one month. He offered her fifty thousand British pounds if she'd agree. According to reports reaching J. Edgar, Marlene rejected Goebbels' offer once again.

In spite of this latest evidence, J. Edgar remained stubborn in his belief that "the Kraut is a committed Nazi. All these offers and rejections are staged just for our benefit to conceal what the lesbian bitch is really up to."

Back in Hollywood during that winter of 1937, Hitler was said to have presented Marlene with an elaborate piece of jewelry at Christmas, which was delivered by an official of the German Embassy in Los Angeles. The gift included a letter from Goebbels, urging her to sign with UFA and return to Berlin.

Even though at the time she had been labeled “box office poison” in the United States, Marlene turned down the offer one final time. This latest rejection was widely publicized and endeared Marlene to her still-loyal fans. But it didn’t impress J. Edgar. “She’s an actress. It’s just a ruse to throw us off her trail.”

Just weeks before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, J. Edgar and Clyde supplied secret information to the House Un-American Activities Committee, whose members were in Hollywood looking for violations of the U.S. Neutrality Act. They were trying to ferret out Fascists secretly working for the Nazi cause.

J. Edgar privately informed committee members that the name of Marlene Dietrich should be added to the list. As evidence, he cited that she’d made the German actor Rudolf Forster the godfather of her daughter, Maria Sieber. J. Edgar had learned that in a moment of artistic pique, he’d walked out on rehearsals for a production on Broadway, sending Otto Preminger a note which read, “I’m going home to rejoin Adolf.”

“Even if it’s only guilt by association, Frau Dietrich knows just too many Nazis,” J. Edgar told the investigating committee.

In 1942, at the beginning of America’s entry into World War II, Marlene asked the Office of Strategic Services if she could entertain U.S. troops in Europe. Behind her back, J. Edgar and Clyde filed a report with the OSS that accused her of being a security risk, defining her as a suspected spy for the Third Reich. OSS officials ignored the report and granted her permission to entertain the troops. She was also allowed to sing American songs with German lyrics on shortwave broadcasts to Nazi soldiers.

J. Edgar suspected even those songs, claiming that she was sending coded messages behind German lines. He was told by one of his German-speaking agents that the lyrics to “Taking a Chance on Love,” for example, assumed a completely different meaning in German.



Although it originated as a German-language song, American soldiers, including members of the 63rd Infantry Division in 1945 (*lower photo*) wanted **Marlene Dietrich** (*in both photos, above*) to sing *Lili Marlene*.

(Before she adopted it as her “theme,” the original German-language spelling of the song had been *Lili Marleen*.)

Dietrich starred in frequent radio broadcasts on the Armed Forces network. At one point, she shouted (in German) into the microphone: “Boys! Don’t sacrifice yourselves! The war is a shit! Hitler is an idiot!”

In Army hospitals and on the front lines, the entertainment of American troops became her passion. A legend was being born.

As one soldier recalled, “Marlene had no modesty. While we were showering, she would come right in with us, carrying her soap and towel, and shower with us. Every guy got a hard-on.”

Lt. Colonel Robert Armstrong was assigned the role of Marlene’s military escort in Italy and France, as those countries were respectively invaded by the Allies. He later reported that in Europe, Marlene was threatened by messages from Goebbels, who warned her that both her sister and her mother were citizens of the Third Reich. “I, of course, do not want any harm to come to them. But if you continue to entertain enemy troops of your Fatherland, I cannot guarantee their safety.”

As her biographer Charles Higham wrote: “Sometimes she would perform on rough wooden platforms set up out on the fields, with only the headlights of Jeeps to light her, or in rain under umbrellas or feeble little canvas canopies. She never had more than one suitcase for her makeup and her stage costumes. She wore GI uniforms: an Eisenhower jacket, regulation trousers, boots, and often a helmet or overseas cap. She liked being a soldier. One of the boys.”

J. Edgar was not impressed when he learned of this. “A very clever woman, this German *Frau*. She could have taught Mata Hari.”

Marlene insisted on going to the dangerous front lines to entertain the troops. In addition to numerous soldiers, which she allowed to seduce her, she also had affairs with two of the leading generals of WWII, George Patton and James Gavin.

Patton, whose men called him “Blood and Guts,” was a great admirer of Marlene’s. “They began an intense affair,” claimed Frank McCarthy, who later produced the film *Patton*. “He often summoned Dietrich to his headquarters late at night, ostensibly to inquire about her tour. He assigned her the password of ‘Legs.’”

Over pillow talk, she told him of her fears that she’d be captured by the Nazis. “I’m not afraid of dying, but they will shave off my hair and have horses drag me through the streets of Berlin.”

He gave her a pearl-handled revolver just like his own. “If that ever happens, shoot yourself. After all, you said you’re not afraid to die. Neither am I.”

J. Edgar and Clyde were horrified to learn that Marlene was sleeping with Patton. “What military secrets will he pass on to the Kraut?” J. Edgar asked.

Patton’s rival was the handsome, dashing General Gavin, one of the youngest commanders in the U.S. Army. He, too, had launched an affair with Marlene and had made her song, “Lili Marlene,” the anthem of the 82nd Airborne Infantry Division of the United States Army, a unit specializing in parachute landing operations. Over pillow talk at the Ritz Hotel in Paris, he shared secrets with her, including his knowledge of Operation Eclipse, in which Allied planes would storm Berlin with paratroopers. Plans for this operation were later abandoned.

Marlene even went to the Ardennes in Eastern France where she suffered frostbite. To her horror, she found herself entrapped with Allied troops during the Battle of the Bulge, the last great German offensive in the West. The Nazi general, Sepp Dietrich (no relation), almost captured her.

In a real-life development which resembled a theme from one of her films, her “gallant cavalier,” General Gavin, flew to her rescue, aiming one of his “Flying Fortresses” into the war-torn area and landing virtually at her feet. Bundling her into a Jeep, he broke through enemy lines and drove on with her to Paris, with a few stopovers for lovemaking along the way.

At war’s end, in spite of his expensive and time-consuming investigations and probes, and in spite of his many spies reporting on Marlene’s activities, J. Edgar was terribly disappointed to hear she was staying at the Ritz Hotel in a liberated Paris with Gavin. He chastised Clyde and his agents, “We didn’t dig deep enough. If we’d had better informants, we could have caught her red-handed. Let’s keep after her. Find out what that whoring Kraut is up to after the war. We’ll have her trailed when she returns to Berlin for that reunion with her Nazi mother.”

In early 1942, some of the darkest days for the United States in World War II, neighbors near the Brooklyn Naval Yard became suspicious of uniformed sailors arriving at all hours of the day and night at a private townhouse. Well-dressed men in three-piece suits, often looking like Wall Street bankers, came and went like a steady flood.



Frau Dietrich liked American generals fighting World War II in Europe, especially old “Blood and Guts,” **George Patton** (left) or the young, movie star handsome **James Gavin** (right), whom she found more passionate and even more impressively endowed.

As she recalled, “I advanced with General Patton and the Third Army toward my homeland of Germany. I remember it well—I washed my undies in snow melted in my helmet and survived in sleeping bags in ruins. With the GIs, I dined on K-rations. There were rats and even more crabs.”

“My darling James Gavin should have been my leading man in the movies. What a dashing paratrooper. As a man, he would have been Hitler’s ideal. I fell in love with him in a Russian bar in Paris listening to gypsy music.”

General Gavin was portrayed by Robert Ryan in *The Longest Day*, and by Ryan O’Neal in *A Bridge Too Far*. He accepted John F. Kennedy’s offer of becoming U.S. Ambassador to France in 1961, but, at the age of 70, in 1976, he turned down Jimmy Carter’s offer to become director of the CIA.

Wondering what was going on, Sally Bethune put through a call to the FBI. She managed to get as far up in the chain as Louis Nichols, who told her he would investigate.

When Nichols reported to Clyde and J. Edgar, he found out they were already familiar with what was operating as a male bordello by a “madam,” Gustave Beekman, who over a course of fourteen months had hired as many as fifty sailors, each agreeing to become a male prostitute, for a fee of fifty dollars per client. Of course, Beekman insisted on sampling the sailors in bed himself to make sure they were well built and well endowed and could sexually satisfy a client.

Weeks before the scandal broke, Guy Hotell had gladly volunteered to become a spy for the FBI within the brothel.

Originally, J. Edgar had sent Guy to the whorehouse to gather incriminating information on Sumner Welles and other highly placed government officials, who were rumored to be steady patrons of Beekman and his hotto-trot sailors.

At that point, U.S. Naval Intelligence seemed unaware of even the existence of the bordello. Guy was only too eager to sample the sailors, especially since the FBI picked up the tab. He also had become aware that the brothel had been infiltrated by at least three Nazi spies, who gave each of the sailors a hundred dollar bill and plied them with liquor. Perhaps unknowingly, the Navy men provided these German spies with far more information than they meant to, especially classified data about the Brooklyn Naval Yard.

Long before the FBI wanted it known, this “house of degradation” was exposed in an article in the May 7, 1942 edition of *The New York Post*. The modesty of the press in those days dared not refer to it as a male bordello, since most Americans had never heard of such a thing, assuming that all brothels were by definition staffed exclusively with female prostitutes. The story was considered “unfit to print by most papers,” including *The New York Times*. When the story finally made its way into the pages of *The New York Times*, that paper referred to the bordello as a “resort.”

J. Edgar’s friend, the columnist Walter Winchell, was more explicit, referring to it as “Brooklyn’s spy nest, also known as the swastika swish-ery.”

Many of the sailors who hired themselves out were rounded up. As Guy had reported to J. Edgar, Saturday, when Beekman auctioned off the young men on a small stage, was the bordello’s most popular night. A curtain was pulled back, and each Navy man presented himself with an erection. Bidding was the highest on those nights, and some of the sailors were sold five or six times before the dawn.

When questioned by Naval Intelligence, the sailors usually denied that they were selling their bodies. Most of them said

they had never participated in any homosexual acts. One sailor claimed he sold himself to raise money for dates with Brooklyn women. Another Navy man from Missouri claimed he thought the building was a branch of the U.S.O. One man maintained he only accepted clients who were Catholic priests because his parents had raised him to obey "Holy Fathers."

Three foreign agents were arrested, and somehow they just disappeared from the radar screen. Perhaps the U.S. government executed them.

What turned the bordello into a major national news event was the charge that Senator David I. Walsh, the 69-year-old chairman of the Naval Affairs Committee, was one of the more frequent patrons, at one time calling for a total of five young men to visit his room in a single evening. According to testimony, he was also seen talking to the Nazi agents already arrested.

Walsh was one of the most famous men in Massachusetts, having been its 46th governor (1914-1916). He later was elected to the U.S. Senate (1919-1947). He was the leading isolationist in the U.S. Senate, opposing Roosevelt's Lend Lease to Britain up until the attack on Pearl Harbor. As the first Irish Catholic senator from Massachusetts, he paved the way for John F. Kennedy in later years.

At the 1940 Democratic National convention, Walsh supported James Farley for president rather than FDR. His stand against Britain and against FDR assured him a host of enemies who wanted to see him destroyed.

Under intense questioning from Naval Intelligence, Beekman admitted that "Senator X" was indeed Walsh. The Massachusetts senator charged that he had been framed, and denounced the press, claiming that the charges were a "diabolical lie" and that his political enemies were trying to destroy him.

J. Edgar was asked for a full report. He was aware that Walsh knew that one of his top agents, Guy himself, was also a patron of the bordello. At no point did J. Edgar want it known that the FBI had planted a spy in the bordello to entrap politicians.

Known to J. Edgar and Clyde, but not reported in the press, were some famous non-political clients who also patronized "Beekman's Boys." Chief among them was Virgil Thomson, the celebrated composer whose work was described by critic Peggy Glanville-Hicks as "an Olympian blend of humanity and detachment." Although he was rounded up that fateful night near the Brooklyn Naval Yard, he was later released. Under interrogation, Beekman revealed that some of his movie star clients included Tyrone Power and Cary Grant. According to testimony, the socially prominent stage, film, and radio personality, Monty Woolley, whenever he was in New York, spent every night at the bordello, and another composer, Cole Porter, frequented the house as well.

No report was made of Clyde's private meeting with Beekman after he'd been jailed. However, he must have threatened him in some diabolical way because after their heated confab, Beekman issued a statement. "I was mistaken. I must have confused Senator Walsh with another man, known to me as 'Doc' and residing in Connecticut."

Beekman claimed that the client thought to be Walsh was a different visitor altogether. "Although portly like the Senator and roughly the same age, he resembled him no more than I look like Haile Selassie."

Beekman was sentenced to twenty years for sodomy, and remained in prison until 1963.

When FDR was confronted with the information about his political enemy Walsh, he told J. Edgar that he had long known that the Senator was a homosexual but never wanted to use the charge against him. FDR also told Alben W. Barkley, the Senate's majority leader, that Walsh was indeed a homosexual. But for the "sake of the party," the President suggested that Barkley, who later became Harry S Truman's vice president, denounce the charges as false.



David L. Walsh, the former governor of Massachusetts and later its senator, was trapped at the center of one of the most politically compromising sex scandals of the 1940s. It was so embarrassing that newspapers, even after they learned the facts, judged it as too hot to print.

Walsh, chairman at the time of the Senate's Naval Affairs committee, was one of the busiest patrons at a house of male prostitution that flourished during World War II near the Brooklyn Naval Yard. Every Saturday night, it "auctioned" young, well-endowed sailors to wealthy male patrons for a standard fee of \$50, plus liquor and gratuities.

J. Edgar was well aware of what was going on within the bordello, which was patronized by Nazi spies eager to extract military secrets from its associates.

On May 20, 1942, the FBI issued a false report to Senator Alben W. Barkley, the Senate Majority Leader, denying that Walsh had ever been a patron of the male whorehouse.

The establishment's "madam," however, Gustave Beekman, was sent "up the river" for a long prison sentence.

Before the Senate, Barkley refused to insert the investigative report on Walsh into the Congressional Record "because it contains disgusting and unprintable things. The details are too loathsome to mention on the Senate floor or in any group of ladies and gentlemen." For all official purposes, Walsh was cleared. The FBI found no evidence he passed on any information to Nazi spies, even though he had patronized the sailor prostitutes, in spite of his denials.

Through Clyde J. Edgar pretended to conduct an investigation, later issuing a report that the newspapers had been wrong. He even attacked *The New York Post* for its "irresponsibility." His report cleared Walsh, even though dozens of witnesses knew he was guilty. J. Edgar officially stated that Walsh had an "unsullied reputation." The grateful New Englander wrote J. Edgar a thank you letter and continued in his post as senator.

Except for those in New York City, the rest of the American newspapers avoided the story, fearing libel or "not wanting to print dirt."

After Barkley's speech, Bennett Clark, senator from Missouri, demanded an investigation of "the old hussy who runs the *Post*." He was referring to 38-year-old Dorothy Schiff Backer.

To complicate matters, Schiff was said to have had an affair with FDR after ascertaining from his doctor that he was capable of having an erection.

In retaliation, the publisher demanded that J. Edgar file a complete report on the case and that it be made public. It never was.

The New York Post finally concluded, “The known facts made only one thing indisputable: Either a serious scandal was being hushed up or a really diabolical libel had been perpetrated.”

In 1946, in Massachusetts, Walsh was defeated in his bid for re-election by Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., a Republican and an enemy of the Kennedy clan. Walsh remained a bachelor until his death on June 11, 1947. If he’d been re-elected, death would have claimed him before he served out his term.

In the future, another more famous senator from Massachusetts would be intensely investigated by J. Edgar and Clyde.

One foggy early morning on June 13, 1942, four Nazi saboteurs emerged from a German U-boat, *Innsbruck*, at the shore near Amagansett, Long Island. They were in the vanguard of a massive operation planned for the arrival of Nazi submarines on the East Coast of the U.S. Each of the saboteurs had been ordered to instigate a “Reign of Terror” through bombings and sabotage, creating panic on the American homefront.

From the shore, John C. Cullen, a twenty-year-old Coast Guard seaman second class, was trying to see through the dense pea-soup fog that night. He spotted the glistening of a submarine. Although unarmed, he bravely approached the party of four men as they stood on the beach.

Their leader, George Dasch, spoke perfect English and lied to Cullen, telling him that they were fishermen whose boat had run aground. Almost immediately, Cullen suspected they were Nazi spies, but didn’t want to alarm them, fearing he’d be killed. He suggested they return with him to a nearby Coast Guard station and wait until dawn broke.

One of the men, Heinrich Heinck, accidentally said something in German but was quickly silenced by Dasch. Actually, he’d told Dasch to kill Cullen.

Ignoring the request, Dasch offered Cullen \$260 in American twenty-dollar bills, “If you’ll forget you ever saw us.”

Pretending to go along with that, Cullen appeared eager to accept the bribe. “I’ve never seen any of you before. I know nothing.” Cullen quickly left his lookout post, fearing he’d be shot in the back, but Dasch let him go free. Cullen immediately hurried to the Coast Guard station, where his superiors did not believe his story.

“We don’t want to make fools of ourselves,” one of the Coast Guard officers said. “They’ll give us hell.”

When daylight came, Cullen, along with two officers of the Coast Guard, went to the landing site, where they found evidence that something had been recently buried.

After digging, the guardsmen found a hidden cache of blasting caps, incendiary devices, fuses, timers, and explosives, along with some Nazi uniforms, even German cigarettes and French brandy.

By six that morning the four saboteurs had taken the Amagansett train heading for New York City. They agreed to split into pairs. Dasch, thirty-nine years old, chose Ernst Peter Burger, thirty-five years old. Both of them had lived for a while in the United States. The other two German agents, Heinck and Robert Quirin, went their separate way.

In Manhattan, Dasch and Burger checked into the Hotel Martinique at Broadway and Thirty Second Street, where they enjoyed a sumptuous lunch, having arrived with \$84,000 their Nazi bosses at Abwehr had given them.

Back in their hotel room, Dasch told Burger that he had no intention of carrying through with the sabotage and that he planned to call the FBI and turn himself in. He urged Burger to do the same. But his partner had another plan. He wanted to take the horde of cash and disappear into the American heartland. When he heard that, Dasch took control of the money.

Dasch later claimed that if Burger had not gone along with his plan, he was going to shove him out the window, where he’d plunge eight floors to his death.

Within the hour, Dasch called the New York branch office of the FBI and revealed the entire German plan and details associated with the arrival of the saboteurs. He was ready to turn himself in, along with Burger. “I just got off the phone with Marie Antoinette,” the FBI agent said before slamming down the receiver. He later explained himself by saying, “You wouldn’t believe how many crank calls I get.”

Leaving Burger behind, Dasch flew to Washington and checked into the Mayflower Hotel. With a briefcase stuffed with cash, he headed for the FBI headquarters where he requested a private meeting with J. Edgar himself. He was turned down, but shown into the office of D.M. Ladd (“Mickey”). Ladd didn’t believe his story and called Duane L. Traynor into his office. Head of the Sabotage Division of the FBI, Traynor was far more receptive.

The FBI had been notified by the Coast Guard at noon on June 13 about the arrival of the saboteurs. Precious hours had been wasted. But Cullen had told Traynor that the Nazi leader had a white streak in his hair. Traynor noticed that same white streak in Dasch’s hair.

Right in front of Ladd, Dasch opened his briefcase which at that point contained \$80,000 in cash, the rest of the money left at his hotel. In a dramatic gesture, Dasch tossed the bills across Ladd’s desk. Suddenly, Dasch was believed.

When the call about Dasch came in to J. Edgar’s office, he was studying a report from one of his secret agents in Berlin. It revealed that tap-dancing Eleanor Powell was Adolf Hitler’s favorite movie star. The agent wrote, “Old *Schickelgruber* never misses one of Powell’s films and orders the Gestapo to smuggle her movies in through neutral Zurich. *Broadway Melody of 1940* is the favorite of *der Führer*.”

On learning the secret data provided by Dasch, J. Edgar rushed over to the office of his boss, Attorney General Francis Biddle. Both men agreed there should be a news blackout until all the Nazi saboteurs were in custody.

Biddle later recalled, “Hoover was practically foaming at the mouth. He was just imagining what a hero he was going to be to every red-blooded American boy reading G-Man comics.”

For eight brutal days, Dasch underwent a terrible ordeal of interrogation. First, J. Edgar’s G-Men wanted to find out who he was.

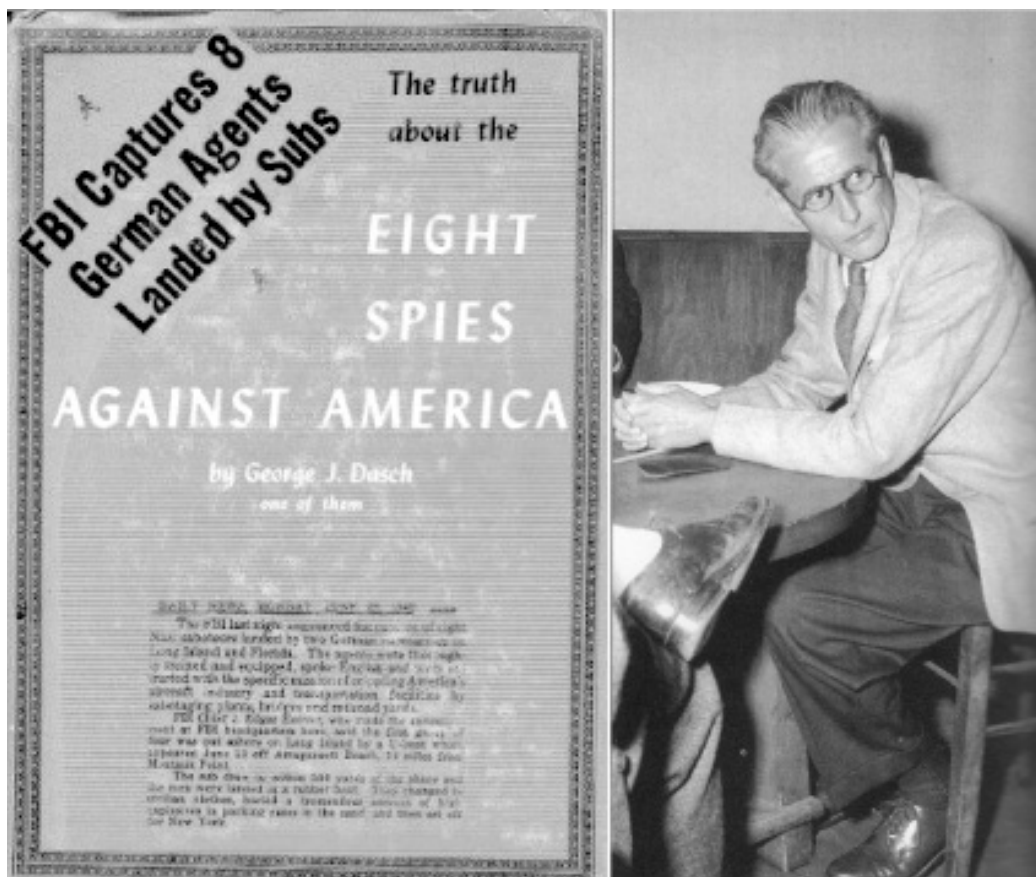
Born in Speyer, Germany, Dasch had entered the United States illegally in 1923 as a stowaway aboard a German ship. He later enlisted as a private in the U.S. Army Air Force. Receiving an honorable discharge, he worked as a waiter in New York City, where, in 1930, he had married an American citizen, Rose Marie Guille. He became a naturalized citizen in 1933. Disheartened when his marriage failed, he returned to the Fatherland in 1941 when Germany was at war with Britain.

For the first few months, he was impressed with the rising Nazi power, and he trained in a school for espionage on an estate outside Berlin. But before he was assigned the sabotage work on the American East Coast, he had already soured on Hitler and the Nazis. He planned to use the submarine leaving from western France as a vehicle for his permanent return to the United States.

During his long drilling by the FBI, Dasch revealed the targets of sabotage for his group. They included the Aluminum Corporation of America, the Ohio River Locks, and the hydroelectric plant at Niagara Falls. He’d also been ordered to bomb Jewish-owned department stores and places of business, as well as synagogues.

He provided a valuable insight into Abwehr’s school for sabotage in Berlin, and gave the FBI German secret codes.

He startled agents by revealing that Germany had developed a submarine that could go six-hundred feet deeper than competing American vessels, which put them out of reach of U.S. depth charges. This information was vital, as the “Wolf Packs,” as the German subs were called, had been taking a staggering toll on Allied shipping across the Atlantic.



A Nazi espionage agent, **George Dasch**, was the centerpiece of what J. Edgar defined as “the most sensational espionage case of World War II to occur on American shores.”

He finally got to tell his side of the story in 1959, when he wrote a memoir, *Eight Spies Against America*, with an accurate report—not J. Edgar’s version—of what really happened, but no one was listening. The book did not sell well, and it was virtually ignored by the press. Yet the episode that inspired it led to some of the most intriguing chain of events on the U.S. homefront during World War II.

The young German, with three others, piloted a Nazi submarine to the shores of Long Island, one of a string of such incursions planned as instruments to incite terror. The Nazi’s plan involved the sabotage of strategic targets that would sow chaos across America—first on the East Coast, then later in California.

Although J. Edgar suppressed the true story, lying about it even to the U.S. president, Dasch had voluntarily turned himself in to the FBI, its agents not at first believing him.

He should have been hailed as a U.S. hero, but after his betrayal by J. Edgar, he drew a long prison sentence instead. All but one of his comrades were executed.

Dasch also revealed that the Nazis planned to send a U-boat filled with saboteurs to some point along the East Coast every six weeks, not only to destroy facilities but as a means of creating havoc throughout America. One plan involved the bombing of Grand Central Station in Manhattan during rush hour.

He also informed them that a second submarine had previously landed at Ponte Vedra Beach near Jacksonville, Florida. J. Edgar ordered his agents into action, and these four potential saboteurs were eventually tracked down and arrested in New York and Chicago. They were Edward J. Kerling, Werner Thiel, Hermann Neubauer, and Herbert Haupt.

Dasch also told the FBI where they could arrest Burger, and he led them to the other two saboteurs who'd landed with him on Long Island. Consequently, the FBI rounded up Quirin and Heinck.

J. Edgar was eager to release the news to the papers. First, he informed FDR, but deliberately did not mention that Dasch had voluntarily turned himself in, an act which had led to all the arrests. J. Edgar suggested that his agents had discovered the plot when they found butts of German cigarettes in ashtrays on that Long Island train to Manhattan.

The next morning, headlines blared—FBI CAPTURES 8 GERMAN AGENTS LANDED IN SUBS. Details were lacking as to how the Bureau did that, but J. Edgar's prestige rose to the top of the popularity polls.

The suggestion remained that the FBI had infiltrated not only the Gestapo but also the German High Command. One reporter on Long Island falsely claimed that J. Edgar himself was on the beach watching as the Nazi submarine moved in toward the Long Island shore.

U.S. Army Intelligence and the Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, were each furious with J. Edgar for prematurely breaking the story. They'd received reports from American spies in Germany that more U-boats with saboteurs would be arriving on the East Coast within six weeks, and the Army wanted to be ready to intercept them.

"Hoover wanted those headlines," Stimson charged. "Whatever he thinks will bring him glory. He always exaggerates or even lies about his role in everything he does or doesn't do."

In front of a military tribunal composed only of generals, Biddle presented the case for the prosecution with information handed to him by J. Edgar, who sat at his side. There was no defense.

Before the trial, J. Edgar met privately with Dasch, telling him the upcoming legal proceedings would be a sham. He promised him that he'd be tried and convicted, but that he would be set free six days later and awarded a secret presidential pardon. J. Edgar didn't want Nazi agents to know he'd exposed their plot of terror against the United States.

THE FACES OF TERRORISM

circa 1942



Dasch



Burger



Haupt



Heinck



Kerling



Quirin



Theil



Neubauer

Former FBI agent William W. Turner, wrote in his book, *Hoover's FBI*, "George Dasch is probably an authentic American war hero, responsible for saving many lives. But fate made him a threat to the FBI's public image."

J. Edgar wanted to take all the credit for rounding up these Nazi terrorists, which meant he had to suppress the fact that Dasch never had any intention of blowing up any facilities in America, preferring to reveal many of the Nazi plans and to defect to the U.S. instead.

J. Edgar promised Dasch that he'd be released after a face-saving mock trial, but reneged on the deal, and was instrumental in getting Dasch sentenced to thirty years in prison. His collaborator, Burger, was given a life sentence, and the other Nazi saboteurs were executed.

When he was finally freed, Dasch was deported back to Germany, where he was viewed as a traitor.

As Dasch later confessed in his memoirs, he was stunned when he heard the sentencing and Biddle told him there would be no pardon. Dasch received a sentence of thirty years in prison, and Burger drew a life sentence. On August 8, 1942, the other six Nazis were executed in the electric chair in a Washington, DC prison.

It was not until 1959 that Dasch told his side of the story when he wrote *Eight Spies Against America*. His memoir sold very few copies and was ignored by the press.

After his trial, Dasch came face to face with J. Edgar and pleaded with him. He shouted, "Mr. Hoover, aren't you really ashamed of yourself?"

In his memoir, he wrote: "An FBI agent walking nearby struck me on the face, sending me sprawling on to the floor. One of the Army guards helped me to my feet. Through the tears brought on by the hot sting of the agent's hand, I saw the chief disappear down the hall, seemingly surrounded by an impregnable wall of justice and strength."

In response to Dasch's charges, J. Edgar later maintained that he defected only at the last moment "when he got cold feet" and feared he'd be arrested and put to death. That, of course, was not true.

Actually, it was later revealed that Dasch found Hitler "a disgustingly funny little man with a horrible mustache." Trapped in Germany when that country declared war on the United States, he was forced into the espionage act because he spoke excellent English and knew the East Coast of the United States. He'd been ordered to kill any witnesses to their landing, but

allowed the young Coast Guardsmen who sighted him that fateful early morning to go free.

In 1948, when Harry Truman learned the full details of the case, he pardoned both Dasch and Burger but ordered them deported at once to the American Zone of a then-occupied Germany, where they were viewed as traitors. Alone and dejected, and living in poverty, Dasch died in Germany in 1991, a forgotten figure but still a key player in World War II.

Former FBI agent William W. Turner claimed, “He is most probably an American war hero, responsible for saving many lives. But fate had made him a threat to the FBI’s public image.”

After the executions, Louis Nichols, J. Edgar’s faithful sycophant, began a campaign to have the FBI director granted a Congressional Medal of Honor. That didn’t happen, to J. Edgar’s disappointment, as he was set to celebrate his twenty-fifth anniversary with the Department of Justice.

In the wake of the arrests and executions, the Nazis felt that the American coastline was far better guarded than reports had it. On November 29, 1944, two more Nazi spies landed by U-boat at Point Hancock, Maine, but they were quickly spotted and arrested, paying the ultimate penalty.

Despite the efforts of J. Edgar and Clyde, they failed to suppress the story of Dasch’s role in rounding up the elite saboteurs. At war’s end, during the autumn of 1945, reporter John Terrell, writing for *Newsweek*, asked to read the file on the saboteurs. In a private meeting with Tom Clark, whom Truman had appointed Attorney General, the Justice Department’s data was made available to him. Hearing of its imminent publication, J. Edgar called Clark, pleading with him to suppress the article. It was too late. The article was on the press.

Working frantically with Nichols throughout the night, the FBI issued a press release, putting out their own version, revealing what future President Richard Nixon would call “a limited hangout.”

In Nichols’s press release, he downplayed Dasch’s role and omitted the revelation that the FBI wasted valuable time by not believing his testimony at first.

J. Edgar claimed the case was “the most sensational espionage case of World War II” to occur on the homefront.

In later years, J. Edgar said, “Clyde Tolson and I, working around the clock, prevented a Nazi campaign of massive sabotage where secret agents would arrive in U-boats, and, working arm in arm with homefront secret spies, would virtually cripple the homefront. If we hadn’t stopped this, the infrastructure of the United States would have been seriously harmed. We might not have won the war until 1950.”

Japanese espionage represented only a fraction of what German spying was. But J. Edgar ordered his agents and its wartime censors to ferret out spies working for the empire of Japan.

One of the most notorious arrests involved Velvalee Dickinson, known in the press as the “Doll Woman.” She used her shop, which sold and repaired antique dolls, to send coded information on U.S. Naval forces to Japanese contacts in Buenos Aires via stenographic messages.

A California woman, she married Lee T. Dickinson, and socially, in San Francisco before the attack on Pearl Harbor, they attended gatherings in which Japanese Navy members and other high-ranking Nippon government officials were present. She was often seen coming and going from the Japanese Consulate in that city.

In 1937, she moved to New York City and opened the Dickinson Doll Shop, on Madison Avenue, catering to affluent collectors throughout America.

In February of 1942, a letter allegedly sent from a woman in Portland, Oregon, talked of a “wonderful doll hospital” and noted that “three Old English dolls” were being repaired. There were also references to “fish nets” and “balloons.” Cryptographers determined that the “dolls” referred to three warships, and that the “doll hospital” was actually a West Coast-based shipyard where repairs were being made. Balloons and fishing nets were references to coastal defenses along the West Coast of the United States.

More letters were intercepted after being sent to Buenos Aires from fake addresses in the United States. A reference to one doll, “Mr. Shaw,” was actually data associated with the USS *Shaw*, which had been damaged in Pearl Harbor.

The FBI determined that these letters were being sent by Dickinson. It was discovered that before the war, she had been a friend of Ichiro Yokoyama, the Japanese Naval attaché in Washington.

Agents arrested Dickinson in January of 1944 where they discovered in her safe thousands of dollars which were traced to Japan. Tried and convicted, she was sentenced in August of 1944 to ten years in prison. However, she was released in the spring of 1951 and faded into the dustbin of history. She was rumored to have died around 1980 long after she became a footnote in WWII history as the notorious “Doll Woman.”

On the surface at least, the personal relationship between J. Edgar and Clyde seemed to travel down a smooth road. But there were a lot of pot-holes along that rocky highway. Like all couples, the two G-Men had their jealous temper fits, and, on rare occasions, engaged in violent confrontations.



J. Edgar ordered most of his agents to focus on Nazi espionage within the U.S. during World War II. But the FBI was also sensitive to Japanese spying, which was much less pronounced.

One of the major spies caught was California-born **Velvalee Dickenson** (*left and center photos, above*) who operated a shop for antique dolls (*one of which is depicted on right, above*) on Madison Avenue in New York City.

She sent coded messages to the Japanese through a contact in Buenos Aires. If she claimed she was working on a doll known as “Mr. Shaw,” she was actually saying that the USS Shaw, which had been severely damaged at Pearl Harbor, was being made seaworthy once again.

One of their most notorious incidents occurred in the waning months of World War II, when they flew to Los Angeles for a two-week vacation. They were house guests of their dear friend, Dorothy Lamour, and her husband, William Ross Howard III.

After a weekend the four of them spent together, Dorothy and her husband had to fly to San Francisco, leaving their house to J. Edgar and Clyde, whom Dorothy privately referred to as “The Hoovers.”

Clyde later told Guy Hotell an amazing story that happened while they vacationed at the Howard household. Clyde discovered a side to J. Edgar’s makeup that he’d never experienced before after returning from a trip into town for supplies.

He claimed to Guy that when he returned from shopping, he entered the darkened living room. “A woman was sitting on the sofa smoking a cigarette. At first I thought Dorothy had come back early from San Francisco. When I switched on the light, I was shocked. It was Eddie in full drag. He’d assembled a tropical motif wardrobe from Dorothy’s closet. In drag, Eddie wasn’t exactly *The Jungle Princess*, but he was A-OK in my book.”

“Weren’t you disgusted?” Guy asked.

“Not at all,” Clyde said. “I realized our relationship had entered another dimension. As you well know, I’m only thirty-three and one-third percent homosexual. As a woman, Eddie brought out the beast in me. I’d always had this fantasy of ripping off a woman’s clothes and raping hell out of her. Now I had my chance, and I took full advantage.”

Some biographers dismiss stories of J. Edgar being a cross-dresser, claiming that these tales are but a myth, an urban legend. Yet sources as diverse as Ethel Merman, who often purchased garments for him, and gay attorney Roy Cohn, Joseph McCarthy’s chief aide, have told friends that these revelations are indeed true. Of course, they made these comments not for publication, and only after J. Edgar was safely in his grave.

Guy may have been the first person to spread the story of J. Edgar’s cross-dressing. In his preliminary talks with his would-be biographer, James Kirkwood, Guy revealed explicit details and numerous private parties where J. Edgar appeared in drag. Kirkwood believed him, “they were just too astonishing not to be true.”

In the words of author Thomas Doherty, “For American popular culture, the image of a *zaftig* FBI director as a Christine Jorgensen wanna-be was too delicious not to savor.”

The favorite pastime of J. Edgar and Clyde was attending horse races at Del Mar Racetrack, twenty miles north of San Diego, where they were guests of Bing Crosby. The singer had been one of the founding fathers of the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club in 1936 and remained its primary stockholder. Bing was easy to spot, always wearing a loud Hawaiian shirt and a jaunty yachting cap.

In a very odd instance of collusion among couples, J. Edgar and Clyde appeared there on several occasions with Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, who were divorcing each other and then not divorcing each other.

Clyde was jealous of Desi and didn’t want these encounters, but J. Edgar insisted. J. Edgar had known Desi since his abortion scandal with Ginger Rogers, and always seemed both mesmerized and amused by the entertainer whenever they encountered each other.

Unaware that J. Edgar coveted her husband and had compiled an investigative file on both Desi and herself, Lucille seemed

flattered to be seen in the company of such a powerful national figure as J. Edgar. “He likes me better than he does that Ethel Merman,” Lucille bragged to friends. Of course, at this point in her career, the red-haired actress could hardly know all the trouble that the FBI director would make for her in the future.

When Desi had to visit the men’s room, J. Edgar volunteered to go with him so he could use the key he’d been given to an executive washroom reserved for VIPs. “Bing Crosby never wanted guys like Clark Gable having to take a piss at a public urinal,” J. Edgar jokingly told Desi.

It can be assumed that it was Clyde, not Lucille, who cast a suspicious eye at J. Edgar toddling off to the men’s room with Desi. He long knew that his boss and lover had harbored a “crush” on Desi, whose picture remained a favorite frontal nude in his private album.



Guy Hotell claimed that actress **Dorothy Lamour** and **J. Edgar Hoover** were certainly friends, but he also knew that each trusted the other not to betray their deepest secrets. J. Edgar had long ago learned that Dorothy, in her early days, had for a brief time been one of Polly Adler’s hookers, a detail that was not revealed in Adler’s autobiography, *A House is Not a Home*.

Dorothy fully realized that J. Edgar was involved in a homosexual relationship and that he was a secret cross-dresser. “Chances were good,” Guy said, “that neither of them would be writing memoirs spilling the beans on each other.”

During World War II, only a sarong separated Lamour from the erotic dreams of many GIs fighting hand-to-hand with the Japanese on South Pacific beaches. Dorothy was known as “The Queen of all Robinson Crusoes.”

What happened next has been claimed by only one witness, the Hungarian-born film producer, Joe Pasternak. Apparently, J. Edgar stationed an FBI agent at the door to the executive washroom with instructions not to let anyone enter until “we’ve finished with our business.”

After a preliminary check, J. Edgar and Desi may have thought they were alone in the washroom, whose private booths were outfitted with floor-to-ceiling doors and walls. Unknown to them, Pasternak was in a toilet booth at the far end of the washroom.

Pasternak would later “dine out” on what he claimed took place that hot afternoon. “I couldn’t see them but I could hear them,” he told such friends as Marlene Dietrich and James Stewart. “From the sounds of it, Hoover was giving Arnaz a blow-job, and the Cuban was egging him on, in Spanish no less. I heard the men up until they washed up and headed out the door.”

Pasternak spread the story like a raging fire across Hollywood. “It was just too good to keep to myself.

In the years ahead, Pasternak saw J. Edgar several times at Del Mar. The producer claimed, “Hoover was a homosexual. Every year, he used to come down to the Del Mar racetrack with a different boy. He was caught in the bathroom by a newspaperman. They made sure he didn’t speak. Nobody dared say anything because Hoover was too powerful.”

These allegations appeared in the most revelatory book about J. Edgar ever published, Anthony’s Summers’ *Official and Confidential: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover*.

In that later quote, Pasternak is referring a period in the late 1950s and 60s when Clyde and J. Edgar, perhaps tiring of too steady a diet of each other, began to patronize hustlers, especially in Florida and California. But at the time of the Arnaz episode, Clyde was still intensely jealous of J. Edgar and wanted to protect his turf.



“Eddie was always jealous of **Lucille Ball** because she had that Cuban fireball, **Desi Arnaz**, and he didn’t,” or so claimed Guy Hotell.

Two of America’s most improbable couples, J. Edgar with Clyde and Lucy with Desi, often “double dated.” They were seen together in Los Angeles night clubs, at the race track, at the beach, and in restaurants together whenever Clyde and J. Edgar made vacation trips to California.

By 1950, the FBI had already accumulated a fairly large dossier on Lucille, tracing how she’d worked her way up from a starving hooker/model in New York to B-film stardom in Hollywood.

More revelations about her past were about to explode.

During the weekend of the Arnaz/Pasternak incident, J. Edgar and Clyde had been given a free suite at a deluxe hotel in Laguna Beach. The night manager, Bernard Gaal, later reported that when J. Edgar and Clyde returned from the Del Mar track that evening, “the fight of the century was heard. I was called to their floor by complaints coming to the front desk. The word ‘Arnaz’ was shouted into the hallway.”

No one knows exactly what happened inside the suite. But dishes were broken and furniture overturned. At one point, J. Hoover must have tossed something at Clyde. It struck him in the left eye and caused serious damage to his lip.

“When I buzzed the door and was let in,” Gaal said, “Hoover had disappeared into the bedroom. But Tolson came to the door. He was a bloody mess. He claimed he’d had an accident and needed to be taken to the nearest hospital. I agreed to drive him there.”

“At the hospital, the doctor treated his eye and put a patch over it,” Gaal said. “His lip required stitches. After he was released, he asked me to drive him to the airport in Los Angeles. He didn’t return to the hotel for his luggage. Hoover was left alone in our complimentary suite.”

J. Edgar remained on the West Coast for another two weeks, conducting business out of the San Diego office. Back in Washington, Clyde called FBI headquarters and told his staff that he had a serious case of “Jap flu” and would be out for almost two weeks while he recovered.

No one knows the details, but obviously those battling warriors made up with each other over the phone. When the director returned to Bureau headquarters, flying into National Airport in Washington, Guy Hotell was the chauffeur and Clyde the eager passenger wanting to have a reunion with J. Edgar.



Ethel Merman always claimed that the Hungarian-born film producer, **Joe Pasternak**, did more than anyone to fan rumors about J. Edgar’s homosexuality in the wake of an incident in a men’s toilet at the Del Mar race track.

When FBI agents in Los Angeles reported that Pasternak was spreading “these vicious lies,” J. Edgar ordered an immediate investigation into Pasternak’s past.

He wanted to know if Pasternak had previously dabbled in Nazism. FBI agents learned that he’d produced German-language musicals in Weimar Berlin, and that Pasternak hadn’t emigrated out of Germany until 1936, three years after Hitler rose to power.

Pasternak’s first major Hollywood victory derived from his transformation of a 14-year-old Canadian singer, Deanna Durbin, into an international star.

“They both had their make-up session in the back seat of the limo, or should I call it make-out session,” Guy said. “Fortunately, the windows were so darkened you couldn’t see in. In the rear-view mirror I watched so much kissing and ass-grabbing it was like a soldier returning to his wife after three years in the Pacific. I cooked steaks for them that night at their home. They were upstairs in the bedroom for three hours. The next day I had lunch with them at the Mayflower. They were like two love-birds.”

J. Edgar conceived many plots for the FBI to execute to protect the home front in World War II. But the most bizarre episode he ever planned called for its execution on German soil. In this wild fantasy, never carried out, he was obviously in search of “the ultimate headline.”

“I think in his megalomania, he completely failed to see his limitations and was hoping for a glory that would make him legendary—and not just for running the FBI,” Guy claimed.

During the investigations by FBI agents of the American Nazi beauty, Tara Marsh, in Mexico City, they had learned many intriguing details. Engaged at the time in a brief but torrid romance with Errol Flynn, she had spoken openly about her affair with Adolf Hitler when she attended parties thrown by Mussolini’s friend, the Countess Dorothy di Frasso.

According to an eyewitness, she'd claimed that Hitler had stashed the equivalent of one hundred million dollars in gold bars in the cellars of his alpine retreat at Berchtesgaden in southern Germany near the Austrian border. The rather indiscreet Marsh had also revealed that Nazi aviation engineers were designing an airplane capable of flying *der Führer* to Buenos Aires without refueling in case Germany lost the war.

Of course, that major claim revealed that Hitler at least was considering the possibility that Germany might emerge from World War II as a vanquished nation. At least that was something the propaganda minister, Josef Goebbels, never admitted.

Guy claimed that during the closing months of the war, J. Edgar began to conceive a fantastic role for himself. Apparently that long-distance airplane was never developed. Informants within the Nazi regime were reporting to the Allies that Hitler in the closing weeks of World War II planned to leave Berlin on April 20, 1945, and return to Obersalzberg, above Berchtesgaden, to defend Nazi Germany until the death of its last soldier.

"I will make our last stand for the Third Reich in the legendary mountain fastness of Barbarossa," *der Führer* announced.

J. Edgar learned that Hitler's household staff had already arrived in Berchtesgaden to prepare for his return to his mountain villa, the Berghof. The director knew that the U.S. Third Army was in nearby Linz, Austria, and he was told that from there, the Allies would move north into Berchtesgaden.

Night after night J. Edgar became obsessed with the idea that he, Clyde, and his trusted agent, Louis B. Nichols, would fly to the headquarters of the Third Army, and that with them, they would advance toward Berchtesgaden. When Hitler's final security guards were subdued, J. Edgar, according to his fantastic plan, would proceed directly into the chamber of the Nazi dictator. Armed with machine guns, J. Edgar, Clyde, and Nichols would move in to arrest Hitler. Of course, if he resisted, J. Edgar himself would mow him down with an FBI machine gun.

After either arresting or assassinating Hitler, and after all the photographs were taken, J. Edgar would make one final grand play. Along with Clyde and Nichols, he wanted to descend into the cellars of the Berghof and rescue millions of dollars in gold bars, which would then be flown back to the United States to help alleviate the vast war debt America had incurred during this epic battle.

J. Edgar diverted some of his top agents to help him draft an elaborate plan to carry out this scheme. When it was ready, he made an appointment to meet privately with Secretary of State Edward Stettinius Jr., who had replaced Cordell Hull, who had to resign because of ill health. J. Edgar had worked very little with this prematurely white-haired, rather handsome man, and had not a clue as to how he would respond to his scheme. Stettinius had been described as a meticulous, no-nonsense bureaucrat with an almost obsessive attention to detail.

In front of Stettinius, J. Edgar was only five minutes into his presentation of "the coup of the century" when Stettinius rose in anger from his desk. "Who in hell do you think you are? Dwight David Eisenhower? A lot of plots have been presented to me, but this is the most ridiculous. Are you out of your mind?"

"But it could work," J. Edgar protested.

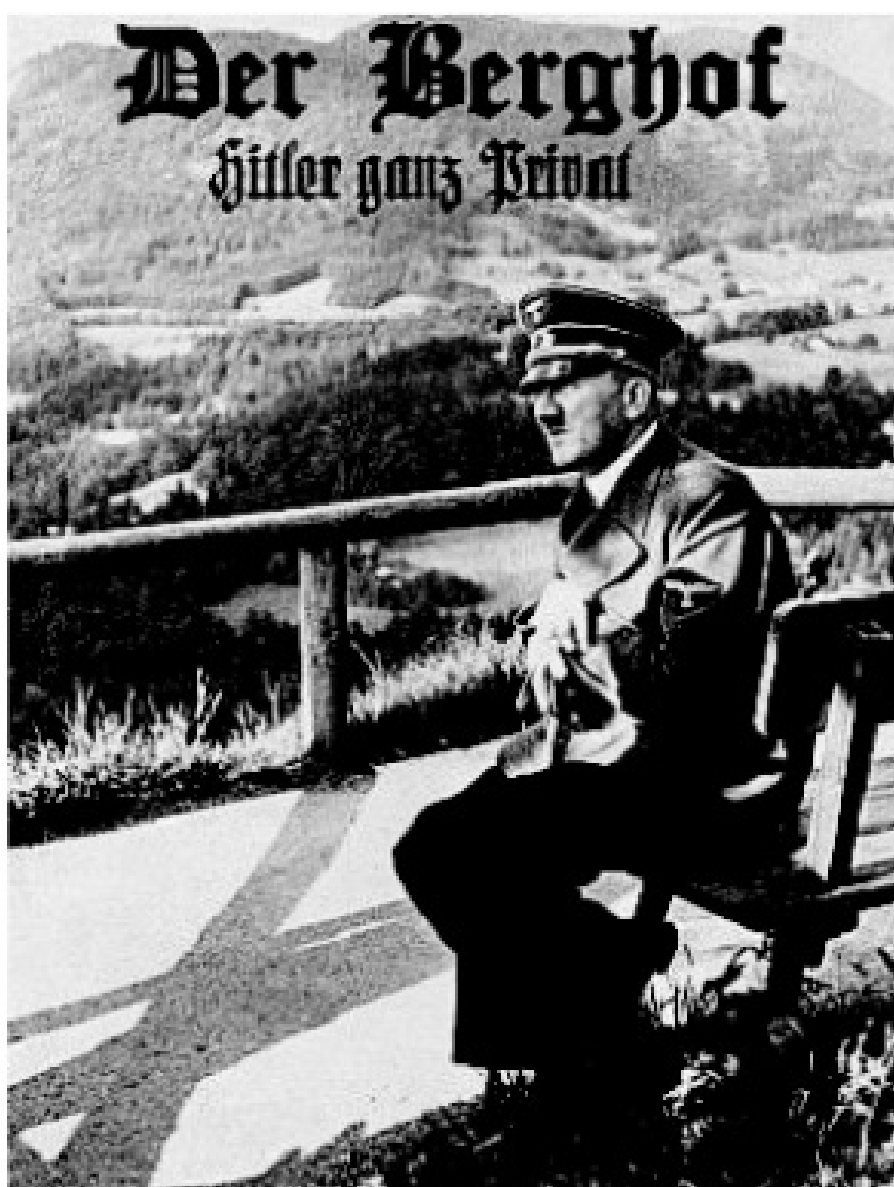
"You are terribly misinformed," Stettinius said. "Hitler has waited too long. There's no way he can fly out of Berlin at this point. The Russians are already bombarding the Chancellery. He's trapped in his bunker with Goebbels and others. There's little doubt he'll be taken alive by the Soviets and shipped in a cage to Josef Stalin. We think he'll commit suicide instead. Now get out of my office. Europe is falling apart, and I've got important business to attend to. No time to listen to some dumb fantasy that sounds as if it were concocted by a twelve-year old G-Man wannabe. You've got to find a new mission, Hoover. The Nazis are defeated. Why don't you go on a commie hunt?"

Enraged and fuming with anger, J. Edgar arrived back at FBI headquarters. Clyde found him in such a state that he decided to drive him home for the day. Before J. Edgar departed, he instructed Nichols to destroy all the plans for their Berchtesgaden coup. "There must not be one trace of it left."

On the way out the door, Guy joined J. Edgar and Clyde. "Behind the anger he showed on his face was a determination I'd never seen before. He told us, 'The Nazis are defeated. Hitler will be dead soon. We must turn our attention to the communists infiltrating our government. I suspect Stettinius himself takes his marching orders directly from the Kremlin.'"

Stettinius didn't need to give J. Edgar advice about ferreting out communists in the government. Before the presidential elections of 1944, he'd already launched such a campaign. His main target was Henry A. Wallace, FDR's Vice President, whom J. Edgar suspected "was as red as his nosebleed."

Secretly delivered to J. Edgar was a highly classified report from Roosevelt's doctors. The report noted that the President's heart might not survive a grueling fourth run for the White House in 1944. The doctors had advised FDR to retire from office at the end of his third term.



In a reflective mood, **Adolf Hitler** (*top photo*) contemplates his next diabolical scheme: Perhaps his plan to bring Winston Churchill to Berlin after the Nazi victory and parade him in chains through the streets, but only after the *Führer* himself had castrated the wartime British leader.

As a site for the contemplation of his next moves, the Nazi dictator enjoyed an idyllic setting that would during the years to come serve as a backdrop for the Julie Andrews movie, *The Sound of Music*.

Hitler vacationed with his mistress, Eva Braun, at the **Berghof** (*lower photo*) in the Bavarian Alps near the Austrian border. He lived in an imposing villa like a villain from a future James Bond film.

During the 1930s, the neighboring village of Obersalzberg became a place of pilgrimage for Nazi fanatics; hysterical women took away stones on which Hitler's feet had trod-den.

In a private confab with Clyde, Louis Nichols, and Guy Hotell, J. Edgar informed them that FDR's selection of a vice president was vital. "The man elected as veep will become President of the United States, perhaps just months after the election—that is, if Roosevelt makes it through the campaign at all."

Fearing that a Wallace presidency would mean a complete communist takeover of the U.S government, Clyde launched a major campaign within the FBI, directing his agents to dig up whatever they could about the Vice President's left-leaning politics.

On May 8, 1942 Wallace had delivered his most famous but most controversial speech in New York. Called the "Century of the Common Man," it was delivered to the leftist Free World Association. In the speech, the Vice President laid out his vision for a New World Order, following the defeat of the Fascist powers.

Unknown to Wallace, Clyde had set up an extensive monitoring system that tapped into the phone wires of the Vice President. He heard and reported, word for word, what Wallace said to the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee. The FBI considered the organization "a commie front group." Clyde also listened as Wallace talked to the president of the leftist Los Angeles Union, which Clyde claimed was "completely red."

In 1943, an FBI agent was in the audience as Wallace appeared before a public rally consisting mostly of African-Americans who had suffered police brutality during recent race riots. "We cannot fight to crush Nazi brutality abroad while engaging in such harsh tactics at home against our own citizens," Wallace said. "For some reason, white supremacists always want to join the police force."

Also in 1943, Wallace made the first of two controversial visits to Latin America. He spoke out in defense of underpaid workers laboring under dangerous conditions. Without authority, he even claimed that the United States would pay half the costs of improving working conditions throughout Latin America. This obviously brought him into a violent confrontation with the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Two FBI agents trailed Wallace wherever he went in Latin America expressing alarm in their reports that he had come under the influence of Bolivian Communists. In a secret memo, J. Edgar expressed his grave concerns to Attorney General Francis B. Biddle.

In one of his memos to Biddle, J. Edgar complained, "Wallace and Eleanor Roosevelt are locked into a conspiracy. I do not for a minute believe she is as naïve as she pretends to be. Both of them are known to socialize or even endorse some of the most dangerous communists in the country, both party members and pro-Soviet groups."

Clyde presented J. Edgar with a detailed report on a private phone conversation between Eleanor and Wallace, in which he asked her if she might consider running with him for the Presidency of the United States in 1948. "You would obviously attract more voters than I would, so you should head the ticket with me being the vice presidential candidate like I was to Franklin." The transcript of the conversation, perhaps for technical reasons, was not complete. The First Lady's response to that radical suggestion was not recorded.

On May 23, 1944, Wallace left on yet another controversial trip, departing via Alaska to the barren wilderness of the "Wild East" of Russia, including Siberia, where communist authorities steered him away from the slave camps. On Soviet soil, he praised the Bolshevik Revolution as the greatest since the American Revolution.

After this trip, J. Edgar sent a notation to Biddle. "There can be no doubt: Henry A. Wallace is engaged in a communist conspiracy. He has secret pro-Soviet ties both in Russia and in America. His actions might not be approved of by FDR, but Eleanor is very influenced by his far left positions."

FDR was also receiving these reports and was seriously alarmed by them. Historians may disagree, but what may have influenced FDR to drop Wallace from the 1944 ticket was a report from his closest advisers that he would lose three-million votes if he kept Wallace on the ticket.

Finally, a decision came through. Wallace would be dropped from the ticket, and FDR would run with Harry S Truman, a relatively obscure senator from Missouri, as his vice president. As history records, Wallace was replaced on the Democratic ticket just 82 days before the elections of 1944, and consequently, thanks to the death of FDR in 1945, missed becoming the 33rd president of the United States.



It was not a happy ride when **Franklin D. Roosevelt** (*left*) brought Vice President-elect **Harry S. Truman** (*center*) and Vice President **Henry A. Wallace** (*right*) together for a ride back to the White House from Washington's Union Station in 1944.

As Wallace told friends, "I was still in a state of shock that Roosevelt had replaced me as his vice president in favor of the shit-kicker from Missouri, a machine-backed politician. He offered me the job of Secretary of Commerce. Truman had already told his cronies that he was going to become the next President of the United States. We both knew that Roosevelt had death written all over his face. Even his handshake felt like that of a cadaver."

To placate Wallace, FDR named him Secretary of Commerce, but he was fired by Truman in September of 1946 because he objected to the President's anti-Soviet policies.

Enraged by many of FDR's foreign and domestic policies, the Republicans nominated J. Edgar's nemesis, Thomas Dewey, the former governor of New York, to run against Roosevelt in the 1944 election. "If he gets in, somebody other than me will be running the FBI," J. Edgar confided to Clyde.

But Dewey didn't win. In spite of his ill health, the ailing FDR retained the presidency and was swept into office with Truman, his last-minute choice, as his vice president. "The Missouri mule" [J. Edgar's pejorative reference to Truman] might just as well make his inaugural speech," he said, "as he'll soon become President."

Three terms as U.S. President would age younger, healthier men. Not only was FDR in poor health throughout three previous terms of his presidency, but he had led the nation through the stress of both the Great Depression and World War II. As regards his final meeting with FDR, J. Edgar told Clyde and his aides, "I don't think he has much longer before he departs this earth."

"That feisty little Harry S. Truman is just waiting in the wings to take over," J. Edgar told Clyde and Guy. "Just the other day, I heard he told some senators that, 'There is no love lost between Hoover and me.'"

Even though World War II had entered its final crucial months, J. Edgar and Clyde diverted more FBI agents to begin an intense investigation of Truman.

The director already knew that Truman had entered politics as a *protégé* of Tom Pendergast, the flamboyantly corrupt political boss whose influence had sent Truman to the Senate from the State of Missouri. J. Edgar and Clyde determined that Pendergast had cultivated ties to the Mafia. "We can use that against him," J. Edgar claimed.

Thomas Joseph Pendergast, called "Boss Tom," controlled Kansas City and its environs (including Jackson County), Missouri, and played a key role in maneuvering his hand-chosen political cronies into office during the Depression, enriching himself as part of the process. He was the most corrupt politician in the state. On election days, there were shootouts and beatings. A citizen of Kansas City faced fraud and intimidation if he voted for a Republican. Turnout for Pendergast candidates was an unbelievable ninety-eight percent of voters. His machine allowed alcohol and gambling during Prohibition, as his men bribed police officers.

In 1934, Pendergast handpicked Truman as his candidate for the 1934 U.S. Senate seat, and Truman won. But after years of

boss rule, in the late 1930s, the U.S. Treasury Secretary, Henry Morgenthau, went after both Pendergast and his collaborator, Mafia boss Charles Corolla as part of a crack-down on corruption and organized crime. Federal funds were pulled from the grasp of “Boss Tom,” and in 1939, he was convicted of income tax evasion. J. Edgar and Clyde were in Kansas City at the time.

Lloyd C. Stark, who’d won the Missouri governor’s seat in 1936, eventually turned against “Boss Tom” and ran against Truman for the Senate seat in 1940. U.S. Attorney Maurice Milligan, who had prosecuted Pendergast, also ran. Truman won as the other two candidates split the anti-Pendergast vote.

When “Boss Tom” died on January 26, 1945, Truman was the only elected official who attended his funeral. Brushing aside criticism, HST said, “He was always my friend, and I have always been his.”

J. Edgar and Clyde realized that Truman’s link to this unsavory character could be a weapon to use against him if he opted to run for President in 1948.

But even though they tried, FBI agents could come up with no sex scandals involving Truman. “I think he has sex with Bess, and only with her, with all his clothes on—that is, if he has sex with her at all, which I doubt,” one frustrated agent reported. “I bet Harry and Bess have never even seen each other naked.”



Corruption, bootlegging, voter fraud, election violence, and intimidation—good, old-fashioned ward politics—gave **Thomas Joseph Pendergast**, known as “Boss Tom,” enormous political power in Kansas City. He is pictured in the inset photo, and also as the left-hand figure in the bigger photo during a dialogue with his arch enemy, **Lloyd C. Stark**, who set out to destroy him.

Pendergast changed the course of world history when he selected haber-dasher Harry S Truman to run for political office as his hand-picked candidate. After Pendergast was convicted of income tax evasion, Stark sought to unseat Truman in the 1940 U.S. Senate election, a bitter campaign that made both men lifelong enemies after Truman was re-elected. Truman, of course, would go on to greater things, like ushering in the Atomic Age.

“The most damaging personal thing we’ve come up with so far is that he leaves skid marks on his underwear,” Clyde claimed. “He’s afraid someone will steal a dirty pair and auction it off as a joke. That’s why he washes his drawers every morning in the sink of his bathroom. He’s also known for taking dinosaur dumps.”

The FBI was informed that Roosevelt had left the White House on March 3, 1945, heading for Warm Springs, Georgia, for rest and recuperation. A spy among FDR’s Secret Service informed J. Edgar that the President’s longtime mistress, Lucy Mercer Rutherford, was staying with him at the Little White House.

In Washington, as the cherry trees were about to burst into bloom, J. Edgar became increasingly convinced that FDR’s death was imminent.

He began to speculate about the degree of influence Eleanor Roosevelt might have on the new President Truman. One FBI agent trailed her at every appearance. On the afternoon of April 12, 1945, the agent had listened to Eleanor speak at the Seagrave Club in Washington. She had just finished her speech when he noted an agent of the Secret Service approach the platform and whisper something into the First Lady’s ear. Excusing herself, she left the auditorium at once and got into a limousine, which sped her to the White House. She was last seen by another FBI agent “rushing into the White House with a sense of panic on her face.”

“Keep us informed,” Clyde told his underling.

Another FBI informant in the Senate called Clyde, who put him through to J. Edgar on his direct line. It was 5pm, and Truman had just finished presiding over the Senate. He retreated to the unmarked Room H-128 with Sam Rayburn, Speaker of the House. This high-ceilinged room was a kind of after-hours hideaway where Democratic Senators gathered to drink and discuss politics.

Truman, it was reported, was enjoying a hefty glass of bourbon when an agent from the White House told him to go there at once to meet Eleanor.

Within minutes, a slightly tipsy Truman was spotted dashing along the otherwise deserted passage beneath the Capitol building. He had no Secret Service protection. In a great rush, he was seen going into the Pennsylvania Avenue entrance of the White House. Over the phone, an FBI agent told J. Edgar, “Either the war is over or Roosevelt is dead.”

With no more immediate news, Clyde and J. Edgar decided to take the elevator down and head for Harvey’s, their favorite restaurant, for an early dinner. Clyde left strict instructions with Edward Tamm, J. Edgar’s top aide during World War II, that they were to be informed of the latest news. J. Edgar didn’t like not knowing what was going on.

As they got off the elevator on the ground floor, a security guard told them that Tamm wanted them to return at once upstairs.

They came back into J. Edgar’s office to approach a highly agitated Tamm. The FBI had hookups with three news services, the International News Service, the Associated Press, and United Press. A five-alarm bell was going off from INS, indicating a bulletin about to be sent. Such bulletins ranked up there with news of “The Second Coming.”

The time was 5:45pm, as J. Edgar and Clyde stood over the machine. Both men read the abbreviated words as soon as they appeared—FLASH WASHN—FDR DEAD.

Newspapers going to bed on the East Coast held their press runs, and radio stations were told to stand by for late-breaking news of major importance. Thousands, even millions of Americans, stopped their activities and gathered around their radios. Three minutes later, at 5:48pm, both AP and UP flashed their own bulletins—FDR DEAD.

Clyde stood with Tamm and J. Edgar in stunned silence as Guy Hotell and Louis Nichols approached.

It was Clyde who broke the deadly silence. “My God, that little haberdasher from Missouri is our new boss. What will happen to the FBI?”

A grimace crossed J. Edgar’s face as he looked at Clyde. “More to the point, what in the fuck is gonna happen to us?”



In the 1950s, **J. Edgar Hoover** (seen above on vacation in Miami Beach) was Clyde Tolson's favorite subject for photographic studies.

CHAPTER SEVEN

After Harry S Truman was sworn in as President of the United States, J. Edgar called Clyde, Louis Nichols, and Guy Hotell into his office. "Harry Truman hates us and will want to cut off our balls. In Guy's case, that will take one big knife." No one said anything, but J. Edgar laughed at his own remark. "A little gallows humor, fellows."

"We've got to dig deep to get the dirt on this pig farmer from Missouri," J. Edgar said. "I think Truman will try to slice us down to size. I hear he wants to create an intelligence agency spanning the globe. I want that agency to be under the FBI. I see a few battles along the way, but ultimately we'll win this war with Truman."

The FBI spy stationed at the White House reported that a funeral cortège with a black-draped caisson drawn by six white horses had just pulled up under the portico of the White House. To his dismay, J. Edgar learned that the funeral service was to be held in the East Room. The widowed Eleanor Roosevelt had not invited him to the services, much less extended an invitation to Clyde. "We're going to the funeral," J. Edgar told Clyde.

"But I'm not wearing a black suit today," Clyde protested.

"Any fool can see that," J. Edgar said. "We're going anyway. Call our limousine."

"Without an invitation, we can't get in," Clyde protested.

"Who do you think you're talking to?" J. Edgar asked. "Name the security guard at the door to the White House who will not allow entrance to J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation?" He slammed his fist down on his desk. "I think not."

On the way to the White House, J. Edgar checked his vest pocket three times. In it he had slipped an envelope with a dossier on the last day of FDR's life. He wanted the now deposed First Lady to be aware that her husband had spent the final hours of his life with not only one, but with two mistresses, Lucy Mercer Rutherfurd, whom Eleanor despised, and a second mistress, Margaret Suckley, whom FDR called "Daisy." For some reason, Eleanor tolerated Daisy but despised Lucy.

Daisy was nine years Franklin's junior and his eighth cousin. She was also a seventh cousin to Eleanor and had come into FDR's life after polio struck. Daisy had helped implement the romance between Franklin and Lucy. After Lucy was banished by Eleanor, Daisy had filled in as the future president's lover.

During his final hours, or so it was reported to J. Edgar, Lucy and Daisy had hovered around FDR as his last portrait was painted by Madame Elizabeth Shoumatoff.

J. Edgar was right. Ultimately, he and Clyde were allowed into the East Room although backed up against the wall and not given any front row preference. With Clyde, J. Edgar stood in the long receiving line to offer Eleanor his condolences. Coming face to face with the widow, he shook her hand and offered his sympathy, and he also slipped her the envelope he'd carried over to the White House from the FBI. Looking startled for a moment, she accepted the envelope and immediately passed it to her social secretary.

Reportedly, she later told her intimate friend, Joseph P. Lash, "It was a final act of cruelty and vengeance on the part of Hoover. I already knew the Rutherfurd woman and Daisy were in Warm Springs. I learned about it an hour after I arrived there."

Back in their limousine, J. Edgar and Clyde sat with Guy, who had not entered the White House. J. Edgar told Guy that he'd given "the final report" to Eleanor. "It looks like old Horse Face is out of the picture. Enter 'the Missouri Cow.'" He was referring, of course, to Bess Truman, who at that moment was arranging her personal possessions and limited wardrobe in the bedroom hastily vacated by Eleanor.

On her arrival in New York at Grand Central, a reporter had rushed up to Eleanor for an interview. She put up her hand. "The story's over."

That would have been the case with most First Ladies after their departure from the White House. Not so with Eleanor. As J. Edgar was to find out, there were many more chapters to be written in her life.



To this day, no one has adequately explained why **FDR** (*top photo, right*) picked “The Man from Independence” (*top photo, left*) as his vice presidential running mate in the 1944 campaign for the White House.

In the lower photo, **Harry S Truman** is sworn in as President of the United States, as his wife, **Bess** (center) and his singer-daughter **Margaret** (right) look on.

On his first day in office, Truman told his aides, “One of my first official acts of duty will be to snip off one of J. Edgar Hoover’s balls.”

The Missouri politician was known for his plain speaking. William Sullivan of the FBI claimed, “Hoover’s hatred of Harry Truman knew no bounds.”

World events were passing so rapidly that J. Edgar and Clyde could hardly keep abreast of developments. U.S. troops liberated the Nazi concentration camp at Buchenwald where countless Jews, homosexuals, and Gypsies had been murdered. In Berlin, Hitler was in his bunker when he heard news of the death of FDR. It was a cause for celebration.

But Hitler himself would commit suicide on April 30, 1945, shortly after marrying his longtime mistress, Eva Braun. A Viking style funeral was hastily held in which the Führer’s body was burned. The Third Reich would survive for another week.

J. Edgar and Clyde followed these events with avid interest, not knowing exactly what the new world would mean for their roles at the FBI.

They were particularly concerned to read of Germany’s unconditional surrender on May 7, 1945, which effectively ended the operations of the Office of Strategic Services. The war was still raging against Japan in the east, but the OSS had never

really operated there very much because of the objections of the commander in charge, General Douglas MacArthur.

With Clyde by his side, J. Edgar began to scheme to assemble all American intelligence operations under his control. That meant commandeering the former duties of the OSS, which had previously been run by his nemesis, William Donovan.

When J. Edgar received some of the first reports that Soviet troops had overrun Berlin, he told his agents, “Communists, not the Fascists, will become the new enemy of the United States. Instead of Hitler, we’ll have to confront the even more cunning Josef Stalin. No one has rounded up more communists in the United States than I have. Now with the war coming to an end, watch me go. Of course, first, we’ll have to do some brown-nosing with this Truman creature.”

Wanting to carry favor with Truman, J. Edgar sent him a memo, putting himself “at your personal disposal, Mr. President.”

Truman angrily shot back, “Tell Hoover if I need any help from the FBI, I’ll go through proper channels and first ask the Attorney General who can then convey my wishes to Hoover.”

When he heard this, J. Edgar was insulted and went into a rage. But he had to swallow his pride and figure out some way to put Truman in his debt. But then J. Edgar received even worse news when he was shown a copy of a memo Truman had dictated.

“We want no Gestapo or secret police. The FBI is tending in that direction. They are dabbling in sex life scandals and plain blackmailing when they should be catching criminals. They also have a habit of sneering at local law enforcement officers. This must stop! Cooperation is what we must have.”

During his first weeks in office, Truman learned many government secrets, including an overview of massive wiretappings by the FBI. “What in the fuck is this?” the outspoken President said. “Tell Hoover to cut this crap. We don’t have time for this kind of shit!”

Aware of his power, J. Edgar ignored the presidential ban and continued to acquire data illegally.

Truman never really wanted J. Edgar to come into the White House, especially the Oval Office. “Body odor offends me,” he told his aides. “If I had to meet him, make sure he’s at least ten feet away and there’s no down wind. On the other hand we’ve got to watch him. Long ago I learned not to kick a pile of cow shit on a hot August day.”

Although it could have been embarrassing to Truman’s administration, the FBI continued with its wiretapping.

J. Edgar baited the President with tantalizing tidbits of information about what his Republican opponents were planning to do to discredit him. Sometimes FBI memos alerted Truman to potentially threatening maneuvers unfolding even within his own administration.

Confident of the degree of power he wielded, J. Edgar even snooped on his own boss, Attorney General Francis Biddle, especially when wiretapping revealed he was linked to the notorious lawyer and lobbyist known as “Tommy the Cork,” the centerpiece of an FBI file nearly a foot thick.

“Tommy the Cork” was actually Harvard-educated Thomas Corcoran, an Irish Catholic lawyer who had become one of the most influential officials in Washington during Franklin Roosevelt’s first two terms in office.

Elliott Roosevelt once claimed, “Apart from my father, Tom was the single most influential man in the country.” He was a key factor in drafting FDR’s New Deal legislation. Long before Lyndon Baines Johnson came onto the scene, Corcoran was called “the ultimate arm twister” in Congress. Senator Walter George of Georgia went so far as to claim, “He had the power of saying who shall be a senator and who shall not be a senator.”

An isolationist, Corcoran in time became “too politically dangerous (FDR’s words) to keep around.” He was instrumental in getting Joseph P. Kennedy appointed ambassador to England, and both men opposed America’s entry into the war. As FDR’s aide, Harry Hopkins, told him, “Tom, you’re too Catholic to trust the Russians and too Irish to trust the English.”

Corcoran’s days as Roosevelt’s trusted adviser were numbered when the *Saturday Evening Post*, in June of 1939, accused the President’s son, James Roosevelt, of being a war profiteer. James was one of Corcoran’s best friends, and as a result, Corcoran got dragged into the scandal.

“It involves my son and my closest adviser.” FDR told J. Edgar. “I want you to see what damage the scandal might cause.”

Two weeks later, J. Edgar called FDR to report, “James and Tommy the Cork are as guilty as hell. There are many instances where Corcoran has been accused of corrupt behavior. I’m sure it was Corcoran who talked poor James into acting improperly.”

Then Norman M. Littell, a high-ranking official in the Department of Justice, approached Anna Roosevelt, FDR’s daughter. He warned her to intercede with her father and fire Corcoran. “Ability and brilliance of mind are not enough.”

In October of 1940, FDR had to call Corcoran and tell him the bad news. “I’ve got to ask you to resign.”

Once FDR forced him out of his administration, Corcoran became the most influential lobbyist in Washington, making a fortune in the arms trade and “wheeling and dealing (J. Edgar’s words) with so many companies I don’t know how he keeps them straight.”

Ever since the 1930s, Clyde and J. Edgar had accumulated an extensive file on Corcoran, much of it derived from phone taps. Conversations recorded included intimate talks with justices of the Supreme Court, Federal judges, congressmen, senators, and even members of FDR's cabinet, including Attorney General Francis Biddle. From Hollywood, private talks with Louis B. Mayer and Darryl F. Zanuck were subject to eavesdropping.

To J. Edgar, the evidence indicated that Biddle, his boss, and Corcoran had "a corrupt relationship." In a memo to Truman, J. Edgar charged, "Corcoran has something on your Attorney General."

When Biddle heard that J. Edgar was trying to get him fired, he met privately with Truman and presented evidence that the FBI director was involved in a homosexual relationship with his associate director, Clyde Tolson.

"I flipped through the file," Truman years later would tell his biographer Merle Miller. "I didn't want to see it. I told Biddle I didn't give a damn about Hoover's personal life. That wasn't my business. It was what he did *while* he was at work that was my business."

During the war, a case had been brought against Sterling Pharmaceutical Company, of which Corcoran was the chief lobbyist, alleging that Sterling had been trading with an enemy antagonist, with strong implications that the company had Nazi links. Somehow Corcoran managed to have Biddle drop the case and erase all charges. This action infuriated J. Edgar, who claimed that Biddle's decision represented "the lowest point in the history of the Department of Justice since the Harding administration."

In Congress, there were calls for an investigation both of Biddle and his links to his lawyer/lobbyist friend Corcoran. The tension poured over into Truman's office, where the president proclaimed, "The buck stops here."

On July 1, 1945 the President fired Biddle and replaced him with Tom Clark, a former lobbyist for Texas oilmen before joining the Justice Department. Ironically Biddle had only recently tried to fire Clark, who was now taking over his job.

Truman later admitted that assigning Clark the position of Attorney General "was the worst mistake of my life. It isn't so much that Clark is bad. It's just that he's such a dumb son of a bitch."

Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter detested Clark, calling his "morality somewhat rancid." Even so, and even after he'd been accused of accepting a large bribe in a war profiteering case, Clark nevertheless became an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, serving from 1949 to 1967.

J. Edgar was delighted when Clark became the Attorney General. "The fucker will more or less rubber stamp anything I want to do," J. Edgar proclaimed to Clyde, Guy, and Louis Nichols. With some exceptions, that turned out to be true.

"I didn't bother to read Hoover's secret memos," Clark later said. "If he wiretapped people, I figured he knew what he was doing. I handed his memos over to my assistant. He wrote several times about queers in the State Department. So what? Queers can show up everywhere, even as captains of football teams. In America it's possible for a queer to become director of the FBI. Hey, don't quote me on that."

J. Edgar was not only concerned with men who held great power in Washington. Both he and Clyde had an uncanny knack for figuring out who would hold power in the future.

As Guy Hotell claimed, "Eddie and Clyde wanted to start collecting incriminating data on young men who were on their way to the top. Often they figured out the politicians who would one day become President—take Richard Nixon, for example, or John F. Kennedy. Yes, they even spotted Lyndon Johnson as a rising force to be reckoned with."

A young couple had moved across the street from J. Edgar on Thirtieth Place NW. He was a congressman from Texas, Lyndon B. Johnson, along with his wife, known as "Lady Bird." J. Edgar told Clyde, "I hear he's a big crook who married her for her money, and that he has the morals of an alleycat. Guess what? Several secretaries he's fucked on Capitol Hill spread the word he's hung like a horse. Not only that, but his favorite dish is grilled Texas rattlesnake. Sounds like he's a man to watch."

After the collapse of the Third Reich, J. Edgar in Clyde's presence often dined out on how he tricked the Nazis into thinking the Allied invasion of Europe would be launched in Norway. Fueled by bourbon, he exaggerated his role one night when he invited Ethel Merman to dine with Clyde and him at Harvey's. "I recommended to Roosevelt that we erect false bases in Iceland that could be seen by German reconnaissance planes. That way, the Nazis were tricked into thinking we were establishing a base in Iceland for the eventual invasion of Norway." Nazi troops were rushed to Norway in anticipation of the landing that never was. Without me, the Normandy invasion would not have been successful."

Instead of war strategy, Merman told him what a lousy lay actor Cesar Romero was, "Gay as a goose," she said before the term had come into vogue.

On another front, J. Edgar's attention turned to "keeping the lid on the Manhattan Project" at Los Alamos. He was one of the few U.S. citizens who knew that America was close to developing an atomic bomb. The original plan, he claimed, was to bomb the port of Hamburg and ask for German's unconditional surrender. If that failed, a second bomb would be dropped on

Frankfurt in an effort to bring Nazi Germany to its knees.

After the German surrender, the attention focused on Japan. J. Edgar wanted the first bomb to fall on Tokyo, but Truman vetoed the plan. “If we bomb Tokyo, there won’t be any officials left to surrender. We might end up having some low-rent Jap admiral surrender.”

Julius Robert Oppenheimer, an American theoretical physicist, is often called the “Father of the Atomic Bomb,” based on his role in the Manhattan Project in WWII that developed the first atomic weapons. The scientist had come under surveillance by J. Edgar and Clyde since before the war when he displayed “pro-communist sympathies” while a professor at Berkeley. He was also known to associate with known communists.

As his involvement with the government became known, J. Edgar increased surveillance, bugging his office and tapping his phone. Letters sent to him were secretly opened before delivery.

J. Edgar was horrified when Oppenheimer was allowed to join the Manhattan Project in 1942, even after he admitted on his security questionnaire that he had been “a member of just about every communist front organization on the West Coast.” J. Edgar had sent to the President a warning that while at Berkeley the scientist “had been the ring leader of a communist cell group.” Even though he was working on the Manhattan Project, Oppenheimer was added to the FBI’s “Custodial Detention Index,” and slated for arrest in case of a national emergency.

Throughout the war, he was repeatedly investigated by both the FBI and the Manhattan Project’s Internal Security team. When FBI agents spotted Oppenheimer talking to suspected Soviet agents trying to steal nuclear secrets, J. Edgar immediately notified Brigadier General Leslie R. Groves, Jr., director of the Manhattan Project. Groves was given a detailed report of Oppenheimer’s communist associations with times and places of meetings. Groves called J. Edgar, claiming that the scientist was “absolutely essential to the project and had to be retained. We have to take the risk to end the war and save millions of lives of American soldiers perhaps by killing a few hundred Japanese civilians. At least the fuckers will surrender—or else NO TOKYO!!!”

Oppenheimer handled the work on fast neutron calculations and was given the role of “Coordinator of Rapid Rupture,” a reference to the propagation of a fast neutron chain reaction in an atomic bomb.

When J. Edgar learned that Groves had named Oppenheimer as director of the project’s Secret Weapons Laboratory, he notified him, “Oppenheimer is a card-carrying communist with direct links to the Kremlin. You have been warned. You are, in fact, giving Josef Stalin the secrets of how to make an atomic bomb.” The Brigadier General chose not to answer.

J. Edgar became even more horrified when he learned that the Manhattan Project had grown from a few hundred people in 1943 to 6,000 employees weeks before the history’s first nuclear attack. J. Edgar told Clyde and other agents, “Stalin will get our atomic secrets. There is no way in hell that 6,000 people will keep a secret, especially Oppenheimer, who is as red as Santa Claus’ drawers.”

Spies within the Manhattan Project kept J. Edgar and Clyde apprised of every development, especially the launch of a project code-named “Trinity.”

The project paid off on July 16, 1945 when the first nuclear explosion ushered the world into the Atomic Age near Alamogordo, 230 miles south of Los Alamos. Oppenheimer later quoted a Hindu verse: “If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst at once into the sky, that would be like the splendor of the mighty one.”

For six months prior to the dropping of atomic bombs onto the mainland of Japan, the U.S. Air Force intensely fire-bombed nearly 70 cities in Japan. The Japanese ignored an ultimatum issued at Potsdam in Germany.

J. Edgar secretly learned that Truman was prepared to authorize dropping at least two atomic bombs on Japan. The first one blasted Hiroshima into eternity on August 6, 1945.

“Little Boy,” as it was called, killed perhaps 160,000 people. On August 9, “Fat Man,” the second bomb, dropped on Nagasaki, turning it into a mushroom cloud, killing some 80,000 people. Six days later, the stubborn Japanese finally surrendered to Allied powers.

Awarded the Presidential Medal for Merit in 1946, Oppenheimer became a national spokesman for science and a household name, appearing on the covers of both *Life* and *Time*.

J. Edgar continued to have Oppenheimer trailed, feeding information about him to his enemies. On June 7, 1949, Oppenheimer was forced to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee, where he admitted to “associations” with the Communist Party in the 1930s. In the 1950s, Oppenheimer found himself in conflict with Edward Teller, who was working on his own project—the development of the hydrogen bomb. Whereas Oppenheimer pushed for smaller “tactical” nuclear weapons, Teller was interested in harnessing the ultimate big blast.



A cigarette-smoking “addict” (four packages a day), **Julius Robert Oppenheimer** was called “the Father of the Atomic Bomb.” He knew all the secrets of the bomb and worked at Los Alamos in its development.

J. Edgar thought he was a communist. Oppenheimer topped the FBI list of possible subversives, which also included Oppenheimer’s friend, Albert Einstein; U.S. Supreme court Justice William O. Douglas, and novelists John Steinbeck and Ernest Hemingway.

Many of Oppenheimer’s lovers and associates were communists. The scientist never said that he had actually joined the party, but admitted that he was a “fellow traveler.” J. Edgar’s FBI could never pin homosexuality on him, but they did investigate his sexual life, discovering him to be “an adulterer who liked to be tortured a bit during sexual encounters.”

Agents also investigated his mistress, Jean Tatlock, the daughter of a Berkeley literature professor who wrote for *The Western Worker*, a communist newspaper. Oppenheimer broke up with Tatlock in 1939 and took up with Katherine (Kitty) Puening Harrison, a radical Berkeley student and Communist Party member.. His affair with her began while she was still married to Richard Harrison, a medical researcher.

Oppenheimer impregnated Kitty on his ranch in New Mexico, and she finally divorced Harrison. She married Oppenheimer on November 1, 1940, and gave birth to his first child, Peter. During his marriage, Oppenheimer continued an adulterous affair with Jean Tatlock.

J. Edgar believed that his years of spying on Oppenheimer had finally paid off on December 21, 1953, when President Dwight D. Eisenhower revoked his security clearance.

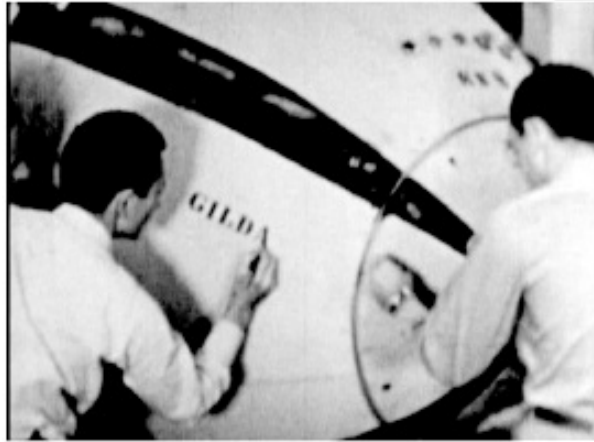
A chain smoker, Oppenheimer was diagnosed with throat cancer in late 1965 and lived until February 15, 1967 when he fell into a coma and died at the age of 62 in Princeton, New Jersey.

Clyde sent an FBI agent to the funeral to write down the names of the powerful political, military, and scientific leaders, as well as the artists who attended. They included the novelist John O’Hara and dancer/choreographer George Balanchine, the director of the New York City Ballet. “Probably red as blood,” J. Edgar told Clyde who reported back to him.

Although Oppenheimer was extensively investigated by the FBI, J. Edgar and Clyde would spend far more of their time spying on Albert Einstein.



Wirephoto
FISSION FIGURE — This picture of Rita Hayworth, film actress, has been painted on the atomic bomb, christened Gilda, to be dropped today.



Rita Hayworth starred in *Gilda* (1946), her most famous movie role, in which she was cast opposite her lover, Glenn Ford. Rita had never been sexier, especially when she sang “Put the Blame on Mame.” Her appearance made *Gilda* the favorite movie shown to GIs that year. To these military men, Rita incarnated American female sexuality. “Rita was the real reason we fought World War II,” said one of the GIs who stencilled her image on the airplane that dropped a nuclear test bomb that exploded the Bikini Island atoll in the Marshall Islands in the Western Pacific.

Although the GIs meant it as a tribute to the love goddess, Rita was horrified. Her husband, Orson Welles, claimed, “Rita flew into the rage of her life. I’ve never seen her this angry before.”

“I am shocked,” she told Welles. “As you know, I would never hurt another human being. Why I would be linked with an atomic bomb that took thousands of innocent lives is beyond me.” She wanted to fly to Washington for a press conference to defend herself. “These GIs have mixed me up with the Bitch of Buchenwald who made lampshades out of human skins,” she said.

Welles talked her out of it. The head of Columbia Pictures, Harry Cohn, also talked her out of the trip, claiming that it would appear unpatriotic. “You make that trip, bitch, and J. Edgar Hoover will have you investigated as a communist.” Later, Rita blamed Cohn for the “Gilda Bomb,” claiming that it was “one of his sick publicity stunts.”

As revealed to his closest allies, J. Edgar was an anti-Semite, as was his friend Clyde. One of J. Edgar’s many criticisms of Albert Einstein was that “he is just too much of a Jew.”

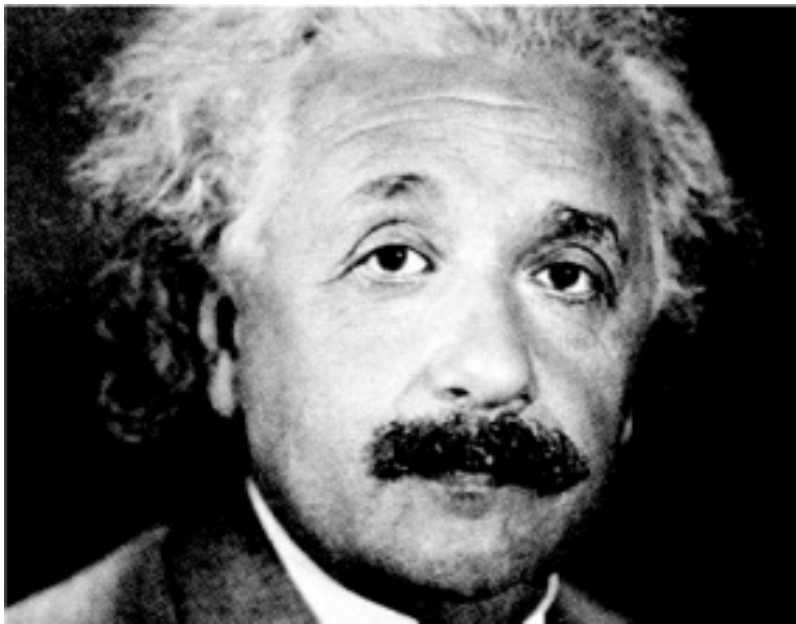
J. Edgar and Clyde had compiled and maintained a bulky file on Einstein since the 1930s. After the war, they increased their surveillance of him when he began to have secret meetings with Oppenheimer. “Just what are they plotting?” J. Edgar asked Clyde and Guy. “I’m sure both of them are in direct contact with the Kremlin, probably sending love letters to Josef Stalin.” An all-out investigation of the scientist would not really begin until 1950 when J. Edgar began to view Einstein as Public Enemy No. 1, like John Dillinger in the 1930s.

Years before that, J. Edgar shared some of his suspicions with Tom Clark. The Attorney General reminded J. Edgar that it was Einstein who had warned Roosevelt that Hitler had ordered scientists to develop an atomic bomb that would destroy both Washington and New York, in both cases with just one bomb for each. J. Edgar did not respond to that praise for Einstein.

Back at his office, J. Edgar ordered Clyde to intensify the FBI surveillance of Einstein. “From what I hear, he’s on his way to becoming the antiwar critic of capitalism. He’s an ugly little Jew, and you know what I think of Jews.”

J. Edgar allowed some of his agents to tell new recruits that there is nothing terribly wrong about the American Nazi Party

because “it is against the Jews trying to take over America, including the media, especially the film industry.”



Ever since **Albert Einstein** arrived in the United States in 1933, he was viewed by J. Edgar as a dangerous pacifist, socialist, and advocate of left-wing causes. Einstein’s political views provided the excuse J. Edgar needed to remove him from the Manhattan Project, code name for the development of history’s first atomic bomb.

But J. Edgar was even more intrigued with another legend: Had the emerging starlet, Marilyn Monroe, bedded Einstein as she had claimed to her girl friends, Shelley Winters and Jeanne Carmen? “I admire his brains,” she told one of her lovers, Peter Lawford.

One FBI agent reported to J. Edgar that “Monroe and Einstein definitely did not have an affair—she just made it up.” But another agent offered a more detailed report, claiming that he had extensively interviewed two servants, each of whom maintained that Marilyn had slipped away from her apartment in New York City and driven to a restored farmhouse on the outskirts of Easthampton, Long Island, where she spent the weekend.

As relayed by Jeanne Carmen, Marilyn said, “After my weekend with ‘Alberto,’ I now admire more than his brain. He might not look like much, but he’s a dynamo in bed.”

Whether Marilyn told the truth or not may never be known. Perhaps she made it up. But then again.....

In the late 1930s, J. Edgar and Clyde vacationed at a hotel on Miami Beach that advertised its policy of NO DOGS, NO JEWS. On their vacations to California, J. Edgar and Clyde lodged at the Hotel del Charro in La Jolla. It was owned by a friend of J. Edgar’s, Clint Murchison, a Texas oilman who had a policy of housing only Gentiles.

J. Edgar was alarmed that the Manhattan Project had employed too many Jewish scientists. Guy claimed, “If Eddie found out someone was a Jew, he immediately felt they might be a security risk.”

With a certain anger, J. Edgar always brushed off criticism that he had been “asleep at the wheel” in the weeks leading up to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. After the war was over, he claimed that his own role in winning the epic conflict did not receive the commendation it deserved. “I blame the Jews for that,” he told Louis Nichols and Clyde. “They are keeping me from many deserved honors because they are secret communists who want to diminish me.”

Both J. Edgar and Clyde continued to see their celebrity women friends, particularly Dorothy Lamour and Ethel Merman, who they entertained with tales of their daring WWII exploits capturing Nazi spies and saboteurs on the homefront. He became especially animated when relating his involvement with Nazi spies William George Sebold and Walter Koehler.

Born in Germany in 1899, Sebold became one of the most famous German spies in WWII, a double agent for the FBI. This former dishwasher and bartender was the key player in outing the Duquesne Spy Ring, which remains the largest espionage case in U.S. history ending in convictions.

Sebold became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1936, but returned to Germany in February of 1939, months before the outbreak of the war. In the city of Mülheim on a visit with his mother, he was approached by an Ab-wehr agent and asked to return to the United States and spy on America. From Major Nickolaus Ritter of Abwehr, Sebold received final instructions, including the use of codes and microphotographs. He was assigned the code name of “Harry Sawyer.”

Before leaving for New York, Sebold took a daring risk and visited the U.S. consulate in Cologne. Perhaps he was in disguise, because visitors entering the U.S. consulate, which was before America’s entry in the war, were often photographed and spied upon by the Gestapo. At the consulate, Sebold told the American staff that he’d been recruited as a spy by Abwehr

but wanted to cooperate with the FBI.

He claimed to Dale W. Maher, the official in charge, that the Gestapo had threatened him when they discovered that he'd been jailed for a robbery in his hometown, but that he hadn't reported that detail in his application for immigration to America. He was also told by Abwehr that if he didn't cooperate, he'd be sent to a concentration camp.

Before leaving for New York, Sebold took an intensive seven-week course in Hamburg, with thorough training in radio telegraphy, Morse code, and short-wave transmitters. In New York, J. Edgar met privately with Se-bold but didn't really trust him. Finally, he agreed to accept him as a double agent, but privately he warned Clyde that Sebold would have to be watched at all times. "His chief advantage, I think will be in leading us to other Nazi spies." J. Edgar was strongly urged to work with Sebold, and he very reluctantly agreed.

Sebold had been supplied with enough money to rent his own office. However, J. Edgar called millionaire Vincent Astor, who owned an office building on 42nd Street in Manhattan. When J. Edgar explained his need for such an office, Astor volunteered to let Seebold use it rent free. That way, J. Edgar could have it equipped for an FBI spy operation before See-bold moved in.

J. Edgar personally inspected the office and ordered Clyde to have it bugged and a one-way mirror installed so that all visitors could be secretly filmed while talking to Sebold. Even though moving ahead with details associated with Sebold, J. Edgar remained deeply suspicious that he was a plant still loyal to his Nazi bosses back in Hamburg. "I don't want him to make a fool of us," J. Edgar told Clyde and Guy.

Installed in his new quarters, it took Sebold two months before he could start transmitting messages from Nazi agents stationed in America to the officers at Abwehr. Clyde had personally traveled to Long Island with FBI technicians, where a building was purchased and then equipped to broadcast shortwave radio messages to Hamburg. For a period of sixteen months, this secret station remained in operation, providing the main link between the Nazi spies in the United States and the Nazi intelligence operation in Hamburg. For security reasons, J. Edgar never told Sebold the location of the radio transmitter.

Working secretly through Sebold, J. Edgar and Clyde identified dozens of Nazi spies not only in the United States but in Mexico and in such countries as Argentina and Brazil.

On orders from Abwehr, Sebold contacted the major German spy operating in America, Fritz Joubert Duquesne, code-named DUNN. He had been spying in New York for Germany since WWI and had never been caught.

After two months of getting settled and contacting Nazi spies working within the U.S., Sebold began transmitting messages to Hamburg. Officials at Abwehr were impressed with his reports and found them authentic enough to relay to the military.

In sixteen months, some 300 messages were sent to Hamburg, and the radio station became the chief communications link between Abwehr and its network of Nazi spies.

One of the biggest secrets Nazi spies were ordered to discover was how far the United States had gone in developing its atomic bomb project.

All this espionage came crashing down on June 29, 1941 when J. Edgar announced "the greatest spy round-up in American history," carefully planned by Clyde and executed with lightning speed.

The FBI rounded up thirty-three top Nazi agents, all fingered by Se-bold. Collectively, the agents of the "Duquesne Spy Ring" were sentenced to serve a total of three hundred years in prison.

The only advantage Abwehr saw in the round-up was that Sebold himself had not been arrested. But their last hope disappeared when Sebold himself showed up at the trial of the Nazi spies. After that, he just disappeared from the radar screen, perhaps under the wing of the government witness protection program.

Guy once asked over dinner at Harvey's what happened to Sebold. "We had to get rid of him because he knew too much about the operation of the FBI," J. Edgar said, supplying no further details.

The exploits of Sebold formed the basis of a 1945 spy film, *The House on 92nd Street*, starring Lloyd Nolan and Signe Hasso. J. Edgar introduced the film, and FBI agents played themselves in the semi-documentary style movie produced by Louis De Rochemont.

J. Edgar later proclaimed that the ring's round-up of spies delivered "the death blow to Abwehr's espionage efforts in the United States." Perhaps that was an overstatement, but it was more or less true.

In 1946 in *American* magazine, J. Edgar published an article called "The Spy Who Double Crossed Hitler." It dealt with the strange case of Walter Koehler, who was hardly the romantic James Bond type of spy. As J. Edgar described Koehler, he was "a swarthy, short, heavy-set man with thick-lensed glasses who walked with a stoop—hardly the spy type."

A jeweler by trade, Koehler was a Dutchman and a staunch Roman Catholic who had worked as a spy for the Kaiser during World War I.

He came to the attention of Abwehr because of his knowledge of scientific matters. How a man who sold diamond rings to engaged couples became familiar with science is not known. Abwehr agents recruited him to go to America and learn about government proficiency in the field of nuclear research.

Koehler was flown to Lisbon, a city crowded with refugees from Hitler trying to get a visa for entrance into the United States. Interviewed by the vice consul there, Koehler immediately confessed that he'd been hired by Abwehr to go to the States to spy for the Nazis. He turned over evidence. In J. Edgar's article, he claimed, "They dealt with every detail of building and operating a shortwave radio, frequency tables, ciphers, hours of transmission, and a copy of the Dutch-language prayer book, on which his code was based. Koehler pleaded that he had never intended to work for the Nazis and that he had gone through with it just to get out of Europe. He insisted he loved the United States and would willingly serve it as a counterspy."

In his coat he carried some \$20,000 in gold coins, travelers checks, cash, and jewelry.

The vice consul notified the State Department, which called J. Edgar. Clyde brought his boss an extensive file on Koehler, outlining his espionage activities in WWI. J. Edgar was greatly puzzled. He told Clyde, "I don't think a zebra can change its stripes so easily. I think he's planning to double-cross us. That confession in Lisbon was but a ruse. Let's send for him but try to outsmart him. In his attempt to double-cross us, perhaps we can figure out a way to double-cross Abwehr. Let's play a dangerous game."

When Koehler landed in New York, Clyde ordered FBI agents in Manhattan to put him under strict surveillance. In his luggage, G-Men found a spy's equipment not reported to the vice consul in Lisbon—a miniature Leica camera, chemicals for making inks not visible without special equipment, and equipment for microphotography. One agent reported to Clyde that Koehler's wife had visited a minor Nazi spy known to the FBI. He turned over \$8,000 in cash to her.

From February 7, 1943 until the German surrender in May of 1945, Koehler sent coded messages to Abwehr in Hamburg through the FBI transmitter on Long Island.

In his article, J. Edgar wrote: "We gave the Nazis industrial and military information on a week-to-week basis. Most of the information we gave them was true, because we wanted to give Koehler a high degree of credibility. It was a touchy situation because we did not want to give away anything of real importance and also because we could not let it appear that Koehler knew too much. After all, he was a single agent working alone in the United States. If he had been too knowing, the Germans would have suspected us. Really, what we wanted out of the Koehler operation was to prevent the Nazis from sending others to pry into our nuclear activities. But we also wanted to learn how Nazi agents on the American continent were being paid."

The FBI director also used Koehler to feed Abwehr the false information that the allied invasion of Europe would begin in Norway through U.S. bases in Iceland.

J. Edgar's claims about Koehler in a magazine article have been disputed by later revelations by historians investigating Nazi espionage in 1971. A charge appeared that a Nazi spy operating out of Rochester, New York, frequently journeyed to Manhattan to pick up military secrets from Koehler. Although he was under surveillance, he was not guarded twenty-four hours a day.

A year before J. Edgar's death, charges were made that Koehler was THE SPY WHO FOOLED J. EDGAR HOOVER, as one article claimed. As the story unfolded, the FBI director became almost consumed with rage.

When the U.S. Army invaded Hamburg, secrets from Abwehr headquarters were retrieved. It was too much information to consume at once and did not receive high priority because the war had already ended. But as the years went by, it was discovered that secrets were sent from Koehler to Hamburg through a communications link to Abwehr from Rochester. The spy there was never found, and presumably faded into the great American heartland after the Nazis surrendered.

Born in Weinheim, Germany, in September of 1897, Koehler lived a long, mysterious life. The last decades of his life remain a mystery, and he went to his grave in January of 1989. The secrets of his role as a spy, possibly a double agent, in WWII were buried with him.

After celebrating his fifty-first birthday in January of 1946, J. Edgar asked Clyde to fly with him to New York for a brief vacation. At the Club of Champions in Manhattan, J. Edgar knelt down to kiss the sapphire ring of the notorious Francis Joseph, Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York. Before flying to New York, Clyde had presented J. Edgar a long file on Spellman's sometimes outrageous homosexual lifestyle, which was well known even by the Pope himself. Around the Vatican, the American archbishop was mockingly called "Nellie Spellman."

That night at the club, the audience was filled with many right wing zealots, including Spellman himself. J. Edgar launched an attack on the "new enemy," communists, who were actually his old enemy. With the Nazis defeated, he began his campaign against "the Red Menace." Arguably, more so than any other individual, including the infamous Senator Joseph McCarthy, J. Edgar was the key figure in launching the anti-communist hysteria that would rage across America in the post-war years, destroying lives and careers.

Before Spellman and the club members, J. Edgar gave a fiery speech. "Come what may, when thirty million Catholics assert themselves, the nation must pause and listen. There are only 100,000 Communists here but they are organized, articulate, and motivated by a fanatical frenzy. We must search them out and neuter them. Perhaps make *castrati* out of them." The audience laughed and applauded wildly.

Spellman was one of the leading American prelates of the Roman Catholic Church and the sixth archbishop of New York,

reigning (and that's the right word) from 1939 to 1967, having served before in the archdiocese of Boston. When J. Edgar met him, he had already been designated as a cardinal. At the time, he was convincing Pope Pius XII of the need to internationalize the Vatican's investments. "They are too centered in Italy," Spellman claimed. He had such success at going global with Vatican lire that he became known as "Cardinal Moneybags."

Truman Capote in later years referred to Spellman and J. Edgar as "Mary and Franny. Spellman was the major child abuser in the Roman Catholic Church," the author claimed. "With Hoover, he often swapped young males, many of them underage, for the purposes of sex. Spellman's name of Franny made its way through New York's gay community. When not being an archbishop, he could in private be the campiest queen in New York. On the other hand, 'Mary' was a bit more macho and subdued, even at the gayest of parties."



The flamboyantly gay **Francis Spellman** used to scream "more lace, more lace" at his tailor when being fitted for one of his gowns. As Guy Hotell claimed, "Spellman could appear in drag during his official duties in all that Vatican finery, but his pal, Eddie, could dress up only in private. They were two birds of a feather—or should I say 'boas'?"

No other archbishop of New York, before or since, was as controversial as "Nellie Spell-man," as he was called by his enemies in the Vatican.

At the 1958 papal conclave that elected Pope John XXIII, Spellman said, "He's no Pope! He should be selling bananas!"

Even though John F. Kennedy was a Catholic, Spellman supported a Quaker, Richard Nixon, for President during the elections of 1960. "Jack Kennedy is a whoremonger with a homosexual concubine on the side," Spellman told J. Edgar Hoover. The archbishop was referring to JFK's best friend, Lem Billings, who was a homosexual.

Capote was known to exaggerate, but there may have been some truth to his claims, which have been substantiated by other sources.

Tracy Coombes, who later became a waiter in a Hollywood eatery, was born in New York. He went to *Confidential* in 1955 and tried to sell an article to the magazine's editors about his experiences with Spellman and J. Edgar. The hustler wanted five thousand dollars. Although the editors were enthralled with his revelations, they were considered too hot for them to expose. "Hoover would surely shut down our magazine," said one of the editors.

"I was a good-looking kid when I was fourteen, and had a good build and an impressive package," Coombes claimed. "I'd heard that Spellman paid big money for young boys, and I made myself available to his secretary who arranged things for the Cardinal. I was ushered into his chambers, and I was there for about an hour. He gave me a blow-job and really felt me up. He gave me a hundred dollars, probably from the collection plate. At the time, my going rate was ten dollars. He asked to see me again, and I was always willing. For one hundred dollars, I would have had to turn ten tricks."

Coombes told the editors that one day Spellman arranged for him to be driven to Washington in an FBI car. "I was taken to the home of J. Edgar Hoover. I once thought I wanted to be a G-Man myself. I was really shocked to find that the director of the FBI liked to make it with young kids. Later I heard about this Tolson guy who was Hoover's lover. But on the afternoon I visited, Tolson was not in the house. Hoover took me into his library. He asked me to strip down and get a hard-on. He took several pictures of me before giving me a blow-job. Since I was sent down all the way from New York and had to be driven back, he gave me two hundred dollars. I'd never made money like that before. I was so grateful I even let Hoover kiss me when the FBI driver arrived outside to take me back. I was goddamn grateful for the money. Nowadays as a waiter, I can make two hundred dollars in just one night in tips."

Somehow the boy-swapping between J. Edgar and Spellman became known to Richard Cardinal Cushing of Boston. A heavy drinker, he preferred young nuns to young boys.

Lem Billings, John F. Kennedy's best friend and a homosexual, once said, "Jack knew about Spellman and Hoover. He knew about the boy exchanges, the dressing in drag, the works. Cushing was a great friend of both Bobby and Jack, and he gave the brothers a full report. Of course, that dreaded Hoover kept a full report on both Bobby and Jack. He had all the shit on them, and they had all the shit on him. Revelations would have ended all three careers. Jack could never fire Hoover, and Hoover could never afford to expose the Kennedys. Everybody knew too much about everybody else. Call it a Mexican standoff."

In spite of decades-old cover-ups, word did leak out, of course, about both J. Edgar and the Kennedys. One of Spellman's biographers, John Cooney, interviewed several people close to the cardinal, who made claims that he was gay. "I talked to many priests," Cooney claimed. "These men worked for the cardinal and were incensed, dismayed, and angered by his conduct, which was often outrageous in private."

Journalist Michelangelo Signorile called Spellman "one of the most notorious, powerful and sexually voracious homosexuals in the American Catholic Church's history." The author claimed that pressure was brought to bear on Cooney's publisher, Times Books, and charges of Spellman's sexuality were reduced to one paragraph of accusations. One of Cooney's interviews was with the famous historian C.A. Tripp, who made many revelations about Spellman.

Signorile also cited a story that in the 1940s, Spellman had an affair with a male member of the chorus in the Broadway revue *One Touch of Venus*.

Although he had no intention of ever exposing Spellman—he couldn't afford to and had no motivation to do so—J. Edgar still gathered an extensive file on the cardinal, which he and Clyde read for voyeuristic pleasure.

As Guy Hotell later recalled, "When Eddie met Francis, it was the beginning of a beautiful friendship, just like Bogie and Claude Rains in the closing scene in *Casablanca*. They were birds of a feather. With his Vatican apparel, Francis was in a sort of drag most of the day. But with Eddie in private, he could bring out the boas, the feathers, the hosiery. Both men loved total drag, especially spiked high heels. I attended their parties in New York and Palm Beach. My greatest regret is that I never snapped a picture of both of them sitting down to dine in total drag. Surely it would have sold for a million bucks."

The meeting of the young Congressman from Texas, Lyndon B. Johnson, and J. Edgar became the stuff of Washington legend and lore. After moving in, Johnson learned from the neighbors that J. Edgar, who, with Clyde, occupied the house across the street, was called "Weird Mary" by the other residents on the block.

On several occasions when he came home from his congressional office, LBJ had noticed a person "wearing either a dress or an old woman's style housecoat while watering his flowers and trimming his rose bushes, his face masked by a beekeeper's hat and face net." The future President was astonished to learn that "Weird Mary" was actually J. Edgar himself.

One afternoon, tanked up on bourbon after drinking with House Speaker Sam Rayburn, LBJ dared cross the street to present "Weird Mary" with an invitation. Striding into J. Edgar's yard, LBJ confronted J. Edgar, who at first seemed to want to flee.

"Hi, Edgar, I'm Lyndon Johnson," he said. "I meant to come over before and get acquainted."

"Hello," J. Edgar answered in a low voice.

"Lady Bird and I want you to come over for dinner tonight," he said. "She's found a place in Washington that makes real Texas barbecue. The chef's from San Antonio."

History does not record what went through J. Edgar's mind at that point. Obviously he realized that LBJ was accepting of him, even in a housecoat, and wanted to form some sort of bond.

"You like barbecue don't you?" LBJ asked.

"Clyde and I love it," he said.

"Well, why don't you and your boy get your asses across the street at seven tonight? We'll have a few Jack Daniels to get acquainted. I hear that's what you drink at Harvey's. It's about time we became asshole buddies because I think you can help me and I can help you in this town."

Details about J. Edgar's introduction and the dinner shared with Clyde at the home of LBJ and Lady Bird were related in graphic detail to Guy Hotell the following day.

Actually, LBJ, according to reports, did not approve of homosexuality, but he was clever enough to keep his prejudices under control when dealing with people in Washington who had a sexual preference other than his own. Before moving to Washington, Lady Bird had warned him, "Lyndon, you're going to have to adjust to the fact that up in D.C., people sleep together in different combinations from what you are used to—not just men with women, but men with men, or even women with women."

"I wouldn't mind watching some of that lesbian action, but cocksucking or taking it up the ass never appealed to me," he said.

"If you're going to be President one day, you've got to learn to leave your Texas prejudice behind and tolerate sexual behavior that your mama didn't teach you."

"You've got a point there, Miss Lady Bird," he told her.

Standing in the garden of his front yard, his face hardly visible, J. Edgar looked across at Johnson's rented home. "Clyde and I will be there right on the dot."

As he was leaving the yard, LBJ turned back to J. Edgar, "Oh, you guys can wear whatever you want. It's very informal. I often eat dinner in my underwear."

"No one knows what J. Edgar told Clyde when he got home that night. But promptly at seven that night, they showed up on LBJ's front porch. They were dressed in dark suits and ties. Access to the house was blocked only by a screen door, the main wooden door having been left hospitably open. Clyde rang the doorbell.

From down the hall, LBJ called to them. "Come on in," he shouted. "I'll be out in a minute."

J. Edgar and Clyde stood awkwardly in the hallway. In a few minutes, LBJ emerged dripping wet from the shower. With his penis swinging, he strode up the hallway to shake J. Edgar's hand and introduce himself to Clyde.

Far from concealing his prodigious endowment, he flaunted it. He took his penis in his left hand and shook it. "I've gotta take Ol' Jumbo here and give him a workout tonight. After the barbecue, tell Lady Bird we have some business at FBI headquarters tonight. I'll leave with you boys but skip out. I wonder who the lucky gal will be tonight who gets me to fuck her with this."

In his entire life, J. Edgar had never met a politician this open and blatant. Apparently, what LBJ was trying to do was to signal them right from the beginning that there was no need for secrets among them. It was an effective ploy.

When Lady Bird arrived thirty minutes later, the men were already enjoying their second bourbon. As she came in the door, the smell of the barbecue she carried permeated the air.

Johnson rose and gave her a wet kiss before introducing her to J. Edgar and Clyde.

Regrettably, no one recorded what was said among this soon-to-be famous quartet. That night, a liaison was formed that would grow more intense as LBJ's political power grew in Washington.

Of course, his tolerance of homosexuals went just so far. The next day at his office, he told Ted Sudling, a young aide he'd brought up from Austin, "Guess what? Last night I fed barbecue to the two most famous cocksuckers in Washington." He grabbed at his crotch. "I bet the faggots wanted me to feed them Ol' Jumbo here, but, as you know, I'm strictly a man for the ladies."



En famille in Austin, Texas, in 1948, **Lady Bird** (left) and **Lyndon B. Johnson** (right) look like one happy family in a posed portrait with their daughters. Actually, the road for Lady Bird was a rocky one, as she had to tolerate Lyndon's adulterous affairs, especially after their move to Washington. "Women were attracted to Lyndon like flies to honey," Lady Bird said in her Southern drawl.

In the 1940s, Lyndon and Lady Bird also socialized with another "couple," J. Edgar and Clyde, during the months when they lived across the street from them. When Lyndon wanted to take Lady Bird out on the town for the night, he often asked Clyde and J. Edgar to babysit for his girls. Both of these G-Men gladly volunteered.

"Babysitting with my little gals is as close as Clyde and J. Edgar will ever get to know what it's like to bring up children. After all, they can't have kids. Neither one has the right plumbing, even though J. Edgar wears a dress on occasion."

In another part of town, J. Edgar ordered Clyde to begin a much closer FBI monitoring of the activities of LBJ. "This tall Texan is going places, and we must find out what he's up to. This town has rarely seen a wheeler dealer like him, and he certainly isn't the modest type."

Actually it was J. Edgar himself who gathered firsthand evidence of a scandal involving LBJ and one of his mistresses. He was enjoying his usual lunch at the Mayflower Hotel when he saw LBJ enter the dining room with Alice Glass, whom he introduced to Clyde and J. Edgar before going on to their own table.

J. Edgar was well aware of who Alice was. She was the live-in lover of Charles E. Marsh, the newspaper magnate, who had walked out on his wife and children to live with Alice. Politicians, including Franklin D. Roosevelt himself, had visited the couple at their 18th-century manor house, Longlea, in Northern Virginia, a short drive from the heart of Washington. Marsh also entertained some of the best-known journalists in Washington, including columnist Drew Pearson.

Ostensibly, Alice and LBJ, who were spending a lot of time together, were trying to rescue Jews from Nazi Germany. J. Edgar had suspected they were having an affair, which was dangerous on LBJ's part, because Marsh was his principal political backer. His newspapers also promoted Johnson. Not only that, but J. Edgar had been told that Marsh was contributing thousands of dollars a year for LBJ's personal fund, since he could not live well on his \$10,000 annual salary as a congressman.

FBI agents had learned that in 1939, Johnson had been sold a tract of very valuable land, using \$5,000, a "knock-down price," to purchase land worth nearly half a million. He used Lady Bird's money to close the deal. "Today I have secured our financial future," Johnson reportedly told his staff in Texas.

At the end of their meals, Alice and LBJ walked back to J. Edgar's table. Alice invited both men to join her lover, Marsh, and herself at Longlea for the weekend, and the two G-Men accepted. "Lyndon here and Lady Bird will be there." Almost provocatively, she said, "You guys don't mind doubling up and sharing a bedroom?"

"That will be fine," J. Edgar said.

Alice gave a knowing look at LBJ and headed toward the elevator.

With a wink, LBJ told J. Edgar and Clyde, "Don't spread it around, but Alice keeps a room upstairs. Back in Texas we believe in 'love in the afternoon.'"

When the congressman left to join Alice upstairs, J. Edgar told Clyde, "We know his secrets, and he obviously knows ours. We should get along fine. He'll not make trouble for us, and we won't make trouble for him."

For years to come, J. Edgar and Clyde would keep abreast of Alice Glass, who eventually married Charles Marsh. Her long-enduring affair with then-President Johnson lasted until 1967. She so strongly objected to his conduct of the Vietnam War that she finally told him goodbye after thirty years of seductions.

Lyndon Johnson wasn't the only future President that J. Edgar began courting in the early stages of a national political career.

As a young law student, Richard M. Nixon had attended a recruitment lecture in Los Angeles organized by one of J. Edgar's FBI aides. So inspired was young Nixon by the speech that he flew to Washington and applied for a position with the Bureau. He had graduated from the Duke University School of Law in 1937.

His record looked impressive, and he went so far as to have a brief interview with Clyde. Nixon was so reserved, formal, and polite with Clyde that he rejected his application. "Not aggressive enough to be an FBI man," Clyde wrote.

An entire decade would pass before J. Edgar met Nixon at a 1947 hearing before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Truman didn't trust J. Edgar, but Nixon at that stage in his career viewed him as a tireless warrior against the rising menace of communism. *Newsweek* had featured J. Edgar on its cover against a background of Stars and Stripes. Behind the scenes, J. Edgar was feverishly working to consolidate his power and take control of all foreign intelligence for the U.S. in the post-war years.

J. Edgar was delighted at *Newsweek's* honor of him but embarrassed when the American Mothers' Committee of 1947 named him "Father of the Year." At the time these mothers were unaware of J. Edgar's private life and just assumed that he was married with children. In those days homosexuality was not mentioned in polite circles. When the committee learned that J. Edgar was not married, one of the secretaries, Elizabeth Harris, wrote J. Edgar a note of apology withdrawing the award. "Oh, dear, oh dear, we are so terribly embarrassed and must withdraw the award. Please forgive us. Our committee is certain that you'll meet the right woman and have a family of your own. When that happens, I am sure that you will be truly recognized as Father of the Year. With your pristine record in government, I feel confident that you will not only make the ideal husband and the perfect father to your sons. We just know they'll be boys and future FBI men themselves."

The Father of the Year mishap once again sparked rumors of J. Edgar's homosexuality. His guilt drove him to become a patient of Dr. Marshall Ruffin, a prominent psychiatrist in Washington. But sessions with Dr. Ruffin were not successful, because J. Edgar feared that revelations about his private life would somehow be exposed. He broke off the sessions, and he was right. Some of the secrets he confided to the psychiatrist later were made public by Ruffin's wife after her husband died.

During J. Edgar's appearance before the House Un-American Activities Committee, he was asked a number of questions by Nixon about communism. J. Edgar viewed each of these friendly queries as aiding him in his battle against communism. Unlike Clyde, J. Edgar was impressed with Nixon.

During recess, an aide to J. Edgar whispered that Nixon had used dirty tricks against Jerry Voorhis to take away his congressional seat in California. "I know all about it," J. Edgar said. "Clyde let me read his file before coming over here this morning. There's nothing wrong with using dirty tricks if the goal is to defeat communism. I think Nixon will be a man we can work with in the months ahead."

That morning when J. Edgar had read Nixon's file, he found it rather skimpy. Before J. Edgar's death, the dossier would grow into volumes. Unlike Lyndon Johnson, Nixon appeared to have been a virgin until his wedding night.

In Whittier, California, he'd dated Ola Florence Welch, the daughter of the local police chief. It was hardly a passionate romance, though it lasted for six years. She'd voted for Nixon's rival when he ran for student body president.

He and Ola were cast as Dido and Aeneas in a local production of *The Aeneid*. In the play, he was supposed to embrace Ola and declare his love for her before throwing himself on a funeral pyre. His lack of passion and simpering kiss caused the student audience in the theater to utter catcalls and boos.

Ola remembered going to her first dance with Nixon. "We sat in chairs looking at the other dancers. Nixon didn't dance."

When he finished college, Nixon was hired by the law firm of Wingert and Bewley in Whittier. But he asked to be taken off divorce cases. "I can't tolerate hearing women talk about the sexual incompatibility of their husbands. I turn fifteen colors of the rainbow."

In January of 1938, Nixon, who fancied himself becoming a movie star one day, was cast in *The Dark Tower*, a production of the Whittier Community Players. Thelma (Pat) Ryan, a twenty-six-year-old teacher, was cast in the role of Daphne. The playwright called for "a tall, dark, sullen beauty of twenty."

As Nixon later recalled, "That night a beautiful and vivacious young woman with Titian hair appeared whom I had never seen before. I found I could not take my eyes off her. For me it was a case of love at first sight."

She let him drive her home. But at her doorstep, he asked if he could date her. She rejected him, claiming "I'm very busy." "You shouldn't say that," he told her. "Someday I'm going to marry you."

Years later she recalled, "I thought he was nuts."

Over the next few months she kept turning him down. Most biographers have missed the reason why. Dreaming of

becoming an actress, as did many attractive young women in Hollywood in the 1930s, Pat was cast as an extra in the film *Small Town Girl* (1936), co-starring Janet Gaynor and matinee handsome Robert Taylor.



The top photo shows **Richard Nixon**, snapped in 1937 when he was a senior-year law student at Duke University. Before his death in 1972, J. Edgar had accumulated a massive file on him.

The FBI director had also ordered the compilation of a file on **Patricia Nixon** (*lower photo*), but except for a few “indiscretions” prior to her marriage, she seemed to be “clean as a hound’s tooth.” She spent most of his high-profile years within her private suite at the White House, hitting the bottle, perhaps as a means of forgetting the many woes her husband had caused her.

By the time they married, both Nixon and his wife had abandoned their dreams of becoming movie stars. “All fairly attractive young men and women who grew up in California in the 1930s wanted to be movie stars,” Patricia once confided to a group of Republican women she was addressing in Washington in 1969.

Gossip columnists at the time speculated that Gaynor and Taylor were having a torrid romance, not knowing that Gaynor had a preference for her own sex and that Taylor was involved in a torrid affair with the aviator Howard Hughes.

But Taylor also seduced women, and he began to date Pat and even managed to take her virginity. As she later admitted, “I developed such a powerful crush on Bob—call it love if you wish.”

But his attentions shifted, and he saw her less frequently, as he’d also launched an affair with Errol Flynn. She had dreams of his asking her to marry him, but soon realized it would never happen.

Almost in desperation she let Nixon date her. But he often wasn't free. Working in the law firm during the day, he labored in a plant at night. He'd secured some investors to launch a frozen orange juice business and was trying to get the packaging right. Pat warned him that no American consumer would ever purchase frozen orange juice.

One night the frozen orange juice bags exploded in a refrigerated rail boxcar, and all of Nixon's savings were wiped out. "For a while if we went to the movies, I had to pay," Pat remembered.

Finally, Pat agreed to marry Nixon in a small ceremony on June 21, 1940. Two years later they moved to Washington, where he landed a job in a government wartime agency that rationed tires to motorists.

In Washington, Nixon decided he didn't want to be a movie star or a lawyer, but a congressman. In 1945, back in California, he persuaded some powerful Republicans to back him for Congress, taking on the popular Jerry Voorhis who was a Democrat. Handsome and well educated, Voorhis had served five terms in the House of Representatives, backing Roosevelt's New Deal.

Nixon ran a dirty campaign against Voorhis, accusing him of being a communist backed by left wing groups who owed their allegiance to the Kremlin.

When Voorhis had served on the House Un-American Activities Committee, *Time* magazine asserted that he could be "counted on to temper rightist blasts for leftish lambs." He was tabbed as "Kid Atlas" in the press because he seemed to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders.

A Republican smear committee delved into Voorhis' past. No communist links were discovered, but there were charges of homosexuality. Some of these stemmed from 1923 and 1924, in Germany, when Voorhis was said to have engaged in sex with a number of German youths when he was a representative for the YMCA. In 1928, he founded and became headmaster of the Voorhis School for Boys in San Dimas, California, a post he retained until he was elected to Congress. The smear campaign located three young men who'd attended the school. Each of them claimed that he was coerced into a homosexual relationship with Voorhis.

The Republican campaign headquarters considered this too hot an issue to make known to the public. Instead they launched a whispering campaign. Voters in the district picked up their phones to hear, "Did you know that Jerry Voorhis, running for Congress, is both a homosexual and a communist?" Nixon trounced Voorhis on Election Day and was sent to Washington.

At FBI headquarters, J. Edgar told Lou Nichols, Clyde, and Guy, "Richard Nixon is just the man to help us in the Red-baiting campaign I plan to launch. He'll go far. I predict he'll become a Senator from his state, maybe even Governor of California one day."

"Why not President of the United States?" Guy asked.

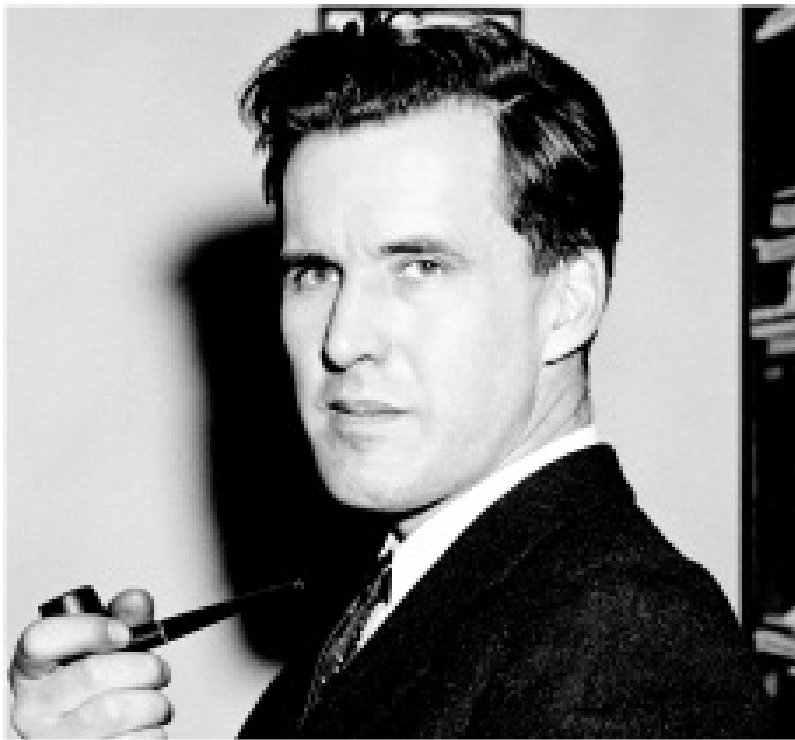
"Never that!" J. Edgar said. "He's no glad-hander. No personality. In a race against our friend Lyndon, the Texan would cut off Nixon's balls. I prefer the kid's politics, though, a hell of a lot more than I do that tall Texan's."

When Nixon met privately with J. Edgar two weeks later, Nixon confessed, "I knew Jerry Voorhis wasn't a commie. The man has high ideals and is strongly motivated to do good, the do-gooder type. But I had to win. That's what a lot of people in politics don't understand. The important thing is to win."

"You're preaching to the choir, Dick," J. Edgar said.

J. Edgar continued to view William (Wild Bill) Donovan as his chief rival for power even at war's end. During the war, Donovan as the director of the OSS had controlled some 12,000 agents, even several dozen in Nazi Berlin, and had scored victory after victory in counter-propaganda and disinformation activities, igniting J. Edgar's jealousy. OSS agents had also indulged in sabotage and demolition.

Seeing the war coming to an end in a few months, Donovan had met with Roosevelt in November of 1944 and presented his blueprint for a peacetime intelligence agency for the United States—something distinctly separate from the existing structure of the FBI. Other countries had such agencies, and FDR was convinced of the need for such an intelligence-gathering agency. Of course, Donovan proposed himself as a candidate to head such a giant spy network.



A hard-as-nails lawyer, Murray Chotiner, ran Nixon's 1946 congressional campaign against a popular Californian representing Los Angeles county, **Jerry Voorhis**, depicted above. The ruthless Chotiner had a motto: "Hit 'em, hit 'em, and hit 'em again for good measure."

He told the aspirant Richard Nixon, "What are the two most disgusting things you can be in America?—a communist and a homosexual. Actually, the worst thing of all time is to be a homosexual communist. We'll string Voorhis up by his balls on both charges."

Publicly, Nixon denounced Voorhis as a communist; privately, he launched a whispering campaign that Voorhis had a fondness for teenaged boys. Voorhis went down in a humiliating defeat and left politics forever. Nixon went on to greater and more notorious things.

Nixon was just as rough on his wife, Pat, who bore their first child, Tricia, at the start of the campaign. When she walked in while he was meeting with his aides, he shouted at her, "Would you get the fuck out of here...and stay out! I'm busy."

After the election, Voorhis told a reporter, "I'm rid of Nixon now and all his lies. His wife will have to live with him forever, or at least until she wises up and divorces the tyrant."

FDR claimed that Donovan "is a man who has one-hundred ideas a day, ninety-five of which are awful." [During the war, Donovan had endorsed a proposal to saturate Japan's cities with tiny delayed-action incendiary bombs attached to millions of bats, who would supposedly nest in the mostly wood-built city of Osaka. He also supported the use of chemical weapons against enemy targets.] "However," FDR continued, "how many men come up with five good ideas in a lifetime?"

As a means of accumulating feedback, Roosevelt sent copies of Donovan's plan for the establishment of a separate intelligence agency to various government agencies, including both Army and Naval intelligence, to officials at the State Department, and to J. Edgar at the FBI.

Plotting with Clyde, J. Edgar leaked the report to Walter Trohan, the Washington correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune*. Publication brought an avalanche of attacks from the nation's press, *The New York Daily News* charging that it was "another New Deal move right along the Hitler line."

The outcry became so loud that in a private meeting with Donovan, FDR informed him that he would not be allowed to set up such a new agency. Donovan accused J. Edgar of "deliberate sabotage. He wants to keep all the power for himself."

Roosevelt's untimely death put the plan for an alternative intelligence agency temporarily in mothballs, but it was revived when Truman became President. He was opposed to launching a "world-wide Gestapo-like agency," but he recognized the need for a U.S. agency that specialized in foreign intelligence. He told Brigadier General Harry Vaughan, his chief military aide, that, "No man, especially one J. Edgar Hoover, should control such an agency and also the FBI. Hoover is already too big for his britches."

Truman rarely allowed J. Edgar to come into the Oval Office, but agreed to meet with him there about the new agency. In a tense session, J. Edgar made his pitch that the agency become a subdivision within the FBI and under his control. The President flatly rejected the proposal.

When J. Edgar persisted, Truman snapped at him, "You're out of bounds. Don't forget one thing: I am the President of the United States. I decide. Case closed."

Humiliated, J. Edgar rushed out of the White House and into a waiting FBI limousine. Back at FBI headquarters, he called a confab with Clyde and some of his top agents. "We must do everything in our power to see that the Missouri jackass is not

re-elected in 1948.”

In 1946, Truman moved ahead to launch the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), appointing neither J. Edgar nor Donovan as its director, but anointing Rear Admiral Sidney W. Souers, who served only five months before being replaced by Lt. General Hoyt S. Vandenberg.

A former executive of the Piggly Wiggly grocery chain, Souers had been an admiral in the Naval Reserve and had almost no background in intelligence. He found the new agency filled with jealousy, conflict, and strife, and urged that its functions be turned over to the FBI, which J. Edgar certainly wanted.

His replacement, Vandenberg, was just biding his time during his administration of the CIA, waiting for an appointment as U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff, which is the position he really wanted. He was eventually forced by presidential edict to take over the South American intelligence operations which had been run by J. Edgar up until then. When Vandenberg requested that J. Edgar turn over the FBI's complete dossiers on South America, the director ordered that all U.S. intelligence, including vital contacts, be burned. Vandenberg recalled, “We got a lot of empty safes and a pair of yellow rubber gloves—that was it!”

Privately, and without the President's approval, J. Edgar continued surveillance in Mexico, duplicating the efforts of the new CIA.

In 1947, Congress passed a bill creating the National Security Council. The CIA was placed under that board's direction. By then, the CIA was being popularly compared to the KGB in the Soviet Union.

With foreign intelligence removed from the scope of his authority, J. Edgar set out on another massive attack plan on the homefront. “If the stubborn jackass from Missouri won't let me fight communists abroad, I'll do so on the homefront, beginning with Soviet spies in the government. We'll knock them off one by one or else use a machine gun in case we run into a nest of these treasonous bastards. We'll go after the commie sons of bitches not only in Washington but in Hollywood.”

Early on the morning of February 26, 1947, Clyde ordered two agents to begin a file on Frank Sinatra. It was learned that he was flying to Miami and on to Havana. Agents in both Florida and Cuba were told to monitor his trip and to report on the people he met. During the presidency of John F. Kennedy, the Sinatra file would balloon.

But on this cold morning, it began as a skimpy document. Many stories about Sinatra's mob connections had already been published in newspapers in New York and Los Angeles. The singer was linked to such gangsters as Willie Moretti, who was said to have launched Sinatra's career as a Big Band singer in New Jersey.

J. Edgar's spies in Cuba had tipped him off that high-ranking Mafia figures were meeting at the Hotel Nacional in Havana, where Sinatra was slated to entertain them.

One report asserted that Sinatra was scheduled to meet with Lucky Luciano, who, after his forced deportation from the United States, had moved to Cuba, hoping to run his crime syndicate ninety miles from the Florida coast.

Ever since he was a young man, J. Edgar had witnessed the burgeoning growth of the American Mafia, especially when he was director of the Bureau of Investigation in the 1920s when Prohibition was the (frequently violated) law of the land. He was told at the time that some 250,000 speakeasies were operating in the United States, a problem for the Treasury Department—not for him.

During the Roaring Twenties and into the Depression era, J. Edgar had sat silently by as bootleggers in such cities as Chicago and New York had become multi-millionaires. With all that money, many gangsters had developed side businesses such as prostitution, labor racketeering, and loan-sharking.

The role of J. Edgar and the Mafia was controversial and long criticized and debated. At one point he claimed that organized crime did not exist in the United States.

In 1993, an investigative TV documentary on PBS alleged that, “J. Edgar Hoover corrupted the very mission of the FBI. It was while he was director that the Mafia was allowed to grow rich and powerful.” The rumor still persists that the mob, especially Meyer Lansky, had incriminating photographs of J. Edgar performing fellatio on Clyde on the terrace of their hotel suite on Miami Beach.

While J. Edgar was denying that organized crime existed, he was regularly hob-knobbing in the 1930s with such mob figures as Frank Costello. It was reported that J. Edgar viewed some members of organized crime as his “ideological kinsmen.” At the Stork Club in Manhattan, he was seen on three different occasions having drinks with Costello. He reportedly told the gangster, “Just stay out of my bailiwick, and I'll stay out of yours.”

An inveterate gambler at the horse races, J. Edgar was very tolerant of gambling in America. He had good reason not to get anything on Costello. At the races he'd receive tips on the horses from columnist Walter Winchell, who picked them up from Frank Erickson, the nation's leading bookmaker. The tips came from Costello himself and were “sure things”—meaning horse races that had been fixed. The FBI director made more money at the tracks than he did working for the FBI.

J. Edgar was spotted once in the coffee shop of the Waldorf-Astoria having a light lunch with Costello. Reportedly, the gangster—supposedly in a flash of sardonic humor—told him, “I've got to be careful of my associates. They'll accuse me of consorting with questionable characters.”

In August of 1937, under heavy pressure from the government, the FBI swept through three states, arresting gangsters in the prostitution racket. One mobster jailed was one of Luciano's key men. "The Boss of Bosses" had been sent to prison the year before by Manhattan Attorney General Thomas Dewey. Luciano was convicted on ninety counts of extortion and "for the direction of harlotry." But even from his cell he retained his position as the father of organized crime in America, issuing orders to Lansky, Costello, and Joe Adonis, among others.

Right after this crackdown, for no apparent reason, J. Edgar's interest in the Mafia waned. It was at this time that rumors spread that the Mafia had blackmail evidence on him.

During World War II, the FBI often worked with the Mob, members of which protected vital waterfronts such as those in New York and New Jersey from Nazi saboteurs.



In the 1940s and 50s, *La Voz* (Frank Sinatra, nicknamed "The Voice") decided that "Havana, not Chicago, is my kind of town."

"Cuban teenagers today still speak of Sinatra," claimed Bill Lezzi, writer for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. "They listen as their grandparents and parents play his LPs and talk about his music. Cuban TV occasionally airs his life story. Sinatra is seen by more *Habañeros* now than when he used to visit."

At the end of the war, Luciano was released from prison and deported to his native Italy. From Naples, he ran the International Crime Syndicate, directing shipments of millions of dollars worth of heroin into the United States.

Both Clyde and J. Edgar knew that Luciano had only one reason for flying to Cuba, and that was to establish a base closer to the United States.

Through his so-called "girlfriend" and informant, Lela Rogers, J. Edgar learned that Luciano had given her daughter, Ginger Rogers, "a whole lot of money" to appear at the Copa Room at the Hotel Nacional in Havana. "Lucky told Ginger that she sure could wiggle her ass but can't sing a god damn note," Lela told J. Edgar and Clyde.

In 1947, J. Edgar and his agents were aware of the upcoming mobsters' convention in Havana, but weren't certain of Sinatra's role in it. Was he being brought in just to sing Italian songs to the gangsters?

An FBI agent was secretly observing Sinatra when he disembarked in Miami from a plane that had flown from Idlewild Airport in New York. Sinatra was seen being ushered into a black limousine, in which he was driven to the home of the Fischetti Brothers. All three of them—Charles, Rocco, and Joe—had just attended the funeral of their friend, Al Capone, in Chicago.

During Sinatra's stay at the Fischetti villa, a number of beautiful women, presumably hookers, were seen coming and going at all hours of the night.

Before flying to Cuba, Sinatra was driven to Hallandale, north of Miami Beach, where he sang a medley of ten of his favorite songs at the Colonial Inn. This was a swanky gambling casino owned by Joe Adonis and Meyer Lansky.

The following day Sinatra and the Fischetti brothers were seen boarding a plane from Miami to Havana where two FBI agents were waiting to pick up their trail. Each of the men carried an attaché case. The FBI learned that the quartet carried a total of sixteen million dollars in U.S. currency. Sinatra's attaché case contained two million of that stash from Luciano's illegal operations within the United States.

In Havana, at the Hotel Nacional, two bodyguards escorted Sinatra and the Fischetti brothers to Luciano's penthouse suite. The Fischettis later left, but Sinatra moved into the suite with Luciano. Two days later, he and Luciano traveled by Cadillac to the gangster's seaside villa in suburban Miramar where more beautiful girls had been shipped in.

The FBI reported that Albert (The Executioner) Anastasia and Joey (Bananas) Bonanno were among the gangsters checking into the Nacional. After some private meetings, the mob, on the first night of their "convention," congregated within the dining room of the hotel, where Sinatra sang some of their favorite numbers, Costello requesting "Stella by Starlight."

It was later learned that Sinatra was being offered hugely profitable business deals in Havana, including interest in a projected resort and casino which was slated to become the most luxurious in the Caribbean. That deal eventually fell through.

Much to Sinatra's regret, he was spotted by American newspapermen, and his link to the mob was widely reported back in the United States. It was the beginning of a bad reputation he'd never live down.

Clyde and J. Edgar were besieged with calls demanding to know what they were going to do about Sinatra and how they were going to handle Luciano's return. Clyde deflected such calls, claiming that President Truman had restricted their authority to the domestic front, not Cuba.

As time went by, J. Edgar and Clyde would learn more and more about Sinatra, but their early conclusion was that he was a notorious womanizer and "the least faithful husband who ever existed."

Clyde said, "Apparently, he's signing up to be a money runner for the Mafia."

J. Edgar's hands-off policy toward the Mafia drew a continuing barrage of criticism from the press, not only during the time he ran the FBI, but for years after his death.

"Hoover paid so little attention to organized crime that we can accuse him of dereliction of duty," wrote historian Albert Fried. He said that J. Edgar thought that organized crime "constituted no immediate danger to the established order and that gang members were in fact pillars of the status quo."

Privately J. Edgar said that the mob "has a vested interest in the health of the free enterprise system and represents America's triumph over communism."

A future director of the CIA, Richard Helms, said, "I always thought that the reason J. Edgar did not take on the Mafia had nothing to do with blackmail but had everything to do with the fact that he was concerned that his beloved FBI would be tarnished with all the money that was sloshing around the Mafia, that they might buy off some of his agents, bribe them, or corrupt them. He wanted a squeaky-clean outfit."

"Why take the risk of going after the Mafia," J. Edgar asked William C. Sullivan, the number three man at the FBI. "The Mafia is too powerful, too much to tackle."

One footnote reported at that 1947 mobster convention at the Hotel Nacional was the arrival of Clyde himself. He had been assigned a complimentary suite immediately adjacent to Lucky Luciano.

Although it might appear that he was in Havana to investigate Sinatra and the mob, he was not. He had been suffering from bronchitis, and he arrived in Havana a sick man. J. Edgar sent him to Cuba to recuperate. He could not go himself because he had to testify at a hearing in Washington.

Several times, Clyde spotted Sinatra coming and going from Luciano's suite, but at the time the singer did not know who Clyde was.

At the U.S. consulate office in Havana, a legate had been instructed to wine and dine Clyde—"and provide him with anything he wants." The official knew what that meant. All the VIPs arriving from the United States wanted to be fixed up with beautiful hookers, and the young man making arrangements for Clyde assumed he wanted the same.

The first night in town, he wine and dined Clyde at the Nacional. The young man, whose name has never been revealed, was having an affair with a buxom Swedish blonde-haired actress who had run afoul of U.S. Immigration. She needed help from J. Edgar's office to clear her entry into the United States because she was known to have slept with high-ranking Nazi officers during the war.

The legate figured he could solve two problems at once—a beautiful woman for Clyde to seduce and a visa for this Swedish bombshell with the questionable past.

When Clyde flew back to Washington, he told Guy Hotell and J. Edgar what happened after he'd dined with the consulate official. "I went back to my suite and pulled off my clothes and draped them on the sofa. I wanted to soak in a hot tub. I went first into a small adjoining kitchenette where I drank a large glass of fresh orange juice."

“Then I walked buck-assed naked into my bedroom heading for the bath. There I saw this blonde thing lying on top of my bedcovers fingering her bush. I rushed to wrap a robe around myself and called downstairs. The sexpot got kicked out of my suite. I was furious that he’d pull a cheap stunt like that.”



Frank Sinatra consistently lied about his associations with gangster **Lucky Luciano** (*above*). The singer told Hedda Hopper, “Even if I’d caught his name when introduced, I probably wouldn’t have associated it with the underworld character.”

Later, Hedda claimed (but not in her column) “That was pure bullshit.”

In Havana and later in Italy, Sinatra and Luciano shared hotel suites and a lot more with each other, including visits to a Havana whorehouse that advertised, “There is no human desire we can’t satisfy.”

“Sex for Sale” might have been the motto of pre-Castro Havana, and Lucky claimed “Sinatra enjoyed every hour he spent there. I saw to that.”

Within the hour, J. Edgar was on the phone to the U.S. consulate in Havana. “Fire that god damn pimp who tried to set up Tolson with that Nazi Swede in some sort of entrapment. You probably had hidden cameras. As for the whore, tell the bitch she’ll never get a visa to enter the United States. I’ll see to that.” He slammed down the phone and turned to Clyde, “At least Havana cured your bronchitis.”

Even though stripped of his international surveillance powers by the CIA, J. Edgar continued to fancy himself as the true head of America’s international police network. He still had an informant in Paris who sent disturbing news that Doris Duke, the American tobacco heiress and the richest woman in the world, planned to marry playboy Porfirio Rubirosa at the Dominican Legation in Paris on September 1, 1947.

It was more than a society wedding, where an heiress was purchasing a heavily endowed stud for sex, and he was marrying her for her vast riches. J. Edgar viewed this odd couple’s mating as a threat to the security of the United States.

In Rome, the Department of State had been so concerned about Duke marrying Rubi that they momentarily revoked her passport, making it impossible for her to travel. Through her vast retinue of attorneys, she managed to get her passport returned. She immediately booked the entire First Class compartment on an Air France plane to Paris where she joined Rubi, who was having a torrid affair with Zsa Zsa Gabor.

The State Department feared that Duke’s vast fortune might fall into the dangerous hands of Rubi and his sponsor in international crime, Rafael Trujillo, the brutal dictator of the Dominican Republic. Rubi had wanted to marry Duke on his home island in the Caribbean. J. Edgar feared this would be a dangerous step. He was informed that the D.R. followed the Napoleonic code, which granted the husband authority over communal property. Duke rejected the idea of getting married in the D.R., but agreed to marry him at the Dominican Legation in Paris, which international law interpreted as being on Dominican soil without actually being on island.

Both the FBI and the State Department viewed Rubi and Trujillo “as shady characters, really international gangsters.” J. Edgar stashed an informant at the wedding ceremony. His ultimate fear was that Rubi somehow would take over Duke’s estate, which might give Trujillo and him control over Duke Power and the electrical grid of the southern United States.

Carmel Snow, the editor of *Harper’s Bazaar*, prevailed upon Duke to call her lawyers and draw up a pre-nuptial agreement. Duke gave in and did just that.

Two attorneys with briefcases arrived at the Dominican Legation with papers minutes before the ceremony. They confronted Rubi and demanded he sign the pre-nuptial.

At first he balked, but he was told that if he did not sign, the marriage would not take place. At that point in his life, he had only fifty U.S. dollars in his striped pants. Infuriated, he signed the pre-nuptial.

As J. Edgar’s informant later claimed, “Rubirosa looked like one of those fierce Miura bulls about to charge a red cape. I’ve never seen a man look so mad. To show his contempt, he smoked a cigarette throughout the wedding ceremony.”

For three hours before the wedding, he’d been drinking heavily. At the end of the ceremony, he fainted. “Big Boy passed out in my arms,” Duke later told Snow.

Rubi got his revenge on his honeymoon with Duke at Cap d’Antibes along the French Riviera. J. Edgar, through Clyde, ordered that the honeymoon bungalow of Rubi and Duke be bugged. No state secrets were discovered on the wiretapping, but J. Edgar and Clyde did learn that Rubi withheld sex from Duke for forcing him to sign that pre-nuptial.

J. Edgar also learned that Rubi excused himself on the morning of the second day of their honeymoon, claiming he was going out to purchase a package of cigarettes. He was gone for three days and nights.

It was later learned that he’d encountered a former lover, known as “Manouche,” who invited him for a drink. She later spoke about their fling to Alice Leone Moats, author of *The Million Dollar Studs*. According to Manouche, “Rubi’s sex organ was long and pointed and it hurt. It was nothing for *ce cher* Rubi to take on two or three women a night. Late at night when he was good and drunk, he didn’t give a damn what kind of legs were opening.”



In one of the few happy moments of their short, traumatic marriage, **Porfirio Rubirosa** dines with his wife, **Doris Duke**, the richest woman in the world.

As Rubi's biographer claimed, "Women heard about it, wondered about it, whispered about it, had to see it, hold it, have it—and who was he to deny them? Doris Duke bought it, but didn't get to enjoy it as much as she'd wished."

The writer was obviously referring to the mammoth endowment of the "Last Playboy of the Western World." Rubi once told a reporter, "I am a man devoted to the pursuit of pleasure."

Sometimes it was a young man opening up for Rubi, as well as a string of beautiful women.

After the wedding, Trujillo appointed Rubi as the Dominican Republic's Ambassador to Argentina. The U.S. government refused to issue Duke a diplomatic visa. But she went as a private citizen, flying to join her husband in Buenos Aires in a converted B-25 bomber she'd purchased for him.

On the day after her arrival, bribed servants reported to her that Rubi had been having an affair with Evita Peron, the wife of the Argentinian dictator, Juan Peron. The FBI also learned that Rubi was associating with former Nazis who had fled from Berlin shortly before or after it collapsed during the spring of 1945.

"Rubi was a real whore," claimed the author and columnist Doris Lilly, the lover of Ronald Reagan. She also claimed that Duke had tried to commit suicide over Rubi by cutting her wrists, but was discovered by a servant and rushed to the hospital in time to save her life.

Even though J. Edgar had been officially stripped of his intelligence gathering authority in South America, his job going to the CIA, he nevertheless kept his informants and occasionally sent agents South of the Border.

He openly bragged to Louis Nichols and Guy Hotell that, "I saved Latin America from going communist." His boast was that he had prevented Duke from purchasing a fleet of cargo ships in the Caribbean that, had the deal gone through, would have been controlled by Rubi. He thought he could make millions transporting arms from one Latin American republic to another republic ripe for a communist takeover, including Cuba.

J. Edgar never explained how he did that, although Clyde obviously knew. "Instead of a communist Cuba, the United States, were it not for me, might have faced twenty Latin American countries controlled by the Kremlin."

The director also claimed that he foiled a plot to have Duke assassinated and her estate taken over by Rubi. Again, he didn't reveal just how he accomplished that.

There were many unanswered questions within the dossier the FBI collected on Duke over the years. Long before J. Edgar died, most of her file was destroyed. Unknown to J. Edgar and Clyde in the early 1940s was that Duke entertained many Nazi notables, especially Hermann Göring. "Surely Duke wasn't a Nazi spy like Errol Flynn?" J. Edgar asked.

Her file showed that in 1944 and 1945 she contributed greatly to the welfare of merchant seamen and spent weeks at a time bestowing food, cigarettes, and liquor on them. "She was a traveling USO," in the words of one reporter.

"I'm happier now than I've ever been in my life being with a lot of swell, interesting guys," she told the press. "I guess I've discovered it's fun to work."

FBI agents learned that she took “dozens upon dozens” of these young men to bed. She later told Jimmy Donahue, the dissipated and chronically scandalous cousin of the Woolworth heiress Barbara Hutton, “of all the men I’ve seduced, I’ve never found one with the dimensions of Rubi. I know you’ve had him too. Did you ever find anyone bigger?”

“Once in Morocco I encountered this mulatto boxer from the Sudan,” Donahue said. “But he was half an inch shorter than Rubi.”

Leaving her daughter, Ginger Rogers, back in Hollywood, Lela Rogers flew into Washington, configuring herself as “arm candy” for J. Edgar at a party honoring newly elected members to Congress.

In the 1946 elections, Republicans had swept into control of both houses. Among the newly elected politicians on hand to greet J. Edgar that night were John F. Kennedy, Democrat from Massachusetts, Richard M. Nixon, Republican from California, and Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, Republican from Wisconsin. Each of these rising young politicians would be closely linked to J. Edgar in the future.

As Louis Nichols later said, “We already had files on Nixon, McCarthy, and Kennedy. They were on what J. Edgar called his watch list. Our file on Kennedy was 250 pages before he took office ... and growing. Most of it dealt with his womanizing. McCarthy was a closet homosexual, and Nixon was squeaky clean sexually but had shady business dealings with big businessmen back in California, guys like the tycoon Gordon Howard.”

In the post-war years, J. Edgar and Clyde had two main concerns during their investigations of the private lives of prominent Americans: What were they doing sexually, and were they or had they ever been a member of the Communist Party?

FBI agents fanned out to gather evidence where they could find it, planting bugs, wiretapping phones, and even committing “bag jobs,” or robberies at the offices of such magazines as *Amerasia*, whose leftist views were interpreted as propaganda for the Chinese communists. Although arrests were made and the *Amerasia* editors put on trial, none of them was convicted.

Because of the FBI’s mishandling of the investigation, Attorney General Tom Clark was publicly forced to back away from his accusations of communism. Embarrassed, he attacked J. Edgar, putting the blame entirely on the FBI.

J. Edgar never handled criticism well, and his heretofore friendly relationship with Clark soured after that.

Pressure mounted on J. Edgar to “name names” of all those Soviet agents he claimed were working within the U.S. government. The director knew he had to produce some actual spies sooner than later.

Luck had been on his side during World War II, when a saboteur (George Dasch) had walked into the offices of the FBI, revealing Nazi plans for a massive campaign of wartime sabotage within the United States. Luck shined on J. Edgar once again when an otherwise unknown woman named Elizabeth Bentley walked into the FBI headquarters in New Haven, Connecticut, and revealed to agents there that she was a Soviet spy. She was a most unlikely spy, the daughter of a straight-laced family of Episcopalian New Englanders.

In New Haven, she revealed only a fraction of what she knew about Russian spying in the United States.

The agent didn’t really seem to believe her, perhaps thinking she was an incoherent crank who had wandered accidentally in from the street. After interviewing her, he reported to the FBI in Washington that she was “very vague, appeared drunk, and did not provide any convincing evidence. I recommended that she go home and sober up.”

A month later, she met with her KGB “handler,” Anatoly Gorsky. Exceedingly drunk, she became angry at him and called him a “gangster.” She also threatened to go to the FBI and reveal all she knew about Soviet espionage in the United States. Apparently, he was not aware that she’d already been interviewed by the FBI. The next morning when she sobered up, she realized that she was in imminent danger for having made such a threat. Indeed, it was later revealed that the Kremlin had become alarmed at her condition and had ordered Gorsky “to get rid of her.”



Soviet spy **Elizabeth Bentley**. Although newspapers described her (without actually running her photograph) as a shapely and beautiful blonde, she wasn't that at all. J. Edgar thought she looked like some dumpy American housewife.

After Clyde investigated Bentley's sexual past, he concluded, "She'd fuck a tree if she could."

In desperation, she drove to Washington and was interviewed by Guy Hotell at FBI headquarters. Before him, she claimed that she'd been an American spy for the Soviet Union from 1938 to 1945. She also told Guy that she thought her life was in danger.

Her story could have inspired a Cold War novel. It began when she won a fellowship to the University of Florence (Italy), where she had joined a local anti-Fascist group. There she fell in love with Mario Casella, a faculty member.

He convinced her that upon her return to America she should join a communist front group, the American League Against War and Fascism. She did just that, and in March of 1935, she became a card-carrying member of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA).

Bentley was employed by an organization in New York City known as the Italian Library of Information. She soon discovered that it was a propaganda bureau for Italian fascists. She reported this to CPUSA headquarters, volunteering her services to spy on Mussolini's fascists. Her contact became Jacob Golos, a Russian émigré and naturalized U.S. citizen who was the key Soviet intelligence agent in America. She did not know that at the time nor did she know that he was plotting the assassination of Leon Trotsky in Mexico, a murder which took place in 1940.

Bentley and Golos became lovers, and he assigned her the code name of *Umnitsa* or "Miss Wise." As a communist spy, she came into contact with everyone from dedicated Stalinists to "romantic idealists." When Golos suffered a fatal heart attack late in 1943, the Russians assigned Bentley to take his place.

In her new position, the Soviets had cause to worry about Bentley's stability. An alcoholic, she suffered bouts of depression and was also promiscuous, known to be "loose-lipped" with her male conquests, often U.S. servicemen.

As her paranoia deepened, she took on a new lover (unnamed), whom she suspected of working either for the Soviets or the FBI. She finally decided that he was a spy for the Kremlin after he tried to force her to emigrate to the Soviet Union, where she feared she would be put to death. Afraid for her life, she had descended, in August of 1945, onto the FBI office in New Haven.

Guy found her story convincing, and he turned her over to Clyde, who after hearing only five minutes of her testimony summoned J. Edgar. “This could be big,” Clyde told his boss and lover.

To J. Edgar, she turned over a list of 150 American citizens, including 37 federal workers, whom she claimed were spies for the Kremlin.

After an extensive interview, J. Edgar had Guy drive Bentley to an undisclosed location for her own safety. J. Edgar immediately notified William Stephenson, head of British security in the Western Hemisphere. Stephenson alerted his intelligence contact in London, the soon-to-be infamous Kim Philby, who was a double agent, spying for the Soviets.

It was obvious she’d been outed because the Soviets made no further contacts with her, although she remained a potential target for assassination.

Philby eventually came under suspicion, but British intelligence did not investigate him at that time, considering him “an old school Brit, loyal as Churchill.”

The Soviet agents who had been identified as such by Bentley were rounded up. In every case they either evoked the Fifth Amendment or maintained their innocence. J. Edgar had evidence that they were lying but he couldn’t officially corroborate Bentley’s testimony without exposing one of the U.S. government’s most guarded secrets. If he had, it would have compromised an explosive piece of evidence that J. Edgar felt was too vital even to share with Harry Truman, the sitting U.S. President.

It was the “Venona Project,” the core of which involved a machine that could decrypt cables between Soviet agents working in America and the Kremlin. These cabled messages, decrypted through Venona, had revealed that Bentley was telling the truth.

Tom Clark, the Attorney General and (nominally) J. Edgar’s boss, agreed that the success (or the very existence) of the Venona Project should never be revealed at various trials. “There’s no way we want the Soviets to know we’ve cracked their code,” he told J. Edgar.

But for reasons of her own, in April of 1948 Bentley went public with her revelations during an interview with reporters from *The New York World-Telegram*. Without running her picture—an odd editorial decision—she was identified as “a beautiful young blonde,” which she wasn’t. Actually at this point in her life she’d begun to look rather dumpy. *The New York Journal American* called her a “shapely blonde and a blue-eyed New Yorker who lured secrets from her Soviet lover in the boudoir.” A.J. Liebling of the *New Yorker* ridiculed her, labeling her a “Nutmeg Mata Hari.”

This catchy, albeit somewhat enigmatic, phrase was picked up by other newspapers, even though no one knew exactly what Liebling meant, except to suggest that Bentley was a spicy, aromatic seed about to fall off a Soviet tree into a spice grinder.

After these press revelations, she was, of course, summoned to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. After the official airing of Bentley’s revelations, Thomas Dewey and other Republicans attacked Truman, accusing him of covering up communist espionage within his administration.

As the weeks went by, J. Edgar and Clyde grew increasingly concerned about Bentley’s credibility as a witness. In a memo, J. Edgar wrote, “She’s bordering on some mental pitfall.” Her drinking had increased, and she was involved in three automobile accidents while driving drunk. Surprisingly, her driving license was not suspended. One night she picked up a male hitchhiker and drove him to a secluded motel. He turned out to be psychotic and beat her so severely she almost died.

Skeptics doubted some of her revelations, especially when she claimed she had had advance knowledge of the Doolittle air raid over Japan in the middle of World War II. She also maintained that she had transmitted the exact time and place of the D-Day landings on the beaches of Normandy to the Soviet Union.

Many historians were skeptical of the claims made in her 1951 autobiography. It wasn’t until the 1990s, when Venona transcripts along with some Soviet intelligence archives were made public, that many of Bentley’s charges were verified.

But in spite of his many doubts about Bentley, J. Edgar stood by her testimony, perhaps to glorify his own achievements in exposing Soviet agents working within the United States.

“The testimony of Elizabeth Bentley had a major impact on making eunuchs out of many Soviet spies in America,” he said. What he didn’t say was that her revelations ruined many lives, both the innocent and the guilty.

Bentley’s notorious life came to an end on December 3, 1963. At the age of fifty-five, she was felled by abdominal cancer at Grace-New Haven Hospital in Connecticut. *Time* magazine gave her death only a two-sentence mention in its “Milestones” section, yet she paved the way for the emergence of Red-baiting Joseph McCarthy, and she was the fuse that lit the anti-communist explosion set off in America in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

One of the most shocking outings of a Soviet agent was the exposure of Harry Dexter White, an American economist who in

the 1930s had been one of the chief architects of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. He had been a former Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Treasury.

White had participated in the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference that ultimately led to the creation of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. By 1946, he was calling for improved relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Truman nominated him for the post of director of the International Monetary Fund in spite of a damaging twenty-eight-page memo sent by J. Edgar to the President, accusing White of being a communist.

J. Edgar viewed Truman's rejection of his memo as a direct slap in his face. At the time, Truman was being besieged with accusations against hundreds of suspected communists, and he thought J. Edgar's charges lacked credibility.

"I'm deluged with mail accusing everybody of being a communist," Truman told Lyndon B. Johnson. "You won't believe the bullshit that comes over this desk, especially from our boy Hoover. One minute some crank claims that Eleanor Roosevelt is the mistress of Josef Stalin. The next letter claims that Clark Gable is on the payroll of the Kremlin. A letter arrived the other day charging that Ambassador Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy] was working with American capitalists to re-launch a new Nazi Party to bring Hitler back to power."

"But Hitler, so they say, committed suicide," Johnson said.

"Not according to my informants," Truman said with a smirk. "The next thing I hear about you, Lyndon, is that you're working to have Texas secede from the Union and become Soviet-occupied territory."

"That wouldn't be such a bad idea, Harry, if Stalin made me President of Texas," Johnson said jokingly.

Before HUAC, Elizabeth Bentley had testified that White had given the U.S. Treasury's engraving plates for the printing of the "occupation currency" then used within the American zone of occupied Germany to the Soviet Union, which had then used them to print counterfeit currency. Russian soldiers had then exchanged this counterfeit money, according to Bentley, for consumer goods and hard currency. This had created a black market and caused serious inflation in the occupied and war-torn country. It was estimated that this counterfeiting cost the United States a quarter of a billion dollars.

Summoned before HUAC on August 13, 1948, White denied he was a communist or had ever been one.

In 1950 White was positively identified as a Soviet spy by J. Edgar's FBI. Venona decrypts revealed he was operating under the code name of "Jurist."

J. Edgar claimed that White "should have been sent to the electric chair and branded a traitor."

But three days after testifying before HUAC, White died of a heart attack on his New Hampshire farm. He was fifty-five years old. An overdose of digitalis was reported as the cause of his death.

Bentley also exposed Laurence Duggan, who had functioned as director of the U.S. State Department's operations in South America during World War II. In New York, Clyde and Guy Hotell, on orders from J. Edgar, questioned Duggan extensively about accusations that he was engaged in espionage for the Soviet Union.

It was claimed that Duggan had been recruited as a Soviet spy in the mid-1930s by the leftist journalist Hede Massing. Duggan was charged with supplying the Soviets with intelligence, including copies of confidential cables, some of them sent by William Bullitt, U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union.

Indeed, although Duggan had transmitted information to the Soviets, he had resigned from his position at the State Department in 1944, telling his Soviet contacts that, "The only thing which kept me at this hateful job where I did not get out of my tuxedo for two weeks, every night attending a reception, was the idea of being useful for the communist cause."

To the FBI, however, Duggan denied all charges. But later evidence gathered as a result of the Venona Project, which decrypted Soviet intelligence cables, revealed that Duggan was indeed a spy operating under the code name of "Frank." His last message sent to the KGB in Moscow was dated November 12, 1944.

Ten days after Clyde and Guy questioned Duggan, he fell to his death from the sixteenth floor of the office of the Institute of International Education in midtown Manhattan. The New York Police Department concluded that he "either accidentally fell or jumped."

Clyde Tolson had a different conclusion. "I have little doubt that his KGB agent pushed him. Duggan knew too much about Soviet spying in America to be allowed to testify before a committee."

Another casualty of Bentley's testimony was William Remington, a mid-level government economist who was employed in various Federal government positions until "the blonde spy" presented her accusations.

He'd acquired a security clearance in 1941 when he worked for the Office of Price Administration, even though he admitted having been active in communist-allied political groups. In March of 1942, he began to pass secret information on to Bentley, including data on U.S. airplane production.

When Bentley outed Remington in 1945, FBI agents trailed him but learned little, as a result of how, by that time, he had become disillusioned with communism and had broken off his relationships with what he called "my radical friends of yesterday." When questioned by the FBI, he denied all accusations that he had ever had any communist affiliations.

To shift suspicion from himself, Remington became an anti-communist informer for the FBI, labeling as communists "Negro nationalists," extreme liberals, his estranged wife, Ann Remington, and his hated mother-in-law, Elizabeth Moos, both avowed communists.

In spite of that, another loyalty investigation of him was opened in 1948. In hearings in June of that year, he was called “a boob who was duped by commie agents,” according to the *Washington Post*. At loyalty review hearings he stated, “I divorced my wife, Ann, because she’s a communist.”

On NBC Radio’s *Meet the Press*, Bentley referred to Remington as a communist. He sued for libel and settled out of court with NBC for \$10,000. But then his divorced wife turned against him, claiming he was a communist spy.

Tried and convicted for perjury, he was sentenced to five years in prison. The *Washington Daily News* claimed that “in Russia he would have been shot without a trial.”

The verdict was appealed and a new trial was conducted. It concluded that Remington was guilty of two counts of perjury for lying about his communist links. This time he was sentenced to three years in prison.

Jailed at Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary in Pennsylvania, Remington met George McCoy, a violent man with an I.Q. of 61. He taunted Remington about his communism. On the morning of November 22, 1954, McCoy and another inmate, Lewis Cagle Jr., a 17-year-old juvenile delinquent, murdered Remington with a brick encased in a sock.

J. Edgar called the warden and told him to claim that the motive was robbery. He did not want to be connected to Remington’s death because of the zealous investigation of the FBI. McCoy, however, denied J. Edgar’s claim and testified that he and Cagle had killed Remington because he was a communist.

Gary May, Remington’s biographer, later claimed that his conviction for perjury seemed justified. “Yet Remington was no pro-Soviet automaton, no slave to Party or ideology, and not even the FBI, at least privately, was willing to classify him as a Russian spy.”

Remington has entered the history books as one of the few murders attributable to McCarthyism.

When J. Edgar was asked about the murder, he told a reporter, “No comment,” and walked rapidly away as if to distance himself from this notorious case.

In the 1948 presidential election, J. Edgar faced one of his worst dilemmas. He detested Harry S Truman, and he loathed his Republican challenger, Thomas E. Dewey, with whom he’d conflicted when Dewey was the Manhattan District Attorney.

When faced with such a daunting challenge, J. Edgar decided to throw his weight behind Dewey but only after “he’d come around” [J. Edgar’s words].

“Dewey will be a tough nut to crack,” J. Edgar told his aides. “I’m convinced Truman will fire me if elected. But Dewey has threatened to do the same thing.”

In 1944, after his unsuccessful run against FDR for President, Dewey had told his aides, “The proper place for Hoover is a jail cell in the darkest prison.”

J. Edgar was ready to cut a deal with Dewey, meeting privately with him in a Manhattan hotel suite, probably the Waldorf-Astoria. There, J. Edgar, Clyde, and Louis Nichols made what was called “The Devil’s Pact” with Dewey.

J. Edgar promised to give Dewey any dirt he’d dug up on the Truman administration and promised to inaugurate an all-out war, charging that Truman was soft on communism and that his administration was riddled with Soviet spies seeking to overthrow the U.S. government. In essence, with Dewey’s approval, J. Edgar was launching the anti-communist hysteria that swept over the United States in the post-war years and that ultimately led to the rise of Senator Joseph McCarthy.

“In exchange for making you president,” as J. Edgar put it to Dewey, “I want to be named your Attorney General, with Clyde here as my Assistant Attorney General. I want you to name Lou here as director of the FBI.”

To the surprise of his aides, Dewey gave his solemn promise that if elected President he would make those appointments. The candidate must have realized, though, that with Nichols in charge of the FBI, J. Edgar would still be running the Bureau as his boss in his new position as Attorney General.

Guy Hotell claimed that J. Edgar had long ago realized he would never become President of the United States. But his ultimate ambition, after being appointed as Dewey’s Attorney General, involved being designated as Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court when that post became vacated.

Armed with promises from Dewey, the Republican candidate, J. Edgar began supplying him with damaging evidence. First, Harold Stassen, Dewey’s chief opponent for the Republican nomination, had to be eliminated. “I’ve got enough stuff on Stassen to make him toast,” J. Edgar later bragged.

Stassen had been governor of Minnesota from 1939 to 1943. The year 1948 marked the first of eight times he would run for President of the United States, his last attempt in 1992.

Stassen had shown surprising strength in the primaries, and polls showed that he could beat Truman if nominated as the Republican candidate. But J. Edgar insisted that he was “a dangerous liberal” and that he had received campaign money from “a rich Baptist preacher,” who was never named. [In 1963 Stassen did join Martin Luther King Jr. in his march on Washington.] The FBI also charged that Stassen had used a portion of the campaign money he collected in his run for governor of Minnesota in 1940 and 1942 for private expenses.

To his credit, after confronting this information, Dewey opted to retreat to higher moral grounds. Ultimately, Dewey

concluded that Stassen was ultimately a good and decent man, and that J. Edgar's accusations should best be left unvoiced.

Stassen's aspiration for higher office was summed up by Hunter S. Thompson in *Last Train from Camelot*. That author said, "Others are not so lucky and are doomed, like Harold Stassen, to wallow for the rest of their lives in the backwaters of local politics, cheap crooks, and relentless humiliating failures."

Even without J. Edgar's mud-slinging, Stassen still lost the Republican nomination to Dewey, who privately claimed that "Stassen was far too liberal to be a Republican. He really should come out as a Democrat."

For a while at least, Dewey's chance at becoming president looked good. Truman's popularity was sinking, and a lot of votes that would have gone to Truman were divided in a three-way split between Henry A. Wallace, running on the Progressive Party ticket, and segregationist Strom Thurmond, who sought the presidency on the Dixiecrat ticket of the Deep South.

The FBI continued throughout the campaign to fuel the Dewey people with "toxic data" about his rivals. But as his campaign progressed, Dewey himself made a fatal decision in his quest for the presidency. He delegated the publicizing of "Hoover's dirt" to his Republican attack dogs and spoke in platitudes in a misguided attempt to appear like a statesman rising above gutter campaign tactics.

The Louisville Courier Journal summed up Dewey's run for President:

"No presidential candidate in the future will be so inept that four of his major speeches can be boiled down to these historic sentences: Agriculture is important. Our rivers are full of fish. You cannot have freedom without liberty. Our future lies ahead."

Although he had promised otherwise, and although his GOP backers urged him to, Dewey refused to indulge in J. Edgar's "Red baiting." J. Edgar wanted to outlaw the Communist Party in America, but in response, Dewey said, "You can't shoot an idea with a gun. Unlike Hoover, I don't go around looking under beds."

Henry Wallace was the campaign's most liberal candidate, running on the Progressive Party ticket beside his vice-presidential candidate, Idaho's Democratic Senator Glen H. Taylor, Wallace called for an end to segregation, full voting rights for blacks, universal government health insurance, an end to the nascent Cold War, and friendly relations with the Soviet Union. He was a candidate far ahead of his time, and he campaigned with African American office seekers.

In the South he refused to appear before segregated audiences or stay in restricted hotels in such states as Georgia and South Carolina. He was often greeted with raw eggs and rotten tomatoes hurled at him, "with his Negro secretary beside him," wrote a newspaper in Columbia.

J. Edgar couldn't be absolutely sure that Truman would be defeated, so he decided to hedge his bets. To be on the safe side, he also supplied damaging information to Truman's campaign manager on Wallace, FDR's former Vice President. He secretly spread the word that Wallace was a homosexual, a technique he perfected in the 1948 election and would use more forcefully in the 1952 and 1956 campaigns against Democratic candidate Adlai Stevenson.

Like all good rumors, there was a nugget of truth in this accusation, and it does appear that Wallace might have engaged in two, possibly three, rather harmless affairs in the 1930s with young men when he was Secretary of Agriculture.

One man from Wallace's native Idaho, James Whiting, was willing to sign an FBI affidavit that he and Wallace had engaged in homosexual trysts during the 1930s when he traveled with Wallace on a very controversial tour where farmers were ordered to slaughter pigs and destroy cotton fields in rural America to drive the price of these commodities back up to improve the financial plight of America's farmers.

What made the homosexual rumors stick to Wallace was a controversial group of his supporters who called themselves "Bachelors for Wallace."

This was the first time a group of gay or bisexual men had ever organized as a group, much less supported a candidate for political office.

Privately Wallace had a number of campaign meetings, rather secretly, with Harry Hay, who in 1950 would go on to found the Mattachine Society, giving rise to the modern gay and lesbian movement of today.

Wallace welcomed Hay and his bachelors in both California and New York. "We didn't find any in Alabama," he recalled. But he told them it would not be possible to come out for homosexual rights at this time. "But your day will come. Maybe not in the 1950s but surely by the 1960s. If I'm still around, I will be your chief advocate."

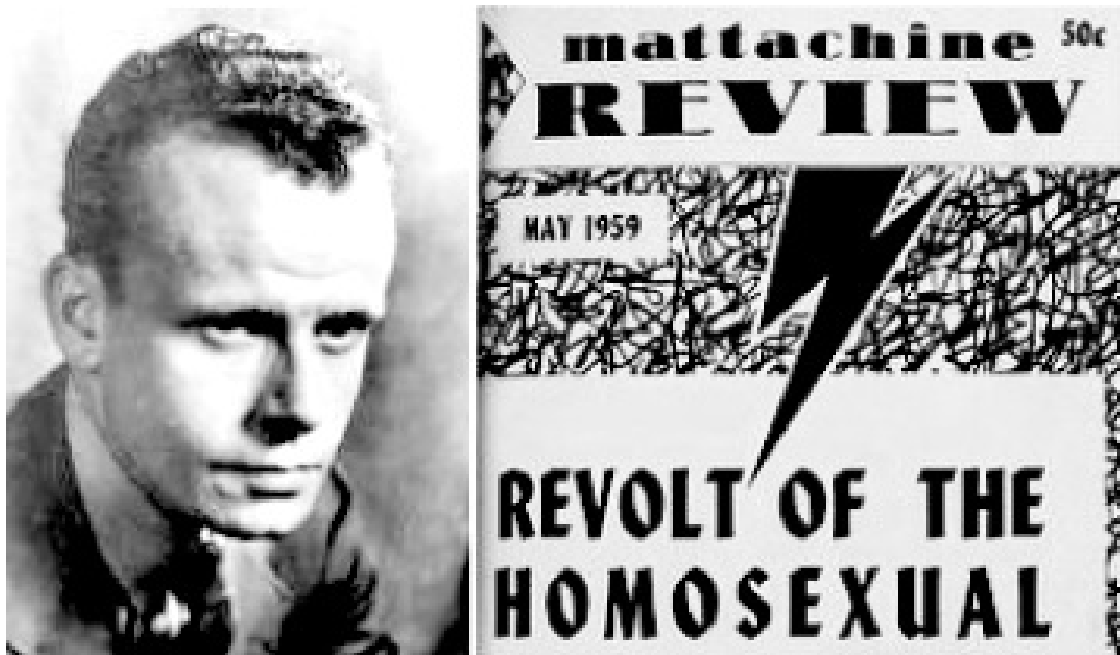
Although he could not come out publicly and endorse homosexual rights, Wallace promised that if elected President he would end the dismissal of homosexuals from government service and that he would stop the FBI harassment of homosexuals, both men and women. For Hay, that was reason enough to support Wallace.

In his campaign for gay rights, Hay was thrilled to read the controversial Kinsey Report, published to widespread interest and furious refutations. The first volume, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, released in 1948, was the most talked about

book of the year, making the claim that thirty-seven percent of adult men in the United States had experienced man-on-man sex.

One night at a rally, Wallace whispered to Hay, “I am among those thirty-seven percent.”

Hay wanted the Progressive Party to include a plank in its platform supporting the right to “privacy”—a code name for protection of homosexuals. It seemed too much of a hot button. Even some of Wallace’s so-called Progressives labeled the Bachelors “Fruits for Wallace” or “Queers for wallace..”



Two years after he supported Henry Wallace for President in the 1948 race for the White House, activist **Harry Hay** (*two photos above*) founded The Mattachine Society, giving rise to today’s gay rights movement.

Called before HUAC, Hay sat through the testimony of Stephen Wereb, an FBI agent that J. Edgar had assigned to infiltrate “Hay’s Boys.”

In 1940, Wereb, using the name “Steven Webber,” had spied on Hay, eventually reporting him as a “Marxist-Leninist who advocated the overthrow of the American voting system.” The agent also cited ninety other Southern Californians as communists.

When called to the stand, Hay was “dangerously loquacious.” After hours of pompous courtroom buffoonery, the proceedings were disrupted. A table was accidentally overturned, and the court reporter’s transcripts uncoiled into a jumble on the floor. Spectators directed mocking laughter at the inept HUAC staff. Hay was dismissed.

Frank Tavenner, chief counsel of HUAC, became so flustered that Hay later described him as “looking like the *commandante* from *Don Giovanni* rising out of the floor.”

Hay later wrote of the enormous stonewall he faced. “I knew the government was going to look for a new enemy, a new scapegoat. It was predictable. But Blacks were beginning to organize, and the horror of the Holocaust was too recent to put the Jews in that position. The natural scapegoat would be us, the queers. They were the one group of disenfranchised people who did not even know they were a group because they had never organized before. They—*we*—have to get started. It was high time.”

On election night, J. Edgar went to bed confident of a Dewey triumph. *The Chicago Tribune* had already flashed the night’s headline—DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN.

The next morning, Clyde was the first to wake up to make coffee. He turned on the radio to hear the news. In panic, he rushed to the stairs and called up to his bedtime companion. “That fucking asshole from Missouri is still the President.”

After breakfast that morning at the Mayflower Hotel, J. Edgar stormed into his office. He was looking for a scapegoat, and he settled, somewhat arbitrarily, on the ever so-loyal Louis Nichols. “You pushed me out on a limb, and it got sawed off,” he charged. “I wouldn’t be in this mess if it weren’t for you. Four more years of Harry Truman. I don’t think I can take it. I’m going to resign.”

He didn’t resign, of course, and was in Washington to hear Truman take the oath of office.

J. Edgar was so depressed on Inauguration Day, January 20, 1949 that he claimed “only Shirley Temple could cheer me up.” Consequently, he invited her to Washington to join him on his office balcony to watch the parade, as Truman passed along Pennsylvania Avenue.

J. Edgar later told his aides, he was a bit disappointed “to see Shirley all grown up.” She was twenty-one years old at the

time. “But I guess she couldn’t be a little girl forever.”

As a goodbye present, she claimed he “flashed his best Santa Claus smile as he gave me a present, a tear-gas gun disguised as a fountain pen. It’s one of my most prized possessions.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

J. Edgar Hoover, with a lot of right-wing help, launched the most sweeping and penetrating witch hunts in American history. He saw Red everywhere, a river of corruption whose tentacles, he claimed, incorporated the highest offices in Washington to movie studios and film stars in Hollywood. The hunt was on to ferret out communists in all walks of life, but mostly in politics and the film colony. In the “Red Scare” that J. Edgar spearheaded in the aftermath of World War II, lives, friendships, reputations, and careers would be destroyed.

Now that America’s “official” enemies, Japan and Germany, had been defeated, he turned the full force of the FBI into an assault on what he called “the enemies within.” At least in the beginning, he had the support of the majority of the American public. Of course, there were dissenting voices, such as those expressed by historian Bernard DeVoto in October of 1949:

“I say it has gone too far. We are dividing into the hunted and the hunters. There is loose in the United States today the same evil that once split Salem Village between the bewitched and the accused and stole men’s reason quite away. We are informers to the secret police. Honest men are spying on their neighbors for patriotism’s sake.”

New Jersey-born J. Parnell Thomas, a former stockbroker, was elected seven times to Congress before being sent to prison. He was known for his controversial statement, calling James Forrestal, U.S. Secretary of Defense, “the most dangerous man in America. If he’s not removed from office, he’ll cause World War III.”

A staunch opponent of Roosevelt’s New Deal, Thomas was an avowed anti-communist. He claimed that the Federal Theatre Project presented nothing but “sheer communism propaganda,” and he seemed to have a special aversion to Hollywood. When Thomas became chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee, J. Edgar supported him totally. The FBI fed Thomas a constant stream of accusations as to who was a communist and who might make a friendly witness before HUAC.

Drew Pearson in his column, *Washington Merry-Go-Round*, wrote, “Those watching Lou Nichols,[the FBI Agent in charge of public relations, reporting directly to J. Edgar] note that he goes in and out of the office of Congressman J. Parnell Thomas like an animated shuttlecock.”

J. Edgar never seemed quite certain what a communist actually was. At one time he suggested that it was a “diabolic figure” or else a “sinister person.” He also claimed that a communist was someone “strangely out of step with American values.” In the wave of his own self-generated hysteria, he found the pervasive influence of communism virtually everywhere, even in the theme song for two films and a radio show about the FBI. Called “Love for Three Oranges,” the song was written by Sergei Prokofiev, the Soviet composer. “Who knows what communist messages are embedded in that song?” J. Edgar asked.

After a “fact-finding” trip to Hollywood in May of 1947, Thomas returned to Washington to launch the investigations of HUAC, with America tuned in. At first only friendly witnesses were called. Many of the spectators turned on not to hear who was a communist, but to view movie heart-throbs such as Gary Cooper and Robert Taylor.

Begun on October 20, 1947, the hearings were held in the overcrowded Room of the Old House Office building in Washington.

Some friendly witnesses in their testimony cited nineteen people working in the film industry, accusing them of holding left-wing views, with the suggestion that each of them was a card-carrying member of the Communist Party.

Taylor’s appearance was so spectacular that police had to erect barricades to hold back the surging crowds. Before the committee, Taylor referred to communists in Hollywood as “the rotten apples in the barrel. If I had my way, they would all be sent back to Russia.” He also claimed that, “I was forced to work in the film *Song of Russia* glorifying that country.” He testified he turned down many scripts because “they are pinko influenced. I will not work with a Hollywood communist even if it means the end of my career.”



When **J. Parnell Thomas** (*above*) took over as head of HUAC, he informed J. Edgar, “Now you have a grand opportunity to say anything you want to.”

Privately, J. Edgar told Thomas that “President Truman is the embodiment of evil by defending those I’ve accused of being disloyal to America.” In the midst of the hearings, J. Edgar learned that the congressman was operating a kickback racket, but he did nothing about it.

At the end of his testimony, pandemonium broke out and several people were injured. Clothes were ripped and one woman dangerously injured when she fell in the stampede.

A young congressman, Richard Nixon, congratulated Taylor, praising his “patriotism and fearlessness in testifying.” It is not known at this point if Nixon knew that Taylor was the star who had taken his wife Patricia’s virginity.

J. Edgar maintained a file on Taylor, learning that he was having an affair with a very young Elizabeth Taylor. It was also revealed that he was bisexual and had had affairs with Howard Hughes, Errol Flynn, and Tyrone Power. He was married at the time to Barbara Stanwyck in a “lavender marriage” to conceal his homosexual lifestyle. Stanwyck was also bisexual.

Other stars such as Robert Montgomery and George Murphy also arrived to testify, but the greatest mob scene occurred on the day Gary Cooper showed up. He was mobbed by nearly a thousand women, some of whom tried to rip off pieces of his clothing.

Before HUAC, Cooper claimed, “I’m no danged Red, never have been a Red, don’t like Reds, and will never be a Red.” He freely admitted he didn’t know Karl Marx from Groucho Marx. “I could never take any of this pinko mouthing seriously,” he claimed.

Cooper had long been under the scrutiny of J. Edgar and Clyde for his political beliefs. For their voyeuristic pleasure, they also kept an extensive file on his sexual affairs, learning that like Robert Taylor he was also bi-sexual, having had affairs with Clara Bow, Tallulah Bankhead, director Edmund Goulding, Cary Grant, William Haines, Rod La Rocque, Barbara Stanwyck, Lupe Velez, Mae West, Marlene Dietrich, and a long-enduring relationship with the wealthy tobacco heir Anderson Lawler.

Cooper’s morning session was followed that afternoon by the appearance of Walt Disney.



Deadly charm projected from two of Hollywood's biggest heartthrobs, **Robert Taylor** (*top photo*) and **Gary Cooper** (*below*). Fans at the Senate hearing mobbed them, far more interested in seeing them, ripping their clothes, and getting an autograph than they were in any "friendly witness" testimony they had to deliver about communists infiltrating the film industry.

Disney attacked the League of Women Voters as a "commie front group," although he meant the League of Women Shoppers, which included members such as Bette Davis. Women Shoppers was a nonpolitical consumers' group. In an astonishing statement, Disney also claimed that communists in his studio in the 1930s had tried to use the cartoon figure of Mickey Mouse to spread propaganda.

Just one of the careers he destroyed that day was that of animator David Hilberman, who had studied for six months in 1922 at the Leningrad Art Institute. There was absolutely no evidence he was a communist. After that, Hilberman never found work in Hollywood. In just one minute of testimony from Disney, his life's career and livelihood had been destroyed.

Before HUAC, Sam Wood, one of the directors of *Gone With the Wind*, claimed, "If you pull down the pants of a communist you will find a hammer and sickle tattooed on their ass."

After the hearings, the films of Cooper, Taylor, Montgomery, and the aging right-wing Adolphe Menjou were banned from Iron Curtain countries, even those of Ginger Rogers because her mother, Lela Rogers, had testified before HUAC.

Before Parnell and others, Lela had been introduced as one of the outstanding experts on communism in the United States. She attacked films such as Cary Grant's *None But the Lonely Heart* (1940), which had been directed by playwright Clifford Odets, whom Lela considered a communist. She charged that this moody Odets drama of a Cockney drifter was filled with

communist propaganda.

Although it had nothing to do with communism, J. Edgar slipped Thomas secret data that Grant and Odets were lovers.

Ronald Reagan had been an informant for the FBI (file no. 100-382196) since 1943. Early in the communist witch hunt of the 1940s, he agreed to provide secret information about his fellow actors, directors, and writers. He did not want to name names in public hearings like some actors did, preferring instead to warn J. Edgar and Clyde about artists in Hollywood that he felt were so left wing in their politics that they should be investigated.

James Cagney claimed Reagan was a “rat” on his fellow actors. “Hoover wanted more than reports on left wing politics. He wanted to know who had a drug problem, who contracted venereal disease, who had homosexual relationships in secret, and what stars, other than Errol Flynn, were fucking teenage gals? Reagan reported to Hoover that Audie Murphy, the most decorated hero of World War II, was plugging me in the bedroom cottage on the property I’d rented to him.”

From Hollywood, Reagan flew to Washington two days before his appearance at HUAC. He met privately with J. Edgar, Clyde, and Louis Nichols at the FBI director’s private home. He did not want to blow his cover as an informant by appearing at FBI headquarters.

Before Reagan’s dinner ended that night at J. Edgar’s home, he had launched the FBI on a road of discovery that would destroy the career of one of Hollywood’s biggest and most popular stars, John Garfield. He finished off a minor star, Larry Parks, and threw suspicion on Ida Lupino, Fredric March, Edward G. Robinson, and Paul Muni.

He named a number of actors—only one woman—whom he suggested should be placed on the FBI’s “watch list,” because of their extreme left-wing views that bordered on communism, even if they were not actual card-carrying members.

Although Reagan was painting many artists red, he complained to J. Edgar, “There are some of my associates, I’m sure, who believe that I am as red as Moscow.”

To popping flashbulbs, Reagan’s appearance before HUAC hardly prompted the heartthrob hysteria that sexpots Robert Taylor and Gary Cooper did. By 1947, Reagan’s screen career was in serious decline.

Before flying to Washington on October 7, 1947, he’d received a phone call from his wife, Jane Wyman, who had been shooting a film with Lew Ayres called *Johnny Belinda* (released in 1948). It would win her an Oscar. She told Reagan that she’d fallen in love with her handsome co-star.

Ironically Ayres had been the husband of Ginger Rogers and the former son-in-law of J. Edgar’s much-admired Lela Rogers.

Having already promised to combat the movie industry’s “domination by communists, radicals, and crackpots,” Reagan had volunteered to appear before HUAC. In March he’d been elected president of the Screen Actors Guild, replacing the right wing Robert Montgomery.



Ronald Reagan (above) was a friendly witness before HUAC, but he took a far more moderate position than his boss, Jack Warner. Before committee members, Warner attacked communists in the film industry, calling them “ideological termites” and “subversive germs that breed in dark corners.”

Reagan called Humphrey Bogart’s Committee for the First Amendment “for suckers only.” Commentator Quentin Reynolds claimed that “Reagan stole the show from the better known stars,” a reference to Robert Taylor and Gary Cooper.

Reagan looked rather studious in a white gabardine suit complete with thick glasses. As president of SAG, he claimed he had always opposed communist propaganda. “I do not believe that the communists have ever at any time been able to use the motion picture screen as a sounding board for their ideology.” He contradicted testimony by Robert Taylor in that regard.

Startling the committee, he took a position directly opposite to that of MGM mogul Louis B. Mayer. Reagan defended the rights of communists to exist so long as they remained a legitimate political party and not an agent of a foreign power. That contradicted his previous statements.

Before the committee, Reagan seemed to be undergoing a major political change, drifting uncomfortably from an FDR New Deal liberal into a conservative Republican. On some weeks he would take one position, appealing to his liberal friends, and at another time he would be turning them in as suspected communists.

Earlier, he’d told J. Edgar that “I am firmly convinced that the Congress should declare the Communist Party illegal.”

Back in Hollywood, Reagan desperately tried to save his marriage. He even told Hedda Hopper that he was aware of his wife’s affair with Lew Ayres. “Right now, Jane needs very much to have a fling, and I intend to let her have it.”

He finally persuaded Wyman to return home, where she occupied the guest bedroom. She even accompanied him to a party, where he spent the evening ignoring her and making political speeches.

Finally, in front of everybody, she shouted at him, “You bore me. You’re a god damn windbag. Our marriage is over. You’re as good in bed as you were in *Night Unto Night*.” She stormed out the door never to return.

She was referring to a 1947 film in which Reagan starred with the Swedish actress Viveca Lindfors. It was a somber, unconvincing movie about a dying scientist and a mentally disturbed widow. When Jack Warner saw it, he was so horrified at how awful it was, he delayed its release for two years.

After Wyman walked out on him, Reagan had dinner with his mentor, George Murphy, who would later go on to become a senator from California. “I owe you a great deal in helping me wipe away my white-clouded liberal daze,” Reagan told him. “My liberalism is becoming a liability.”

Months later, Murphy would give Reagan some marital advice. He was having an affair with both Doris Day as well as starlet Nancy Davis, with a side trip to Miami Beach with a Hollywood hopeful who had changed her name to Marilyn

Monroe.

“Marry Doris Day and drop the other two bimbos,” Murphy advised Reagan.

Later, when fearing he’d made Nancy pregnant, Reagan proposed marriage to her. The next morning he called Murphy. “It’s Nancy. There’s something in the oven.”

“My friend,” Murphy said, “you’ll live to regret that marriage. Besides, I hear she’s in love with both Frank Sinatra and Clark Gable, not you.”

Aided by investigations by FBI agents, J. Edgar and Clyde worked in the background to create what became known as the “Hollywood Blacklist.” This career-destroying finger pointing was a list of actors, directors, screenwriters, producers, and other entertainment professionals who were denied employment in their fields because of their political beliefs or left wing associations. Sometimes an exposé of a communist past was real; in many instances, the artists were innocent or were banned because they refused to assist in investigations of their fellow workers. Even starlet Nancy Davis, who later married Ronald Reagan, came under suspicion because of the mail she received. As it turned out, Nancy had been confused with another actress with the same name.

Records are sketchy, but Reagan was known to have outed at least five actors as communists, as well as Ida Lupino. After his return to Hollywood, he continued to add names to the *Red Channels* list.

His first victim was the American stage and film actor, Fredric March, who had won two Oscars, the first for Best Actor in the 1932 *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and the second in 1946 for *The Best Years of Our Lives*. When he learned Reagan had outed him, he said,

“All my life I’ve supported the Democratic Party, not the Communist Party. But my support for the Republican side during the Spanish Civil War caused great controversy and made me suspect because the Soviet Union had funded the anti-Franco side. They even sent communist volunteers. Because I was opposed to Fascists, I was called a communist. I know that the FBI also spied on me when I lived next door to Arthur Miller in Connecticut.”

March was an inveterate womanizer, and the FBI explored his private life. One report to J. Edgar and Clyde claimed that “March is the most lecherous fanny grabber in films.”

Shelley Winters said, “March was able to perform an emotional scene with tears in his eyes while feeling my ass at the same time.”

The star got a taste of his own medicine during the making of *The Sign of the Cross* (1932). Charles Laughton, the gay British actor, kept chasing him across the sound stages, trying to look up March’s toga to get a glimpse of his genitals.

A young Katharine Hepburn also got her revenge on March when they co-starred in *Mary of Scotland* (1936). She had heard from Carole Lombard how he ran his hand up women’s dresses. In her sixteenth century costume, Kate retrieved a banana and taped it over her vagina. When she felt March’s hand go up her dress, she let it travel until it reached a phallic-like object. He withdrew his hand at once and quickly left her dressing room. J. Edgar and Clyde found that story terribly amusing.

Reagan reported to J. Edgar and Clyde that he and his best friend, fellow actor William Holden, once attended a SAG meeting at the home of Ida Lupino, who called herself “the Poor Man’s Bette Davis.”

Her home was crawling with communists,” Reagan claimed. “Not only John Garfield, but Sterling Hayden and Howard Da Silva. Da Silva gets up in the morning only if the Kremlin says he can,” Reagan said.

The future American president also reported that he had received anonymous threats of physical violence, particularly when the Guild went on strike. “Some commies didn’t like the way I was handling the strike, and I was told that they were going to ‘fix my face’—and that I’d never work in pictures again.”

When he reported this to the police, the chief ordered him to be “fitted with a shoulder holster and a loaded .32 Smith and Wesson. “It was the first thing I strapped on every morning and the last thing I took off at night.”

Third on Reagan’s hit list was Edward G. Robinson, born in Bucharest, Romania, in 1893. He and his Jewish family emigrated to the United States when he was nine years old.

Although he despised movies, a bad economy drove him from the stage to the Hollywood film studios in the 1930s where he gained fame playing the gangster Caesar Enrico (Rico) Bandello in *Little Caesar*. This was one of the favorite movies of J. Edgar and Clyde.

When Reagan outed Robinson, J. Edgar didn’t want to pursue a full FBI investigation of him. As Guy Hotell later said, “They gave Rico a pass.”

Charges of being a communist sympathizer arose when Robinson sent author Dalton Trumbo a check for \$2,500 while he was in prison, jailed for contempt of Congress. His family was having financial difficulties. “That brought the vultures down around my neck,” Robinson said. “Apparently, Reagan heard about that and labeled me a pinko. I even appeared in an all star film with Reagan called *It’s a Great Feeling*, so I must have said something to him. At the time I thought he was a liberal

Democrat.”

In his autobiography, *All My Yesterdays*, Robinson said it all—“Imagine, Ronnie Reagan!” Robinson was first outed by the Catholic Information Society of New York in an article called “Red Star Over Hollywood” by Oliver Carlson:

“Names like Edward G. Robinson—to take a notorious example of an actor who has sponsored literally dozens of Red undertakings and organizations—gain for Red enterprises an audience a hundred thousand times greater than any avowed communist can muster.”

Robinson immediately contacted J. Edgar, “I was hoping I would receive a letter from him clearing me or at least telling me of what other dire crimes I had been accused of by unknown witnesses.” He received a mimeographed reply from J. Edgar’s office.

Robinson appeared three times before HUAC, his first testimony given on December 21, 1950. He denied he was a communist, and he claimed he had never been a party member.

“What the hell good was all that?” he later claimed. “What they wanted me to say was that I was a dope, a sucker, a fool, an idiot, that I’d been double-crossed and that everything I believed in was negated by the clubs to which I belonged—that I was a tool, an un-suspecting agent of the communist conspiracy. I didn’t say it because I didn’t believe it.”

But desperate for movie work, he finally broke down and said what was expected of him at his third HUAC appearance on April 30, 1952.

Francis Walter, chairman of the committee, said, “We never had any evidence presented to indicate you were anything more than a very choice sucker.”

Back in Hollywood, there was no more work for Robinson. “Nobody would dare hire a sucker.”



In the beginning, **Ida Lupino** (above) and Ronald Reagan were friends, and she often dined with Jane Wyman and him in their apartment at 1326 Londonderry in Beverly Hills. Both were liberal Democrats and had supported FDR.

Later, Lupino was horrified to see the political transformation of Ronald Reagan into a conservative Republican during his bid for election as governor of California.

According to his FBI file, Robinson's fellow star, Paul Muni, was far more of a suspect than he was. "He has Jew, Jew, Jew written all over his face," J. Edgar told his aides, "and you know by now how far you can trust a Jew."

The Austro-Hungarian born American stage and film actor was the son of a Polish-Jewish family in what is now the Ukraine. The Muni family emigrated to the United States in 1902. Launching his career on the Yiddish stage, he became so clever with makeup he was dubbed "the new Lon Chaney." Edward G. Robinson was a distant cousin.

J. Edgar had liked Robinson's performance in *Little Caesar*, but had only ugly remarks to make about Muni in his 1932 roles in *Scarface* and *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*. Warner Brothers called him "the screen's greatest actor." In 1935 he starred in *The Story of Louis Pasteur* which brought him an Oscar.

There was one piece of evidence about Muni that J. Edgar could not decipher. For such a "dedicated communist," in J. Edgar's estimation, Muni flew into hysterical rage whenever one of his fellow actors showed up wearing anything red. His almost psychotic aversion to the color was never explained. Playwright Arthur Miller felt it had "something to do with an event that happened in his childhood."

In 1946 Muni appeared on Broadway in *A Flag Is Born*, written by Ben Hecht, whom the FBI labeled "Red."

Everyone connected with *A Flag Is Born* was viewed by the FBI as subversive, not only its star, Muni, but the director, Luther Adler.

“The only guy in the cast” was Marlon Brando, who came to the attention of the FBI for the first time. Over the years, his file would mushroom in association with both his bisexual escapades and his civil rights clashes. The play was a strident propaganda piece revealing Hecht’s zealous commitment to Zionism. Obviously he hated the British.

A Flag Is Born marked Marlon’s first experience with a political commitment that in time would lead to his fight for the rights of the American Indian. At the time American Jews were divided over how a Jewish home-land should be established in Palestine. Marlon backed the more militant wing, the Irgun, a group lead by Menachem Begin that advocated violence and was vehemently anti-British. Most American Zionists, however, leaned more to the Haganah movement advocating a less violent approach, as proclaimed by the more moderate David Ben-Gurion.

After the play had run its course, Marlon traveled across the United States, raising money for the Irgun. “I was a hot-headed terrorist back then, advocating violence,” he recalled later in life. “As I matured, I came to understand all sides, even the Arab point of view. I was a bit over the top when I proclaimed in speeches that British troops blocking Jewish immigration to Palestine were committing far greater atrocities than the Nazis. Blame it on my youth!”

Hecht lost his sense of fairness and balance when he zealously took out a newspaper advertisement in the *New York Herald Tribune*. In that ad, he proclaimed that every time a British soldier dies, “I have a little holiday in my heart.”

This uncompromising support of Irgun terrorists would eventually cost Hecht his movie career. It certainly led to a boycott of all his work in Britain. Even such leading Jewish figures as Robinson dropped his support after Hecht’s blatant advertisements.

But Marlon remained loyal to Hecht, and basically agreed with the screenwriter. In his memoirs, Hecht claimed that *A Flag Is Born* raised one million dollars for the Irgun “Freedom Fighters.” Actually, it raised \$400,000. That money went to purchase a large ocean liner, named the *S. S. Ben Hecht*, which ferried nine hundred refugees to Palestine in March, 1947. The British Navy captured the ship and sent six hundred of its passengers to detention camps in Cyprus. The rest of the passengers escaped to Palestine where they joined the ranks of the militant Irgun. Later the *S. S. Ben Hecht* became the flagship of the Israeli Navy.

Although Marlon was appearing in a political role, his presence as a sexual animal on stage did not go unnoticed. “Scads of young Jewish girls flocked every night not to listen to the message of our play but to see Marlon perform,” Luther Adler said. Marlon wore a black turtleneck sweater that showed off his powerful physique and a pair of black trousers tied with a rope belt. One male writer proclaimed that he was “breathtakingly handsome, a figure of charismatic, mythic beauty.”

“I think during the run of the play, Marlon must have fucked half the Jewish gals in New York,” Adler said. “They flocked backstage to meet him, and he took his pick every night.”

In the words of his first wife, Anna Kashfi, “Marlon seduced an ardent harem of voluptuaries. He told me, ‘I wanted a house filled with women. One for every occasion—a picnic in the woods, a day at the beach. One to screw in bed. One to screw standing up.’”

When Larry Parks, the American stage and movie actor, was outed as a communist by Reagan, he was at the peak of his film career. Like Reagan, he had been born in Illinois.

He was an unremarkable stock player of the 1940s before achieving film success in *The Jolson Story* (1946), earning him a Best Actor Academy Award nomination. It was followed by another huge box office hit, *Jolson Sings Again* (1949).

Just as he was really rising in the Hollywood firmament came rumblings that the FBI was investigating him for his communist background.

J. Edgar and Clyde discovered that he had indeed been a member of a Communist Party cell. Summoned before HUAC, he faced the threat of being blacklisted if he didn’t testify. “Don’t present me with the choice of either being in contempt of this committee or going to jail or forcing me to really crawl through the mud to be an informer. For what purpose? I don’t think that is a choice at all. I don’t think this is American. I don’t think this is American justice!”

When J. Edgar heard these remarks, he told his aides, “We’ll fix Parks. Snip off his balls if he has any.”

Parks eventually gave in to the pressure of HUAC, testifying in tears and outing former communists. Sadly, he was blacklisted anyway. His testimony made former friends turn against him. “He was a god damn rat,” said left-wing actress Gale Sondergaard, who faced her own blacklist problems.

Columbia Pictures dropped Parks. A film he’d made at MGM was shelved for three years. His career virtually over, he established a successful construction business which supported him and his wife, actress Betty Garrett, who later became known as Archie Bunker’s Irene Lorenzo on TV’s *All in the Family* and as landlady Edna Babish on *Laverne and Shirley*.

Parks once said, “I’ll hate Ronald Reagan until the day I die.” Death from a heart attack came at age 60 in 1975. By then he’d been long out of sight.

Garrett reportedly once said, “Larry would have been the world’s most surprised man if he’d lived another five years to see Reagan elected president. He viewed him as a hopeless lightweight in the brain department.”



The bad, bad, very bad **Marlon Brando** (above). The young actor appeared with Paul Muni in a pro-Israel play called *A Flag is Born*. It was written by the anti-British playwright, Ben Hecht, whom the *London Daily Express* called “a Nazi at heart.”

Hecht took out an ad in the *New York Herald Tribune* congratulating Jewish terrorists and praising them for slaying British soldiers. Brando enthusiastically backed him, earning him his first entry in J. Edgar’s files.

The biggest name actor Reagan brought to his knees was his fellow star at Warner Brothers, John Garfield. Born to Russian Jewish immigrants, this New York actor was a key player in Manhattan’s avant-garde Group Theater before moving to Hollywood in 1937.

After the war, he starred in some of his biggest hits including *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946) with Lana Turner, with whom he’d had an affair.

As his FBI file revealed, after hitting Los Angeles, he quickly began to seduce some of its leading stars, such as Joan Crawford, Hedy Lamarr, Ann Sheridan, Shelley Winters, and Ida Lupino. “He loves being John Garfield because of all the pussy and the perks,” claimed musician Artie Shaw.

Occasionally he seduced a young male, including author Truman Capote, and somehow he even managed to take the French singer Edith Piaf to bed, plus dozens of showgirls, script girls, starlets, and female students at the American Laboratory Theatre.

The tough New Yorker virtually invented the term “bad boy. He had a penchant for picking up girls two at a time,” claimed Lana Turner. “He also had a reputation as a demon lover. He died young and in bed with a woman. How fitting!”

The gossip columnist Sheilah Graham summed up Garfield’s technique. “He made love like a sexy puppy, huffing and puffing in quick gasps. Before intercourse, he preferred women to go on an around-the-world trip on his body.”

Garfield’s wife, Roberta Seidman, whom he’d married in 1935, was a communist but he never was, or at least there is no evidence that he was. Nonetheless, he was called before HUAC during the Red Scare. He voiced his support for the Committee for the First Amendment, which opposed government investigations of people’s political beliefs.

Before the committee, he claimed he didn’t know any communists in the film industry. In later years, he hoped to redeem himself in front of the blacklisters who had ruined his career. He wrote an article, “I Was a Sucker for the Left Hook,” claiming that he’d been duped by communist ideology. The title was a reference to his movies about boxing.

However, his initial appearance before HUAC had placed him on the *Red Channels* list. The stress of that may have

caused his early death at the age of 39 from a heart attack.

Today he is acknowledged as the predecessor of such Method actors as Marlon Brando, James Dean, and Montgomery Clift.

To gather data about witnesses scheduled for upcoming appearances before HUAC, the FBI tapped phones, opened private mail, and put suspicious persons under surveillance. As a result, the FBI often learned more about their sex lives than they did about their politics.

Upon viewing the accumulating evidence, J. Edgar said to Guy Hotell, "Instead of asking a suspect, 'Are you a communist or have you ever been a communist,' the line should be changed to 'Are you a sexual pervert or have you ever been a sexual pervert?'" According to my educated guess, I'd say that seventy-five percent of the people in Hollywood have engaged in sexual perversion, even guys like Gary Cooper and John Wayne. Cooper, I can believe. He'd fuck anything with a hole in it. But John Wayne! Of course, in Wayne's case, he had to give in to the twisted desires of that pervert, John Ford, to get launched in the movies. Even he-man Clark Gable got his start climbing the lavender ladder."

"But, Eddie, it's been a tradition for two hundred years in the theater that actors have to drop their trousers to get a part," Guy said. "Actually, it began with William Shakespeare. He created the original casting couch."

"Are you suggesting that Shakespeare himself was queer?" J. Edgar asked.

"My dear, have you read his homo-erotic love sonnets?" Guy asked.

On November 25, 1947, the first systematic Hollywood Blacklist was issued when ten writers and directors were cited for contempt of Congress for refusing to give testimony before HUAC. These artists were collectively and notoriously labeled through the decades that followed as the "Hollywood Ten."



On April 23, 1951, John Garfield (*above*) was called to testify before HUAC about his alleged communist affiliations. At the hearing, he insisted, "I have never been a member of the Communist Party. I am no Red. I am no pink, I am no fellow traveler." He denounced the Communist Party as "subversive, a dictatorship, and against democracy."

Despite his performance, he was blacklisted in Hollywood. The Committee members just did not believe his testimony. J. Edgar was called and asked to investigate Garfield.

Victor Riesel, a columnist for the *New York Daily Mirror*, spoke to Garfield right before he died on May 21, 1952 of a heart attack. The journalist claimed that Garfield planned to recant his testimony and that he would hold nothing back. "He'd tell the whole truth about his being a communist."

Garfield's funeral in Manhattan attracted some 10,000 fans to Riverside Memorial Chapel on 76th Street. A squealing mob of bobby soxers and ardent older female fans evolved into a riot.

John Garfield came like a meteor, and like a meteor, he departed.

As the months went by, more names would be added to the list. On June 22, 1950, the FBI-inspired *Red Channels* list was published, naming 151 entertainment industry figures, accusing each of them of being "Red Fascist."

Hollywood changed almost overnight. In what is known as the Waldorf Statement, because it was issued at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York, Eric Johnston, president of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), declared that every member of the "Hollywood Ten" would be fired or suspended without pay and not reemployed.

Each of the "Hollywood Ten" was found guilty of contempt of Congress, and each was sentenced to between six and twelve months in prison.

During the 1947 investigations, witnesses had claimed protection under the First Amendment. By the 1951-52 investigations, they invoked the Fifth Amendment against self-incrimination. But "taking the Fifth" before HUAC meant an automatic blacklisting. Incidentally, at no point had membership in the Communist Party been illegal.

Since there weren't any big-time movie stars on the list of the "Hollywood Ten," their names were not household words in America.

A novelist, journalist, and screenwriter, Alvah Bessie was imprisoned for ten months for contempt of Congress and blacklisted by studio bosses. In 1938 he'd fought as a volunteer soldier in the communist Abraham Lincoln Brigade during the Spanish Civil War. His experiences, recaptured in a book, *Men in Battle*, won the praise of Ernest Hemingway, a novelist who was also on J. Edgar's list of suspected communists.

Bessie was nominated for an Oscar for Best Original Story for *Objective Burma!* (1945), starring Errol Flynn, whose FBI file by that time challenged the size of the *Gone With the Wind* manuscript. Far from being filled with communist propaganda, *Objective Burma!* was a super-patriotic WWII action film about a company of U.S. paratroopers invading Burma to wipe out a key Japanese post.

His career destroyed by HUAC, Bessie ended up running the lights and sound at the hungry i nightclub in San Francisco. In 1965, he published *Inquisition in Eden*, attacking his tormentors.

J. Edgar later claimed, "The book is filled with libelous lies coming from this commie pinko. In his initial sentencing, he should have gotten at least ten years. Some patriot in prison should have beaten the shit out of him."

Bespectacled, Philadelphia-born Herbert Biberman was the husband of the famous actress, Gale Sondergaard, who won the first Oscar for Best Supporting Actress for her film debut in *Anthony Adverse* (1936), in which she appeared opposite Claude Rains. The movie also starred Fredric March and Olivia de Havilland.

Today Biberman is best known for his direction of the 1954 film *Salt of the Earth* about a zinc miners' strike in New Mexico, which is listed for preservation by the National Film Registry.

Biberman's pre-Blacklist career included writing such films as *Meet Nero Wolfe* (1936), *When Tomorrow Comes* (1939), and *The Master Race* (1944). Biberman's wife, Sondergaard, paid a terrible price for standing by her man. It cost her almost a quarter of a century of work in films.

Sondergaard lives in Hollywood trivia as the original Wicked Witch cast in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). Because she didn't want to appear in disfiguring makeup, she withdrew from the role, which immortalized character actress Margaret Hamilton instead.

Sondergaard, as J. Edgar learned, also had lesbian tendencies and had a brief fling with her bisexual co-star Barbara Stanwyck in *East Side, West Side*, which also co-starred Ava Gardner and Nancy Davis (Reagan).

When Dorothy Lamour, beloved friend of J. Edgar and Clyde, filmed one of the Crosby and Hope pictures, *Road to Rio* (1947), she claimed that Sondergaard made unwelcome lesbian advances toward her.

In gay history, long before the advent of Elizabeth Taylor, Biberman and Sondergaard were the first celebrities to endorse gay rights before that became a political goal. They lent their support to Harry Hay's emerging Mattachine Society, an activist group composed of homosexual men.

After his fall from grace and imprisonment, Biberman worked for several years selling small plots of land in the Hollywood Hills.

Lester Cole, a New York-born screenwriter “remained a hardcore communist until his death in 1985,” according to historian Ronald Radosh. Before he was blacklisted in 1947, Cole wrote more than forty screenplays. In 1934 he joined the Communist Party.

Hauled before HUAC, he refused to answer questions and was convicted of contempt. Fined \$1,000, he served ten months in the Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury, Connecticut.

Returning to Hollywood, he wrote a few screenplays, especially the highly successful *Born Free* (1966), but submitted the scripts under the name of Gerald L.C. Copley.

Unable to find a writing job most of the time, Cole worked for five years in New York as a waiter or a short-order cook. In one job he moved slabs of marble around a Brooklyn warehouse.

One of the most famous directors of Hollywood, Canadian-born Edward Dmytryk, was known for directing films such as *Back to Bataan* (1945), starring super patriot John Wayne, whom J. Edgar always maintained “took it up the ass” when he was known as Marion Morrison in the 1920s.

At the time he got sucked into the Red Menace vortex, Dmytryk had directed *Crossfire* (1947), starring three actors named Robert—Mitchum, Ryan, and Young. This *film noir* involved a victim of anti-Semitism and was handled with taste and intelligence. The novel on which it was based cast the victim as a homosexual, but that was viewed as too hot to handle for post-war American audiences. Dmytryk made the victim a Jew instead.

Summoned to appear before HUAC in 1947, he refused to testify and was sent to prison. After a few months, he felt he was going insane while “caged like a wild animal.” On April 25, 1951, he asked to appear a second time before HUAC. This time, “the canary sang” [his words].

He admitted to a brief membership in the Communist Party in 1945 and named twenty-six former members of left-wing groups. He ratted on Adrian Scott, Albert Maltz, and John Howard Lawson, fellow members of the Hollywood Ten. He testified that all of them had pressured him to include communist propaganda in his films.

Regrettably, his testimony damaged pending court cases where these men were trying to exonerate themselves. In a revealing 1996 book, *Odd Man Out: A Memoir of the Hollywood Ten*, he recounted his horrible ordeal.

Unlike the others, his directorial career wasn’t wrecked. He would go on to helm one of Humphrey Bogart’s greatest films, *The Caine Mutiny* (1954). He would also direct Elizabeth Taylor, Bette Davis, Marlon Brando, Montgomery Clift, Sean Connery, Clark Gable, Spencer Tracy, Richard Burton, Richard Widmark, Henry Fonda, and Barbara Stanwyck typecast as a lesbian in *Walk on the Wild Side* (1962).

The famous humorist and journalist, Ring Lardner, was the father of Ringgold (“Ring”) Lardner Jr., who followed in his father’s footsteps, scripting such films as *Woman of the Year*, a 1942 movie starring Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy. He also worked on the classic film *Laura* (1944) starring Gene Tierney.

In 1947 at the time he was scripting *Forever Amber* (1947), he was the highest paid scriptwriter in Hollywood, making \$2,000 a week at 20th Century Fox.

In 1936 he’d joined the Communist Party, and his left-wing politics often upset the studio. Summoned on October 30, 1947 before HUAC, he refused to answer questions. Tried and convicted for contempt of Congress, he served a year in Danbury Prison and was dismissed from Fox.

After that, he wrote under pseudonyms, but in 1965, Norman Jewison gave him screen credit for 1965’s *The Cincinnati Kid*, starring Steve Mc-Queen.

Shortly before Lardner’s death in 2000, he was visited by the Hungarian writer Miklos Vamos. Lardner told him that one of the movies he wrote under a pseudonym won an Oscar. But he refused to name the picture, claiming it would be unfair to the writer who allowed him to use his name. At the time of his death, he was the last surviving member of the “Hollywood Ten.”

Ring Lardner Jr. often wrote under the name of Oliver Skene.

One of the oldest members of the “Hollywood Ten,” John Howard Lawson was also the “reddest.” He was the chief officer of the Hollywood branch of the Communist Party, answering directly to the major cell in New York City. He was the first president of the Writers Guild of America, which eventually changed its name to Screen Writers Guild.

He was born in New York City; his family name was Levy, but his father changed it to Lawson “so that my son would obtain reservations at expensive resort hotels.” He was referring to the policy of certain restricted hotels which would not accept Jewish clients.

Lawson was one of the most controversial Hollywood authors and screenwriters. Like the rest of the “Hollywood Ten,” he was tried and convicted for not answering questions about his communist past.

Some critics claimed that based on his writings, Lawson was out of step with the proletariat. In 1934, the magazine, *The New Masses*, attacked him as “A Bourgeois Hamlet of Our Time.” Perhaps in reaction to those critiques, he joined the Communist Party in 1934 to educate himself about the plight of the working man. Heading south, he studied bloody labor conflicts in Alabama and Georgia and wrote articles for *The Daily Worker*, which led to his arrest on several occasions.

More than any of the “Hollywood Ten,” his scripts were laden with political themes and innuendos. They included Henry Fonda’s 1938 *Blockade* about the Spanish Civil War. For that drama, he received a nomination for an Oscar. His 1945 *Counter-Attack* was a tribute to the USA/Soviet alliance during WWII. He also wrote less obviously politicized films such as *Algiers* in 1938 with Charles Boyer and Hedy Lamarr, and two Humphrey Bogart movies in 1943, *Action in the North Atlantic* and *Sahara*.

Summoned before HUAC on October 29, 1947, he refused to answer questions. Tried and convicted with the others, he was sentenced for a year in Ashland (Kentucky) Federal Prison.

After he was released, he moved to Mexico where he wrote Marxist dramas and remained a dedicated communist until his death in 1977, claiming that Hollywood falsifies the life of the American worker. His writings infuriated J. Edgar, who somehow may have prevented the publication of his autobiography.

Lawson became one of the first male advocates of feminism, claiming that Hollywood degrades the image of women “treating glamour and sex appeal as the sum total of a woman’s personality.”

One statement Lawson wrote particularly enraged J. Edgar. He said that in the movies “when a woman succeeds in the world of competition, Hollywood holds that her success is achieved by trickery, deceit, and the amoral use of sex appeal.”

J. Edgar told his aides, “Lawson is completely wrong on that account. When it comes to women, Hollywood gets it completely right.”

Brooklyn-born Albert Maltz wrote the first of his eighteen screenplays for Hollywood in 1932. One of his most famous dramas was the 1942 *This Gun for Hire*, the movie that propelled those WWII “shorties,” Veronica Lake and Alan Ladd, into stardom. For his 1945 script, *Pride of the Marines*, starring John Garfield, Maltz was nominated for an Oscar in the category of Writing Adapted Screenplay.

After serving time in prison for contempt of Congress, he had to go uncredited for such highly successful films as the 1950 *Broken Arrow*, starring James Stewart, or the 1953 *The Robe*, starring Richard Burton. Maltz was uncredited because of the blacklist.

In March of 1960, Frank Sinatra wanted to end the blacklisting of some of the most talented artists in Hollywood. He called Maltz “the best goddamn writer around,” and hired him to do the screenplay for a film based on the soldier, Eddie Slovik, executed during the closing months of WWII. Slovik was a soldier charged with desertion, and he was shot by a firing squad, the only soldier executed by the U.S. Army since the Civil War.

Sinatra’s hiring of the blacklisted writer sent shock waves through the Kennedy campaign, creating an enormous backlash because of the singer’s close personal friendship with John F. Kennedy, who was running for president that year against red-baiting Richard Nixon, who could have used this as a club against his Democratic rival.

“If Sinatra loves his country, he won’t do this,” wrote columnist Hedda Hopper, a fervent right winger. Finally, Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy called Sinatra. “That pro-Communist shit is more than our campaign can take. Jack being Catholic is enough to derail us. Now this. Make up your mind. It’s either Maltz or the road.”

After that threat, and to the delight of J. Edgar, Sinatra caved in and removed Maltz from the project, although he paid him \$75,000, the full amount he would have received for doing the script. “Chalk up another victory for the lynch-law mentality,” charged *Publishers Weekly*.

Samuel Ornitz, another of the “Hollywood Ten” sent to prison, was the son of a prosperous dry goods merchant in New York. At the age of twelve, he was a dedicated socialist, standing on the street corner giving speeches to the poor on the Lower East Side. He rejected the prosperous life of a Jewish merchant and became a social worker in the New York prison system.

After moving to Hollywood in 1929 at the advent of the Talkies, he wrote twenty-nine screenplays, including *Three Faces West* (1940), starring John Wayne, who engaged in political debates with him all during the shoot. At the time, Ornitz was the most outspoken political figure in Hollywood, praising the glories of the Soviet Union.

At the end of his life, when he learned what a brutal dictator Josef Stalin was and how many millions he had killed, Ornitz

claimed he felt betrayed by communism and totally misled. “Stalin was worse than Hitler himself,” he said. He died on March 10, 1957, of cancer at the Motion Picture Country Home in Los Angeles.

An American screenwriter and producer, Adrian Scott, rose from the bogs of New Jersey to become one of the “Young Turks” working at RKO in the 1940s. He was the quintessential Popular Front Communist, committed to anti-fascism, anti-racism, and progressive unionism. To him, making films was the most effective expression of political activism.

In 1944 he had a runaway *film noir* success, *Murder, My Sweet*, which gave singer Dick Powell a new image as the hard-boiled detective Philip Marlowe. Suddenly, Scott became one of the hottest producers in town, hailed as “The New Thalberg,” or “The New Boy Wonder.”

Scott also helmed *Cornered* (1945), a high-tension drama in which he cast Dick Powell once again. The film’s female lead was played by Anne Shirley, who married him a year later. She had previously been married to heartthrob John Payne. One of J. Edgar’s favorite candid nude shots was of Payne snapped in his dressing room as he showered after shooting a boxing scene in a movie.

One of Scott’s most visible and controversial films was *Crossfire* (1947), directed by Edward Dmytryk, another member of the “Hollywood Ten.”

Scott’s appearance before HUAC was on October 29, 1947, when he refused to discuss his personal politics or name names. On November 25, the president of RKO, N.P. Rathvon, fired him, criticizing his general conduct and claiming he had placed himself in “disrepute.”

Like the other members of the “Hollywood Ten,” Scott, too, was sent to prison for contempt of Congress.

Upon his release he announced to his wife, Shirley, that he was going to Europe to try to find work. She wrote him a “Dear John” letter, claiming she preferred to remain in Hollywood to divorce him.

“I was a threat to the security of the United States,” he said. “My screenplay, *Mr. Lincoln’s Whiskers*, was dropped. From 1947 to 1952 my earning capacity was almost nil—some years, zero. How to eat? How to live?”

Arguably the best writer jailed for contempt of Congress among the “Hollywood Ten” was Dalton Trumbo. After jail time, he won two Oscars while blacklisted—one originally given to a “front” writer, another awarded to Robert Rich, Trumbo’s pseudonym.

Emerging from the arid plains of Colorado, Trumbo in the 1940s was one of Hollywood’s highest paid writers, turning out such hits as *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* (1944) with Van Johnson and Spencer Tracy, or *Our Vines Have Tender Grapes* (1945), starring Edward G. Robinson.

For *Kitty Foyle* (1940), he was nominated for an Academy Award for Writing Adapted Screenplay. Ginger Rogers walked away with an Oscar as Best Actress for her take as a working girl heroine in *Kitty Foyle*.

In 1939 Trumbo published his anti-war novel, *Johnny Got His Gun*, which won the National Book Award. It told the story of a Canadian soldier who had lost all his limbs during World War I. But for motives known only to himself, Trumbo suspended publication of the popular novel during World War II, perhaps not wanting to incite fear in young men being drafted into military service. Even so, he received highly controversial mail from both sides of the political spectrum throughout the course of World War II, some writers calling for “an immediate negotiated peace” with Nazi Germany, others “denouncing the Jews for getting us into this horror.” Trumbo systematically turned the mail over to the FBI.

J. Edgar sent two agents to his home. Later Trumbo said, “I regretted my decision. I soon realized that their interest lay not in the letters but in me.”

What J. Edgar and Clyde discovered was that Trumbo had been a member of the Communist Party from 1943 to 1948 and had once written for *The Daily Worker*.

After being convicted for contempt of Congress, Trumbo spent eleven months in the Federal Penitentiary in Ashland, Kentucky.

Fleeing to Mexico after being released from prison, Trumbo continued to turn out scripts, nearly three dozen, all under pseudonyms. Many became quite famous, including the 1950 *Gun Crazy*, starring Peggy Cummins, a film often noted as a precursor to *Bonnie and Clyde*.

Writing under the name of Robert Rich, Trumbo won an Oscar for Best Original Story for *The Brave One* in 1956. The Oscar went unclaimed until 1975 when Trumbo came forward to admit authorship.

Supported by director Otto Preminger, Trumbo wrote the screenplay for his 1960 film *Exodus*, adapted from the bestseller by Leon Uris. After that, Kirk Douglas hired Trumbo to write the screenplay for *Spartacus* (1960). These widely acknowledged triumphs were viewed as the beginning of the end for the blacklist.

In 1971 Trumbo adapted his own novel, *Johnny Got His Gun*, for the screen and also directed it. One of his last films, *Executive Action* (1973) starring Burt Lancaster, was based on various conspiracy theories about the assassination of

President Kennedy.

In 1993 Trumbo won his posthumous Oscar for *Roman Holiday*, which starred Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck in 1953. The Oscar had previously been given to Ian McLellan Hunter, who had served as a “front” for Trumbo.

Trumbo died of a heart attack at the age of 70 in 1976, donating his body to science.

Another blacklisted writer, Guy Endore, wrote an article in *The Nation* on December 20, 1952, describing what it felt like being blacklisted.

“You are lost. You have no country, no civil rights, no means of livelihood. And you have heard so much about guilt by association that you hesitate to go to see anyone. When you meet an acquaintance you wait to be recognized, not wishing to spread the infection. You feel that like the lepers of the Middle Ages you ought to tinkle a bell and cry out the old warning, ‘Unclean!’ ‘Unclean!’”

Adrian Scott later claimed, “J. Edgar Hoover played real dirty with the ‘Hollywood Ten.’ It was later learned that he went not only after us, but after our attorneys such as Bartley Crum.”

In violation of the 1934 Communications Act, and Supreme Court rulings, J. Edgar and Clyde listened in, through wiretaps, as the “Hollywood Ten” lawyers talked to their clients. The Justice Department was given advance notice of all of their legal defenses. In presenting his evidence, J. Edgar said it came “from highly confidential sources,” not mentioning illegal wiretapping. Attorney General Tom Clark did not challenge him on that.

An outstanding lawyer, Bartley Crum was a confidante of press baron William Randolph Hearst and of the liberal Republican, Wendell Willkie, who ran unsuccessfully against FDR for President in 1940. Crum had advised President Harry S Truman to allow unrestricted Jewish immigration to Palestine and to permit the creation of a Jewish state.

Crum agreed to defend some writers who were subpoenaed to appear before HUAC. For doing that, J. Edgar ordered that his phone be tapped, his mail opened, and that he be shadowed by an FBI agent. Eventually Crum was labeled a subversive and lost most of his clients.

He drifted into alcoholism and on December 9, 1959 swallowed an entire bottle of Seconal, washing down the pills with whiskey.



One of the best but also the most infamous screenwriters in Hollywood was Colorado-born **Dalton Trumbo**, depicted in his prison mug shot above.

He was a member of the Communist Party from 1943 to 1948. At the outbreak of World War II, in September of 1939, he argued, like many other intellectuals and liberals at the time, that the United States should not get involved in the war on the side of Britain.

His daughter, Patricia Bosworth, became a notable biographer, writing books on such “left wing” iconic figures as Montgomery Clift, Marlon Brando, and Jane Fonda.

The aging actor, Adolphe Menjou, who was to the right of Josef Goebbels, declared, “I am a witch hunter if the witches are communists. I am a Red-baiter. I would like to see them all go back to Russia.”

In extreme contrast to his statement, some of the leading figures of Hollywood, a group of Hollywood liberals, appalled at the Red scare destroying careers, decided to fly to Washington to protest the “un-American” activities of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Jack Warner opposed the idea, since he had many of these stars, including Humphrey Bogart, under contract. “Bogie’s making a mistake!” the studio chief shouted at his staff.

“Like Don Quixote,” Bogie said, “we’re just fighting a lot of windmills, but I’m going anyway. Betty is too.” He was, of course, referring to his wife, Lauren Bacall.

In addition to the Bogarts, the roster of protesters included Gene Kelly, June Havoc (sister of stripper Gypsy Rose Lee), Danny Kaye, Evelyn Keyes, Marsha Hunt, Geraldine Brooks, Richard Conte, Jane Wyatt, and Ira Gershwin. The spokesmen for the group were director John Huston and screenwriter Philip Dunne (*How Green Was My Valley*).

Huston said, “Bogie is our big ace, a media magnet.”

Howard Hughes, who in his capacity as director of RKO would himself be named on the blacklist in the 1950s, offered one of his airplanes to fly the group from the West Coast to Washington. The galaxy of stars left California on October 26, 1947.

In a statement, Bogie said, “Is democracy so feeble that it can be subverted merely by a look or a line? The beliefs of men and women who write for the screen are nobody’s business but their own. Congress is not empowered to dictate what Americans shall think.”

Paul Henreid, who had co-starred with Bogie in *Casablanca*, didn’t really want to go. “It was stupid. I didn’t want to have anything to do with it.” His wife, Liesel Henreid, coerced him. Later Henreid himself would become a victim of the blacklist.

Huston told Bacall, “Tell Bogie to keep his trap shut. I’ll do the talking for us.”

It evolved into a tabloid feeding frenzy when the Hollywood delegation appeared at the Old House Office building, posing for pictures with the Capitol dome in the background.

The day of testimony, John Garfield arrived from New York with another delegation. Months later, his own career would be destroyed.

The appearance of the Hollywood delegation was a disaster that day, as seasoned politicians embarrassed them. *Life* magazine gave them its own review, calling them “Lost Liberals.” Dalton Trumbo, later one of the “Hollywood Ten,” called the HUAC proceedings “the beginning of American concentration camps.”

J. Parnell Thomas, the head of HUAC, “pulled every dirty trick in the books,” according to Huston. “He and J. Edgar Hoover, with a little help from Tricky Dickie.” As far as it is known, Huston was the first person to refer to a young congressman, Richard Nixon, with that label.

The Hollywood celebrities presented a petition to the Speaker of the House, but he was too busy to receive them. Their petition claimed, “The procedures adopted by the House Committee on Un-American Activities violates the civil liberties of American citizens.” The delegation later tried to see their California representative in Congress, Nixon, but learned he had fled town.

Throughout their trip to Washington and during their trip back West with stopovers, J. Edgar and Clyde had ordered FBI agents to monitor “their every move.” Clyde was in charge of the file which he headed: COMMUNIST INFILTRATION OF THE MOVIE INDUSTRY.

Columnist Ed Sullivan noted that the plane carrying the stars was called *Star of the Red Sea*.

In spite of the chilly reception the delegation received in Washington, Bogie issued a statement calling the hearings “a failure, a travesty of justice, an abuse of the defenseless, and a subversion of the courts.”

In a call to columnist Ed Sullivan, his drinking buddy in New York in the 1920s, Bogie claimed, “I’m about as much a Communist as J. Edgar Hoover.”

During his stay in Washington, Bogie placed a call to J. Edgar himself at FBI headquarters, but the director refused to come on the line. However, Clyde in an adjoining office took the call. To Clyde, Bogie denied that he had been involved at any time in any communist activities.

“I admired your performance in *Casablanca*,” Clyde told him. “You were on the right side back then.” Then he put down the phone.

On the way back across the vast American continent, Bogie began to have second thoughts about his appearance in Washington, especially when news reached him that members of the “Hollywood Ten” were or had been communists.

Evelyn Keyes, John Huston’s wife and “Scarlett O’Hara’s Younger Sister,” felt the stars had failed on that trip to Washington. “If it’s a choice of who is the bigger star, Hollywood or the U.S. government, it’s no contest. People who hold the power always win.”

By the time Howard Hughes’ TWA plane set down in Los Angeles, gloom had settled over the stars. Screenwriter Abraham Polonsky called it “evocative of a flu epidemic.” Bogie seemed in a rage, shouting at Danny Kaye, “You fuckers sold me out!”

Former friend and now right-wing columnist, Ed Sullivan, called Bogie. “The public is beginning to think you’re Red. Get that through your skull, Bogie.”

Bogart began to drink even more heavily than usual and feared he’d jeopardized his future career in pictures. Jack Warner continued to issue dire warnings. Bogart responded, “Jack, if I made an ass out of myself in Washington, you in your testimony not only showed them your ass but parted cheeks and flashed your rosebud.”

“You’ve been accused of being a commie before,” Warner shouted before slamming down the phone.

He was referring to the testimony of John L. Leech, who had been the executive secretary of the Communist Party in Los Angeles from 1931 to 1937. The party had expelled him when it was discovered that Leech was a paid police informer.

Before a grand jury in 1940, Leech testified that the following stars were red: Humphrey Bogart, James Cagney, Fredric March, Melvyn Douglas, and Franchot Tone during his marriage to J. Edgar’s friend, Joan Crawford.

Furious and filled with rage, Bogie, while shooting *High Sierra*, issued an angry denial. He denounced the charges as “absurd and one-hundred percent untrue because I’ve never been a member of any party or contributed one cent.”

Looking haggard and beaten down, Bogie went into the offices of Warner Brothers in New York in the dying days of autumn in 1947. No record exists of what transpired. But on the following morning, December 1, 1947, Jack Warner in Los Angeles received a telegram from his New York office. It was short and blunt—BOGIE TO RECANT.

J. Edgar had already secretly been sent a copy of a telegram that Warner had flashed to Bogie in New York: “Do you ever want to work in this town again? Do you want to be tried for treason? Look at yourself. You’re fifty and balding. *Casablanca* was a long time ago. You’ve got a wife that the papers are calling a defender of traitors.”

During a change of trains in Chicago, Bogie, along with Bacall, held a hastily called news conference, where he said:

“I went to Washington because I thought fellow Americans were being deprived of their Constitutional rights, and for that reason alone. That the trip was ill-advised, even foolish, I am very ready to admit. At the time it seemed the right thing to do.

I have absolutely no use for Communism nor for anyone who serves that philosophy. I am an American. And very likely, like a good many of you, sometimes a foolish and impetuous American.”

What was not known to the press at the time was that Clyde had called Bogie at his New York hotel before his appointment at the Manhattan office of Warner Brothers. In his most threatening voice, he told Bogie that if he did not recant the statements he’d made during his trip to Washington, an embarrassing aspect of his private life would be exposed.

“Our agents have learned that you have been conducting an affair with Verita Peterson, your hairdresser. We know you’ve been carrying on with her ever since you met her on the set of *Casablanca*. Even after marrying Bacall, you’re still involved with Peterson. You often go sailing with her on weekends. The press hails your idyllic marriage to Bacall, but it is hardly that. Bacall is young enough to be your daughter, and yet you desert her to pursue this other woman. You really don’t want us to leak all the details to Walter Winchell, now do you?”



ALL ABOARD A JOURNEY INTO DISASTER

In October of 1947, the Committee for the First Amendment, composed of Hollywood stars, flew to Washington to protest the “un-American” activities of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Among the stars aboard were **Geraldine Brooks, Paul Henreid, June Havoc, Marsha Hunt, Lauren Bacall, Richard Conte, and Evelyn Keyes**. Howard Hughes, who owned TWA, provided the airplane.

Their trip was ill-conceived, and much damage was caused when Bogie later recanted his testimony.

“I had to be a turncoat,” he later confessed. “I was not a personal friend of any of the Hollywood Ten, and I had worked fifteen years to reach the top in Hollywood. It seemed senseless to throw all that away. At least my trip got my picture on the frontpage of the *Daily Worker*.”

This time Bogie slammed down the phone on Clyde, but he'd listened to every word of the threat and knew that J. Edgar was serious.

That night over dinner at Harvey's, Clyde entertained Guy and J. Edgar, relating how he'd talked tough to the screen's tough guy.

The next day, Clyde typed up the notes of his phone conversation with Bogie and placed them in his file, which in time would grow to two inches thick. He filed his notes next to a favorable review of Bogie's appearance in Washington, which appeared in Moscow's *Daily Worker*.

Back in Chicago before boarding the train to Los Angeles, Bogie made a parting statement to the press. "We went in green to Washington and they beat our brains out!"

In spite of his recanting, the press was largely hostile to Bogie, with such headlines as TOUGH GUY WAVES FLAG. A columnist in Indiana wrote, "All right, Bogie, you can get up off your knees now."

However, *The Washington Post* sort of defended Bogie, claiming, "We are rather sorry for Mr. Bogart. He had nothing at all to be ashamed of until he began to be ashamed."

His liberal acquaintances in Hollywood were horrified, especially Paul Henreid, who'd detested Bogie ever since their mutual appearance in *Casablanca*. "Bogart has no character, nothing," Henreid told the press. "He's a shit." One reporter commented that "Victor Laszlo has gotten his revenge on Rick for taking Ilsa's heart in *Casablanca*."

Actor Luther Adler, who would become blacklisted himself, voiced his extreme disappointment at Bogie's "betrayal." He later said, "And then Gene Kelly reneged and Danny Kaye reneged, and Frank Sinatra reneged, and those of us who didn't stood out like carbuncles."

Marsha Hunt called Bogie's recanting a "body blow," and Evelyn Keyes accused him of "a cowardly sell-out."

In spite of his capitulation, Bogie received bags of hate mail pouring into Warner Brothers. He was called "a pansy," "a cheap sissy," and a "so-called tough guy with no balls."

After Bogie did what J. Edgar wanted him to, J. Edgar wrote J. Parnell Thomas at HUAC, asserting that Bogie had been cleared by the FBI and could continue to work in pictures. "I think the tough guy has learned his lesson now, and will no longer make trouble for us. In the future, he'll chase after villains on the screen and not look for them in Washington."

After Bogie's appearance in Washington with the other left-wing stars, the blacklist, fueled by J. Edgar and Clyde, grew larger and larger, destroying careers and lives. In the aftermath of Thomas' HUAC hearings, a rumor in Hollywood spread that J. Edgar and the FBI would take over the actual casting of future roles throughout the film industry.

Lillian Ross, while researching an article for *The New Yorker*, visited Errol Flynn on the set of *The Adventures of Don Juan* at Warner Brothers. He was attired in royal blue tights for his performance as a 16th Century swashbuckler.

"As a casting director, I have no doubt that J. Hoover will insist on the casting couch," Errol said. "I'm sure I'll have to pull off these blue tights. Of course, in his case, he already knows what the package is like."

Of course, Ross couldn't print those comments.

Left wing Katharine Hepburn had starred in *Undercurrent* with right-wing Robert Taylor. During the shoot, they often clashed bitterly over politics. The picture was a flop. More personally damaging than a string of bad pictures were harmful rumors about her affair with Spencer Tracy, who was not only a married man but, like J. Edgar himself, a closeted homosexual. There were whispers about her lesbianism and criticism of her left-wing politics. She was so controversial she came under the radar of Clyde and J. Edgar at the FBI. "She's as pink as her underwear," or so the FBI director proclaimed.

Some of the stars she'd worked with, not just Taylor but Adolphe Menjou, spread the word that she was definitely a communist and should be hauled before HUAC in Washington. Menjou claimed that every member of her outspoken New England family was a Stalinist.

Her boss at MGM, Louis B. Mayer, had already testified before HUAC as a friendly witness, and he was "increasingly horrified" at comments that she was sympathetic to communism, if not a party member. Hepburn stridently deplored the witch hunt going on in Hollywood, not realizing that she was being sucked into the whirlpool herself.

It all began with a call from Edward G. Robinson, who told her he was sick and could not deliver an important speech about censorship in films. Without knowing all the details, she agreed to appear in his place.

During the war years, Kate had escaped political fallout for her so-called left-wing politics, mainly because of her friendship with the Roosevelts and contributions to the war effort that included patriotic radio broadcasts and her appearance in the morale-boosting *Stage Door Canteen*.

Perhaps angered that Harry S Truman had invited Spencer Tracy to the White House and not her, Kate refused to back the sitting President during his 1948 run for re-election against Governor Thomas Dewey of New York. Whereas Tracy remained with Truman, Kate announced that she was backing the Progressive ticket and endorsed the left-winger, Henry Wallace, instead.

Wallace's attack of Truman's "get tough" policy toward the Soviet Union eventually cost him his position as Secretary of Commerce within the Truman administration. Wallace himself was under investigation from the increasingly powerful HUAC, in which a rising young politician from California, Nixon, was emerging into prominence. Nixon publicly referred to Wallace as "a Communist dupe."

In May of 1947, Edward G. Robinson called Kate, explaining that he was ill and asking her to deliver an anti-censorship rally at the Los Angeles Gilmore auditorium. "Sure, I'll go on in your place," she told the actor. "If you weren't ill, I'm sure you'd be speaking out for the right principles. I have always opposed people who try to censor motion pictures."

She even persuaded a rather unpoliticized Judy Garland to address the audience as well. J. Edgar had learned that Kate was having an affair with the bisexual Judy at the time.

Kate later regretted her decision, claiming that her first big mistake was in her choice of clothing. "At first I was going to wear white," she later recalled. "But then I thought I'd look like the Dove of Peace. So I decided to wear a red Valentino dress. Red, of all colors. Believe me, it wasn't deliberate. I just wasn't thinking. When my enemies, including Miss Hedda Hopper, whose politics were to the right of Attila the Hun, heard of my choice of colors the next day, it was as if I had endorsed Josef Stalin for president instead of Wallace. Even though my ancestors had sailed over on the *Mayflower* and I'd never joined any group in my life, I suddenly became part of the communist conspiracy to overthrow the American government. Actually, I'd written Eleanor Roosevelt, urging her to run for President against Truman, but she ever so gently turned me down."

Kate had seen how powerful J. Parnell Thomas's HUAC committee was. Thomas, the chairman and chief investigator, had been responsible in part for destroying the careers of such friends as screenwriter Donald Ogden Stewart. Stewart, in fact, had been blacklisted because of the anti-Fascist—and allegedly pro-socialist—statements he'd made when writing the screenplay for the Tracy/Hepburn film, *Keeper of the Flame*.

Witnesses at the auditorium that night reported that Kate's voice grew shrill as she warmed up to her attack. She launched into an assault on "super patriots who call themselves the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals."

"For myself," she shouted, "I want no part of their ideals or those of Mr. Thomas."

In her impassioned speech before twenty thousand people, Kate personally attacked Thomas for engaging in a "smear campaign against the motion picture industry. The artist since the beginning of time has always expressed the aspirations and dreams of the people. Silence the artist and you have silenced the most articulate voice the people have."

Even little Judy Garland got up on the podium, although no one expected her at a political rally. She, too, attacked HUAC as the "Un-American Committee," and urged the audience to write their congressmen, protesting "Mr. Thomas's kicking the living daylight out of the Bill of Rights."

Anti-Hepburn forces rallied, enraged, the next day. Louis B. Mayer called Kate in to explain why she'd made such an incendiary speech. She told him, "In my heart, I had to stand up for my beliefs like my mother, Kit, has done all her life. I wanted Kit to be proud of me."

Since Kate had already been cast in *Song of Love*, and since he had legally contracted her for the role, Mayer went ahead with the production despite the negative implications of Kate's designation as a "pinko." But although he didn't inform her immediately, the studio chief, in the months ahead was "unable to find any worthy scripts" for her.

More to the right in his politics than Kate, Tracy did not attend the rally, nor did he join Kate in any of her political protests. When asked what he thought about actors going into politics, he said, "Remember who shot Lincoln?"

After the speech, in spite of Mayer's protests, Kate joined in with hundreds of other actors, writers, directors, and non-studio producers—including David O. Selznick, John Ford, Bogart, and George Stevens—to launch the Committee for the First Amendment, hoping to combat the unfavorable portrait of the film industry rising out of the bad publicity of the HUAC hearings.



Wearing a red dress, **Katharine Hepburn** (above) gave a speech at the Gilmore Auditorium that angered most of right-wing Hollywood, bringing a denunciation from Ronald Reagan, head of the Screen Actors Guild.

In the wake of that speech, “Lady in Red” stories were published across the nation. In his column, newspaperman Jimmie Fidler said director Leo McCarey “was right to can her from his upcoming film *Good Sam*. Her hot political speeches may queer her at the box office.”

In his column, Drew Pearson predicted that Kate would be called before HUAC to be grilled about her communist affiliations. Of course, she wasn’t a communist, but you wouldn’t know that from reading the newspapers.

Tracy’s name surfaced a few times at the HUAC hearings, but references to him did not harm his career. The movie-going public just didn’t believe that Tracy was part of any communist conspiracy to overthrow the American government.

Kate stood by and watched the careers of such actors as John Garfield and Larry Parks destroyed. Amazingly, in spite of all her left-wing activities, she was never called before the committee, although almost daily she rehearsed what she’d say if she did receive such a subpoena.

Her name was mentioned several times, and always unfavorably, at the hearings. She sat by her radio in Los Angeles and heard directors Sam Wood and Leo McCarey testify that they knew “for a fact” that she had helped raise nearly ninety thousand dollars for “a very special political party, and we’re not talking the Boy Scouts of America.” The directors did not name the party.

Traveling between New York and Washington, Kate’s very young friend, actress Patricia Peardon, called her with an alarming report. Perhaps over “pillow talk” with Nelson Rockefeller, Peardon had learned that J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI had amassed a dossier on both Tracy and Kate that “would stretch around a city block and then some.” J. Edgar, according to Peardon, was making noises that he was about to destroy the careers of both Tracy and Kate herself.

For reasons known only to himself, J. Edgar had long been fascinated by the private lives of Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy, Tracy even more than Kate.

A closeted and cross-dressing homosexual himself, J. Edgar was particularly intrigued by Tracy’s gay life and the actor’s patronage of male hustlers. He ordered his agents to dig up all the material they could find on both Kate and Tracy. Eventually, he accumulated massive documentation on Kate’s lesbian affairs, especially with Laura Harding, the American Express heiress.

After Kate's speech attacking HUAC, J. Edgar became more determined than ever to expose both Kate and Tracy not only for what he alleged was their communist leanings, but for their private lives as well.

As he told his associates, "Just wait and see what happens when America learns that its self-styled most ideal couple are really a faggot and a dyke."

Meeting with Nixon, he unveiled how he was going to help the HUAC committee members. At the end of their conversation, J. Edgar dropped a "bombshell" about Hepburn and Tracy.

Although he thought that he'd be applauded by Nixon for his efforts, the young congressman was horrified about the Hepburn/Tracy file J. Edgar revealed to him, but for reasons that the FBI chief had not anticipated.

"For the very precise reason that Tracy and Hepburn are America's most ideal couple is why you have to burn this file," Nixon warned J. Edgar. "It will kick back on all of us and all the work we're doing to clean out the Commies. Hepburn and Tracy are too much of an entrenched institution by now. Besides, all these revelations about homosexual stuff would be too much. There are homosexuals working everywhere."

Perhaps Nixon was sending a subtle signal to J. Edgar when he delivered his final zinger. "There are even homosexuals working for the FBI!"

The conclusion of the dialogue between Nixon and J. Edgar isn't known. However, J. Edgar must have gotten the message, because he destroyed most of the Hepburn/Tracy file, leaving only some minor and relatively unimportant details, such as press clippings about Kate's speech in Los Angeles.

As Nixon later told his cronies, "I personally saved the career of Tracy and Hepburn. They may never know that, but they should always be in my debt. I kept that fag from blowing the whistle on America's favorite box-office love birds."

Nixon even quoted himself, "Drag Tracy and Hepburn through the mud and you'll trigger a backlash."

Years later, when Joseph Mankiewicz heard about the Nixon/Hoover meeting, he weighed in with his own assessment. "If the American public had learned that Father Flanagan was cheating on his sainted wife, Louise, with a Bryn Mawr lesbian, it would have triggered a nation-wide scandal. It would even have undermined the film industry. Besides, it would definitely have killed Spence's image to learn that he had beaten up whores in bordellos and rented male hustlers. His having an extramarital affair with Hepburn would have been the least shocking revelation. Could you see Tracy being convincing as Elizabeth Taylor's dad in *Father of the Bride* if the public knew that he was a closeted cocksucker in his private life?"

When Harry Truman learned of the FBI file on Hepburn and Tracy, he more or less agreed with Nixon, perhaps the only time these two political enemies ever agreed on anything. "Let it lay," Truman advised J. Edgar. "Don't touch that with a ten-foot pole. You say you're going after communists—that's enough. Don't start seeking out homosexuals, much less lesbians, or else we'll go back to burning people at the stake in America, like they did in Salem."

Throughout his life, Nixon remained image-conscious. In 1956 when he was running for vice president on a ticket with Eisenhower, his media adviser was Edward A. Rogers, who arranged for him to appear on a televised question-and-answer session at Cornell University. Facing a barrage of some of the toughest questions of his career, Nixon appeared in total control as he answered his attackers.

Yet afterwards, when Nixon boarded the campaign plane with Rogers, he yelled at him. "You son of a bitch! You put me on with those fucking, asshole, liberal sons of bitches. You tried to destroy me in front of thirty million people!" Completely losing control, Nixon physically attacked Rogers, pounding his face until two newspapermen restrained the vice president.

That same year, 1956, Nixon wrote a joint letter to Kate and Tracy, seeking their support for his election campaign with Eisenhower. "I think you owe me a favor," he said. "It is important that we carry California and if you can get some of your many friends and admirers to support us, it might help in what could shape up to be a close race."

It is presumed that at this point, Nixon knew that both Kate and Tracy had become fully aware of his efforts to have J. Edgar destroy their FBI files. He sent the message in the form of a typewritten personal letter, and arranged for it to be hand-delivered to Kate at her home.

Kate, as she told director George Cukor, was startled. "I don't think I had ever received a letter addressed to 'Miss Katharine Hepburn and Mr. Spencer Tracy' before. Did you notice he put my name first? Smart man." That very afternoon she wrote back to Nixon. Tracy chose not to respond.

"I heard what you did to help maintain my privacy, and I guess in my way I'll always be grateful for that. However, I must also be true to my convictions, and I believe that my parents would disown me if I offered my support in any way to a Republican vice-presidential candidate. Mr. Tracy shares my convictions."

She signed her note to the White House as: THE LADY IN RED.



Even though **Spencer Tracy** was married to another woman, news of his association with **Katharine Hepburn** was widely accepted as a passionate affair throughout Hollywood.

Their closest friend, director George Cukor, knew differently. According to him, they had more of a platonic relationship. Tracy was a closeted homosexual, with occasional affairs with women, and Hepburn was a closeted lesbian with occasional affairs with men.

Ironically, Richard Nixon became their “guardian angel” because of his having persuaded J. Edgar not to expose “this all-American couple.”

In March of 1945, as WWII was coming to its long, dreadful end that would see the arrival of the Atomic Age in August, much of the attention of America was focused on the newly formed United Nations meeting in San Francisco. The temporary Secretary General of the UN was Alger Hiss, who would soon become a household word in the country, but for the wrong reasons.

Handsome, articulate, and debonair, Hiss was an American lawyer, government official, author, and lecturer, the son of an old Maryland family. His father had committed suicide when the boy was two years old. He grew up in “shabby gentility” but managed to receive a law degree from Harvard, where he had been a *protégé* of Felix Frankfurter, the future U.S. Supreme Court Justice. In 1933, Hiss became an attorney for FDR’s New Deal.

He served various positions in the Department of Justice and Department of State. President Roosevelt respected him so highly that he invited him to attend the Yalta Conference in February of 1944, where he negotiated with Josef Stalin and Winston Churchill.

There had been rumblings, mostly from J. Edgar at the FBI, that Hiss was a communist. When President Truman heard of these, he told Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau Jr. that the reports were “either history, hypothesis, or deduction.”

Truman also told his chief military liaison, General Harry Vaughan, “Hoover reminds me of a movie I once saw with Bess. I don’t remember the name. In it, Marjorie Main was spreading vicious rumors across the back fence to her neighbors. Hoover is that nasty old maid gossip. What if I acted on all the gossip spread about him? In his case, and I know this for a fact, the gossip is true. Let’s face it: He’s as queer as a three-dollar bill.”

J. Edgar resented the establishment of the United Nations, and was alarmed that Hiss was playing such a large role in its formation. “It will give every commie country in the world the ability to send spies to America with diplomatic immunity,” he told his aides.

Clyde was ordered to round up some of the FBI's best agents and have them work behind the scenes to gather incriminating evidence against Hiss. Wiretapping was not enough. Clyde even put the Hiss household maid on the FBI payroll as a domestic spy. When J. Edgar's chief agent in London reported that Hiss had dined with Eleanor Roosevelt and Adlai Stevenson, J. Edgar proclaimed, "Now I know the fucker is a communist."

J. Edgar's own appearances before HUAC were rare but momentous occasions. A bystander, Walter Goodman, remembered one visit. "Hoover appeared before HUAC like an archbishop—no, the Pope—paying a call on a group of poor priests. He patronized them as they fussed over him. He was King of the Hill."

On August 3, 1948, the rather nerdy Whittaker Chambers was called as a friendly witness to testify before HUAC. The writer and editor was a favorite of Henry Luce, publisher of *Time* and *Life* magazines.

Pudgy and with a double chin, the Philadelphia-born writer had grown up in Brooklyn. There had been mental illness in his family, including his grandmother. After one year in college, his brother had committed suicide, which Chambers cited as one of the many reasons he had been drawn to the Communist Party when he was still a young man.

In 1931, Chambers married an artist, Esther Shemitz. When she became pregnant, certain key party members demanded that he and his wife abort their child, because having to tend to a baby might interfere with their work. He was told that his responsibility involved carrying out the party's work—not tying himself down to a family. Both Chambers and Esther decided to disobey these harsh instructions, and they went ahead and gave birth to their child. Later, Chambers would claim that the abortion demand marked the beginning of his disillusionment with the Communist party.

J. Edgar and Clyde vetted Chambers before he appeared on the HUAC stand. Chambers told them that he had spied for the Soviets throughout most of the 1930s, but that he had abandoned the party in 1937 when he lost faith in the movement in the wake of Josef Stalin's Great Purge of 1936.

He warned these G-Men that in an attempt to discredit him, the opposing side might bring up the numerous homosexual liaisons he'd enjoyed in the 1930s with young men. "Be prepared," he warned J. Edgar. "They'll bring it up for sure, and all of it is very true. I had numerous encounters in Washington and in New York, great cruising grounds for a man of my tastes." As it would turn out, Chambers had given the FBI only a limited report.



Of all the hundreds of people accused of Soviet espionage, **Alger Hiss** (*above*), an American lawyer and government official, became the most celebrated case.

When Hiss became the temporary secretary-general of the then-new United Nations, J. Edgar ordered Clyde to "have our agents work overtime. This is going big."

Eventually, he wasn't convicted of espionage, but of perjury, and sentenced to prison in January of 1950, ordered to serve two concurrent five-year sentences. He ended up serving three and a half years.

On August 3, 1948, he testified before HUAC, naming people who were part of a Communist underground in the 1930s. The most prominent man he cited was Alger Hiss, a name known to thousands upon thousands of Americans.

Hiss, of course, was summoned before the committee. Initially, he asserted that he did not know Chambers. However, under intensive questioning, and after seeing him up close and in person, Hiss admitted that he had known him in the 1930s under the name of "George Crosley." He claimed that he hardly knew "the deadbeat but I gave him my 1929 Ford when I found out he had no transportation. It was worth twenty-five dollars."

Up until then, Chambers had not presented much evidence that Hiss was a communist. J. Parnell Thomas wanted to establish a stronger link. Hiss testified that he gave the car away when he purchased a new one in June of 1935.

But then the FBI learned that Hiss didn't purchase a new car until three months later. This connection was deemed so important that W. Marvin Smith was called to testify. A member of the Justice Department, he had notarized the transfer of title.

But before he could testify, he fell from a five-story stairwell at the Justice Department, plunging to his death. A woman clerk claimed she heard two men shouting at each other in the hallway before the sound of a blood-curdling scream went out. There was speculation that somebody had pushed Smith to his death. Additional speculations surmised that it might have been a suicide. There seemed no other way that he could have fallen over the stairwell's protective banister.

Without any hard core evidence, most HUAC members seemed to take Hiss at his word. But he had two sworn enemies out to get him, namely J. Edgar and a young committee member from California, Richard Nixon.

J. Edgar ordered Clyde to devote all his time to an entrapment of Hiss. At Harvey's Restaurant they were seen dining with Karl Earl Mundt, a member of the Senate from South Dakota from 1948 to 1973. Mundt was a key participant in the Hiss/Chambers hearings, and also became a key figure in creating the Hollywood Blacklist.

In time, he would join with Nixon in helping pass a bill to require communists in the U.S. to register with the government and to prevent them from holding public office. Clyde passed along what information they'd gathered on Hiss. As it unraveled, it became obvious that the situation was far more complicated than either Hiss or Chambers had revealed so far.

Years later, in 1960, Mundt reflected on the heyday of the witch hunt. Although a champion of the Far Right, he nonetheless denounced J. Edgar "as the most dangerous man in the United States. He has misused his office and done things to congressmen and senators that should never have happened. He has accumulated blackmail on everybody." J. Edgar repeatedly denied the existence of such dossiers, but he lied.

Nixon seized upon the Hiss/Chambers case as the cannon to launch himself like a fireball into national prominence. Under intensive grilling by the ambitious Nixon, Chambers admitted that he and Hiss had been lovers, and he'd preserved dozens of souvenirs from the relationship, including a crushed cigarette butt, a pair of trousers worn by Hiss, and fabric from a battered old love seat on which they had kissed. He also revealed that Hiss had supplied him with a rent-free apartment.

After Hiss became tired of Chambers, Chambers claimed that he had become sexually involved with the stepson of Hiss, Timothy Hiss, who had taken the name of his stepfather.

Lending credence to Chambers' claim was a review of documents that revealed that Timothy had been discharged from the Navy in 1945 on a charge of homosexuality.

Eventually, Nixon decided that the homosexual relationships were "just too much to spring on the public—those lying queers!" He felt that the best option would involve an entrapment of Hiss in perjury. He had already denounced Hiss to the press, criticizing his "condescending demeanor before the committee, which I found insulting in the extreme."

President Truman denounced the Hiss-Chambers conflict as a "Red Herring, a desperate move on the part of the Republicans to regain power after being confined to the wilderness for sixteen long years." Bowing to pressure, however, especially from the FBI, he did initiate a program of loyalty reviews for Federal employees in 1947.



Pudgy **Whittaker Chambers**, with a record of homosexuality, became the man liberal America loved to hate. A former Communist Party member, he was the key witness in the espionage trial of Alger Hiss. Chambers had had a sexual affair with both Hiss and with Hiss's stepson. Richard Nixon detested Chambers, but knew that he'd be an effective witness in bringing about the downfall of the once influential Hiss. Events swirling around the Hiss/Chambers case became Act One in what evolved into the "Red Hunt" orchestrated by Senator Joseph McCarthy. "Without this case, the McCarthy thing might have been a stillborn," Nixon claimed to his aides. "Sometimes these queers [a reference to both Chambers and Hiss] can be useful."

Truman's loyalty oath affected some 2.1 million Federal employees. It was officially decided that no government worker could belong to any group considered "totalitarian, Fascist, Communist, or subversive."

Both Nixon and J. Edgar pressured Chambers to come up with some other strong evidence to implicate Hiss in treasonous wrongdoings, since they did not want to introduce the subject of homosexuality into the hearings.

Whereas Chambers was protected from libel litigation for whatever he said during the HUAC hearings, that protection did

not apply to other venues. When he repeated his charges on radio, Hiss filed a \$75,000 libel suit against him on October 8, 1948.

Under increasing pressure, Chambers produced four notes in Hiss's handwriting, sixty-five copies of typewritten State Department documents, and five strips of microfilm, some of which contained photographs of State Department documents. This evidence became infamously known as "The Pumpkin Papers," because Chambers had hidden the documents in a hollowed-out pumpkin in his garden. This data was turned over by Chambers to HUAC as proof that Hiss was engaged in espionage for the Soviet Union.

On an ocean cruise with Patricia Nixon, Nixon landed in Florida in front of waiting reporters. He announced he was returning at once to Washington to pursue the case against Hiss. "Now we have conclusive proof of the greatest conspiracy in the nation's history."

Both J. Edgar and Nixon knew that Hiss could not be tried for espionage, because the statute of limitations had long ago expired. Instead, Nixon pressed for an indictment for two counts of perjury, the main charge being that Hiss had denied giving any documents to Chambers. The second perjury charge was associated with Hiss's testimony that he hadn't seen his former friend after mid-1936.

During the first trial of Hiss, character witnesses in his defense included Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter and Adlai Stevenson.

Hiss was tried in June of 1949 for perjury, but the case ended with the jury deadlocked eight to four for conviction. The key piece of evidence had involved an old Woodstock typewriter owned by Hiss. Its typeface matched the documents submitted by Chambers. Experts who had compared the documents from Hiss's machine and the Chambers papers had defined them as a perfect match.

Hiss's lawyers had brought in experts who testified that since 1944 typewriters could be doctored. A U.S. army technician testified that during World War II, military intelligence could reproduce faultlessly the imprint of any typewriter on earth.

Nixon was so furious that four members of the Hiss jury had voted for acquittal that he threatened to haul them before HUAC to be grilled for any possible communist connection.

The first trial had lasted from May 31, 1949 to July 7, and had resulted in a deadlocked jury. A second trial, under a new judge, lasted from November 17, 1949 to January 21, 1950, resulting in a conviction and a sentence of five years, of which Hiss could serve three and a half.

The implications of the Hiss trial reverberated through American lives. It thrust Nixon into the spotlight, helping him move, after the elections of 1950, from the House of Representatives to the U.S. Senate, and then on to greater glory and later infamy. As a catalyst to later developments, the Hiss case is still being debated today.

Based on Justice Department documents released in 1976, the Hiss defense team tried to get a Federal judge to reopen the case based on prosecutorial misconduct, segments of which included the introduction of typewritten documents that could have been forged.

They presented evidence that J. Edgar knew that there was an inconsistency in the serial number of the Woodstock typewriter presented in court as evidence and the one that Hiss actually owned. On orders from J. Edgar, the FBI deliberately withheld this vital piece of evidence which might have exonerated Hiss.

But in 1982, the Federal court denied the petition for a retrial, and in 1983, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal.

Testimony showed that J. Edgar and Clyde had visited a secret OSS installation in Canada where typewriter fabrication and other acts of espionage were under wartime development.

John Dean, former attorney for Nixon, claimed in a 1976 memoir that the President's chief counsel, Charles Colson, told him that Nixon had admitted that the typewriter had been fabricated in an FBI laboratory. "We built one in the Hiss case," Nixon allegedly said.

"Had Nixon asked the FBI to manufacture evidence to prove the case against Hiss," claimed former FBI Assistant Director William C. Sullivan, "I'm sure Hoover would have been only too glad to oblige."

When confronted, Nixon denied that he ever made such a claim about the typewriter, contradicting his former attorney... but then, Nixon was not always known for telling the truth.

In 1952, Chambers wrote a best-selling book *Witness*, which Ronald Reagan credited as the inspiration behind his conversion from a New Deal Democratic to a conservative Republican. Chambers died of a heart attack in July of 1961 on his 300-acre farm in Westminster, Maryland.

Eventually, the committee chairman of HUAC, J. Parnell Thomas, ran into his own legal problems. Columnist Drew Pearson exposed corruption in Thomas' office in a newspaper article published on August 4, 1948. Thomas' personal secretary, Helen Campbell, sent documents to Pearson, claiming that since 1940 she had placed Myra Midkiff on his payroll as a clerk, earning \$1,500 a month. Midkiff did no work but kicked back all her salary to Thomas to supplement his meager income and avoid taxes.

Before a Grand Jury, Thomas refused to answer questions, just like many a communist sympathizer had done when hauled

before HUAC. He pleaded the Fifth Amendment against self-incrimination. Tried and convicted of fraud, he was given an eight-month prison term.

When Thomas was sent to the Federal prison in Danville, Connecticut, his sentence included an ironic touch. Fellow inmates included both Lester Cole and Ring Lardner, Jr., two members of the “Hollywood Ten,” whom he had sent to jail during his ill-fated tenure as head of HUAC.

Very generously, President Truman pardoned Thomas on Christmas Eve in 1952. In the President’s words, “I’m letting the man who tried to destroy my presidency out of jail.”

After his release from prison, Thomas admitted that the HUAC hearings had been inspired by Hugh Scott, the Republican National Committee’s chairman, “He told me to set up all that spy stuff to keep the heat on Truman and the Democrats.”

Truman had left office by 1953 when J. Edgar made a rare appearance before the U.S. Senate. His frustration, even his anger, over Truman was still so strong at this point that in front of the law-making body he called the former President a liar.

After retiring from office, Truman later remembered, “All that witch hunting, all those ruined lives. The Constitution had never been in such danger. Could you imagine Nixon as President one day, with Hoover as his Vice President? It would be Hitler and Goebbels all over again.” Tanked up on bourbon, he said that one night at Sheriff John Spottswood’s home in Key West, Florida in 1959.

The case of Alger Hiss became the most controversial, the most debated, and the most celebrated case of communist espionage during the Cold War. Hiss died in 1996, taking his personal secrets to the grave. Today, pro-Hiss and anti-Hiss historians continue to debate his guilt or innocence.



With his chipmunk cheeks, this is one of the grimmest pictures ever taken of **Richard M. Nixon**, a congressman from California who was moving up the ladder of government, based to a large degree on the notorious Alger Hiss/ Whittaker Chambers case.

Eager for the publicity, Nixon spearheaded the investigation of Hiss, garnering one headline after another.

“I want to be known as the mighty warrior against commies. A politician can make his reputation chasing commies in the State Department.”

As late as 2007, researchers probing Soviet archives made claims ranging from “We found no mention of Hiss” to “His name appears countless times—he was a spy all right. Guilty as hell!”

Two weeks after the conviction of Alger Hiss, an ambitious young junior senator from Wisconsin sat in an airport lounge in the nation’s capital. Waiting for his plane, he’d just ordered his fourth glass of Jack Daniels on the rocks.

All his fellow Republican senators were fanning out across the nation to make speeches on Lincoln’s Birthday, February 9, 1950. Instead of New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago, Joseph McCarthy had been assigned to what he called “the backwaters of America,” beginning in Wheeling, West Virginia. This former dirt farm boy, contemptuously said to his aide, “The town is probably inhabited by redneck aborigines.” He was to address the Republican Women’s Club—or, in his words, “a lot of blue-haired old farts who probably were last fucked before World War II.”

An alcoholic, McCarthy was drunk when his limousine pulled up at the McClure Hotel in Wheeling. But, as he so often bragged, “Keep the bourbon coming, ‘cause Joe is a guy who can hold his liquor.”

As he walked into the crowded room, he was reasonably steady on his feet, and, except for a few slurred words, he seemed physically under control. He might have been assigned a backwater, but he’d vowed that by the end of his speech, he would garner more headlines than all the senior senators on Lincoln’s Birthday.

Waiting to be introduced, McCarthy had whispered to his aide, “The House Un-American Activities Committee think they can make headlines with their witch hunt. You ain’t seen nothing yet. Watch me go! I’m gonna round up commies like Hitler’s boys rounded up the Jews.”

A man of his word, bellicose and shameless, the senator faced a field of right-wing women who thought even President Truman was a communist taking orders from Stalin.

That afternoon, he stroked the fiery furnace of the “Red Menace,” and subsequently, its flames would engulf much of American life and culture until they consumed even the senator himself.

CHAPTER NINE

No actual audio recording exists of that drunken speech that Senator Joseph McCarthy gave to the Republican Women's Club in Wheeling, West Virginia, on February 9, 1950, in honor of Lincoln's birthday. But it became a speech of legend.

As recorded in handwriting by a local reporter on note paper, McCarthy electrified the women by claiming, "The State Department is infested with communists. I have here in my hand a list of 205 names that were made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping policy in the State Department."

He also claimed that Dean Acheson, the Secretary of State, was "a pompous diplomat in striped pants, with a phony British accent."

The speech was delivered at a crucial moment in the Cold War. China had fallen to the Communists, Alger Hiss had been convicted of perjury, Eastern Europe had come under the domination of Josef Stalin, and the Soviet Union knew how to manufacture an atomic bomb.

A German-born scientist and naturalized British citizen, Klaus Fuchs, was convicted in 1950 of supplying information about the Manhattan Project to the Soviet Union. From late 1947 to May 1949, he gave a Soviet agent the principal theoretical outline for creating a hydrogen bomb.

Press interest in McCarthy's speech would explode like another atomic bomb, but it was at first slow to build. Eighteen newspapers carried a report of his speech after the Associated Press filed the story on February 10. By February 11, ten other newspapers carried the senator's accusations. The *Nashville Tennessean* accepted McCarthy's word at face value, with a headline—STATE DEPARTMENT HAS 205 COMMIES.

His next stops were Salt Lake City, Denver, and Reno. By the time McCarthy's plane set down in Reno that Saturday, the State Department was demanding that he produce the list of these "so-called commies." The senator faced a major embarrassment. He had no such list.

He claimed to the press he had been misquoted as to the number. "I've got a sockful of shit," he told reporters, "and I know how to sling it. There are 57 card-carrying communists in the State Department." The number had shrunk since Wheeling. At every stop in West Virginia, he was besieged by reporters.

He'd succeeded in capturing the nation's attention. In Washington, President Truman privately denounced McCarthy as a "drunk and a liar," and in public he claimed his statements were not true. "McCarthy is not even fit to have a hand in the operation of the United States government."

Immediately after he landed in Washington, McCarthy placed an urgent call to J. Edgar, who had befriended him since 1946, viewing him "as a soldier in the field against the Red Menace."

Soon McCarthy was dining with J. Edgar and Clyde at Harvey's. Over a blood-red steak and several glasses of bourbon, he told the GMen, "I don't have such a list. I just made up the whole thing to get a headline or two."

The next day J. Edgar, Clyde, and Lou Nichols became a virtual public relations firm for McCarthy, even writing some of his speeches and changing his accusations to "communist sympathizers" or "loyalty risks," since these charges would be easier to prove than "card-carrying communists." J. Edgar also suggested to McCarthy that he hire Donald Surine, a former FBI agent, as a private investigator "to dig up the dirt on the commies."

McCarthy also received help from Richard Nixon, who secretly gave him classified files from the House Un-American Activities Committee.

Another well-wisher was Ronald Reagan.

During the McCarthy hearings, many actors such as John Wayne wanted to ingratiate themselves with J. Edgar, knowing how powerful he was and aware that he could destroy carefully constructed careers.

Before the Republican Convention of 1952, Ronald Reagan sent J. Edgar a confidential memo. "Whatever you do, you should do all you can to prevent the emergence of Thomas Dewey if he dares seek the nomination, having failed in 1944 and 1948. On his swing through California during one of his campaigns, he said there were not enough jails in America to hold all the people he planned to convict. 'The first person I will put in jail is John Edgar Hoover himself.' I thought you should know what an enemy he is. I want you to know that in any future conflict like that, I am definitely inclined to side with America's esteemed FBI director."



A false smile hides a soul of evil and malice on the face of **Senator Joseph McCarthy** of Wisconsin. With a lot of help from J. Edgar Hoover, McCarthy created the “Red Scare” of the 1950s, eventually transforming himself into the most hated senator in the history of the Republic. Bellicose and shameless, he was an extraordinary witch hunter, whipping up hysteria across the land and ruining lives.

Back in Washington, a new type of political war cloud loomed on the home front as America prepared to go to war again, this time in Korea to prevent a communist takeover.

The Tydings subcommittee opened its hearings on McCarthy’s charges on March 8, 1950 in the Senate Caucus Room.

Senator Millard Tydings wanted McCarthy to name names to back up his accusations, but McCarthy floundered. Actually, Surine had hardly begun his investigations into the Red Menace.

Under pressure, McCarthy introduced the names of nine men and women whom he claimed were communist sympathizers. One person cited was Dorothy Kenyon, a sixty-two-year-old New York lawyer who told the press, “Senator McCarthy is a liar.” An embarrassment for McCarthy followed when it was revealed that Kenyon had never been a member of the State Department.

Although headlines in the Hearst papers screamed NEW YORK LAWYER LINKED TO REDS, *The New York Times* noted that “Joe got off to a thin start.” As it turned out, Kenyon was a friend of Eleanor Roosevelt. In her column, *My Day*, she wrote: “If all of the honorable senator’s ‘subversives’ are as subversive as Miss Kenyon, I think the State Department is entirely safe and the nation will continue on an even keel.”

It also turned out that Kenyon had been a delegate to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women from 1947 to 1949 and had clashed bitterly with representatives from the Soviet Union, denouncing them.

At the end of the hearing, the first of McCarthy’s attempts to expose a communist, the *Washington Post* noted: “In truth, Case no. 1, turned out to be not only an outraged and innocent American, but also a woman of spirit.”

At midpoint, Chairman Tydings told the press that McCarthy had not provided his committee with the “name of a single State Department employee accused of being a communist.”

The next day McCarthy fired back that he was going to reveal “the name of the man, connected with the State Department whom I consider the top Russian espionage agent in this country.”

In an emergency call that night to J. Edgar’s home, McCarthy sounded desperate. “I don’t know why, but that statement about my naming this big communist just popped out of my head. You’ve got to help me. I’m going to have to face Tydings, and I’ve got to come up with someone.”

“Clyde’s here with me,” J. Edgar said. “We’ll come up with someone, maybe not a household name. But before the dawn breaks, we’ll have that name for you.”

Although his support from the right wing in American politics mushroomed overnight, many newspapers shot back at McCarthy. The *Washington Post* accused him of “sewer politics—rarely has a man in public life crawled and squirmed so abjectly.”

McCarthyism began to seep into all corners of American culture.

A jittery Hollywood studio cancelled a movie based on Longfellow’s *Hiawatha* out of fear it would be viewed as “communist peace propaganda.” Citizens demanded that librarians remove books from the shelves, including *Adventures of Robin Hood*, because of “its subversive message.” The Cincinnati Reds temporarily changed the name of their team to “Redlegs.” In New York, even washroom attendants had to submit to loyalty tests.

While they worked with Mc-Carthy to dig up communists in the government, especially the State Department, J. Edgar and Clyde also focused on weeding out communists in the film industry.

Far more intriguing than hunting down public enemies such as John Dillinger in the 1930s, J. Edgar and Clyde especially liked to investigate the private lives of movie stars if they found evidence of homosexuality, regardless of how infrequent the occurrence.

Judy Holliday, the brilliant blonde-haired comedienne of the 1940s and 50s, came into their focus, as they’d receive several calls from “informers,” claiming that she was a member of the Communist Party.



Shortly after she won the Oscar for *Born Yesterday*, Judy Holliday was profiled in *Hollywood Life* by right-wing columnist Jimmy Tarantino:

“Judy Holliday only acts dumb. She’s a smart cookie. The commies got her a long time ago. She was a singer with the National Council of Arts and Sciences and Professions, a commie front group. In 1948, she was a guest speaker during a rally at New York’s Hotel Astor for the STOP CENSORSHIP COMMITTEE, a communist front. She was sponsor for the World Federation of Democratic Youth, a known communist front. In 1948, she wired greetings of good luck to the Moscow Art Theatre. She is a supporter of the Civil Rights Congress, a Red outfit. She performed at a dance sponsored by the *Commie Daily Worker*. She always knew what she was doing.”

The daughter of Russian-Jewish immigrants, she grew up in a world of Yiddish culture. Although known for her dumb blonde roles, such as that of Billie Dawn in the Oscar-winning performance in *Born Yesterday* (1950), she had an IQ score of 172, placing her above the 99.999th percentile.

The FBI launched an investigation of her in 1950, but after three months found no direct evidence of her communist links. They were willing to give her a pass, as they'd learned far more about her sex life than her politics.

Like so many actresses they probed, they found that Judy, in addition to her affairs with several men, also had lesbian liaisons. It appeared that she'd lost her virginity to Yetta Cohn, a prominent policewoman in New York who reportedly did have links to the Communist Party. Agents also discovered that Judy had her first heterosexual experience with the British actor John Buckmaster, whom she alleged had raped her.

She'd also had high-profile affairs with journalist Heywood Hale Broun, Sydney Chaplin (son of Charlie), jazz musician Gerry Mulligan, and even Peter Lawford when he wasn't sleeping with one of his boys.

J. Edgar and Clyde were well aware of Katharine Hepburn's lesbian adventures, so they were not surprised that Judy shared her bed at Hepburn's Turtle Bay residence in Manhattan on many a night. Judy was appearing in Garson Kanin's film *Adam's Rib*, directed by George Cukor and starring Kate's companion, Spencer Tracy, who was well aware of Kate's fascination with Judy.

So many "stool pigeons" cited Judy as a communist that in 1952 she was called upon to testify before the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee to "explain" why her name was linked to so many communist front groups.

Garson Kanin, who wrote *Born Yesterday*, was also being labeled a communist. Along with Kanin, Judy began to appear on the *Red Channels* list. The Catholic War Veterans had picketed *Born Yesterday* when it played on Broadway, and placards had denounced Judy as a Red. She suddenly faded from radio and television, because pressure groups warned sponsors not to use her.

Even her Oscar win did not help her case. NBC pulled the plug on a proposed variety show that could have made her wealthy. Liggett and Meyers also cancelled her appearance on the Bob Hope Show, not wanting their product, Chesterfield cigarettes, to be linked to a woman who had donated a hundred dollars to the Peace Crusade.

At Columbia, studio boss Harry Cohn withdrew his bid to purchase *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* for Judy, the career-making role eventually going to Marilyn Monroe, another not-so-dumb blonde.

Privately, two senators called Judy and told her that if she would appear at the Senate hearings and name just four communists, the pressure on her would end. She told Katharine Hepburn that she would view such testimony as a "betrayal of former friends."

On July 12, 1950 before her appearance, she sent Lou Nichols at the FBI a sworn statement, denouncing communism and denying that she had been a member of the party. She pleaded with him to present the document to J. Edgar himself. There was no response from the director.

In spite of her intelligence, Judy's attorney told her to play the role of the dumb blonde at the hearings, and she followed that advice, giving her best Billie Dawn impersonation. Before the committee, she'd claimed she'd been taken advantage of by communist front groups using her name without her permission.

She was cleared of any wrongdoing, but her career was seriously damaged. "Survival is not enough," she told Cukor. "My public image has been tainted. People will forever think I'm a Red. After that grilling on the Hill, I've entered purgatory."

She continued to find work where she could, appearing in a 1960 film, *Bells Are Ringing*. *The New York Times* noted that "the squeaky voice, the embarrassed giggle, the brassy naïveté, the dimples, the teeter-totter walk remain unimpaired."

Disillusioned and saddened by life, Judy died of breast cancer on June 7, 1965.

Gloria Swanson had sent her a sympathy card of sorts. "I hope you get well, but I can never forgive you for taking that Oscar from me." The former silent screen vamp still harbored bitter feelings toward Judy for losing the Academy Award to her for Swanson's own role as Norma Desmond in *Sunset Blvd.*

One of J. Edgar's favorite frontal nudes was of the handsome, strapping actor, Sterling Hayden, once billed as "The Beautiful Blond Viking God."

He ran away to the sea at the age of seventeen and became a ship's boy. He was stalked day and night from the men aboard. "I had to beat off my admirers," he later claimed.

At six feet, five inches, he was one of the tallest actors in Hollywood, and was famous among the women for his endowment. An adventurer and man of action, he made grand voyages around the world, skipping a square rigger from Massachusetts to Tahiti in 1938. He was only twenty-two years old.

Drifting to Hollywood, he'd become a movie star, marrying his co-star, British-born Madeleine Carroll, one of the most elegantly beautiful leading ladies of the 1930s. The marriage lasted four years and wasn't helped when he joined the Marines in World War II.

During that war, J. Edgar was very distressed to learn that under the military pseudonym of “John Hamilton,” Hayden had worked for William J. Donovan as an OSS agent. J. Edgar never got over his jealousy of “Wild Bill.” J. Edgar and Clyde kept a dossier on Hayden, learning that along with Yugoslav partisans, he’d parachuted into fascist Croatia. He also was a hero of air crew rescue teams behind enemy lines in the Naples area.

After the war, when he returned to Hollywood, Hayden became known for seducing his leading ladies, including Anne Baxter in *Blaze of Noon*; J. Edgar’s friend Dorothy Lamour in *Manhandled*; Marilyn Monroe in *The Asphalt Jungle*, and Jane Wyman, the former Mrs. Ronald Reagan, in *So Big*. He was going to play Quint in *Jaws* but could-n’t come back into the United States because he’d be arrested for tax evasion.

After Lex Barker left the Tarzan role, it was offered to Hayden, but he found it undignified to play a character who swings on a vine from tree to tree.

In 1945, he’d been so impressed with the bravery of his communist partisans that he briefly joined the Communist Party. J. Edgar discovered that membership and in 1951 presented it to the House Un-American Activities Committee who called upon Hayden to testify.

Under pressure to keep his career and livelihood, Hayden was coerced into naming names in the film industry with links to the party. In a move so uncharacteristic of him, he cited Bea Winters, a stenographer for Horizon Pictures; Abraham Polonsky, author of the film noir classic *Body and Soul* (1947), as well as Robert Lees (*Abbot and Costello Meet Frankenstein*; 1948). He also named other industry workers but later said, “It was the stupidest, most ignorant thing I ever did in my life.”



J. Edgar admired actor **Sterling Hayden**’s physique, not his left-wing politics. Unconventional and always controversial, he led a life of adventure on both land and sea.

His most famous screen performances included *The Asphalt Jungle*, during which he seduced Marilyn Monroe off screen in 1950, *Dr. Strangelove* in 1964, and *The Godfather* in 1972.

Dorothy Lamour, the close friend of J. Edgar and Clyde, made *Manhandled* with Hayden in 1949. “When he strips down, he truly lives up to his reputation as a Viking God. God himself did not make all men equal.”

Winters was fired the next day, and Polonsky would have to wait two decades before he got another screen credit. Lees never wrote another screenplay.

Ronald Reagan, president of the AFL Screen Actors Guild, said, “The guild congratulates Sterling Hayden on his honesty

and frankness in his testimony which confirms the fact that the guild, with the full support of 98% of the Hollywood actors, defeated the Communist Party's attempts to use the guild for their causes."

Later on, Hayden, contemptuous of his HUAC testimony, called it a "one-shot stoolie show." In his autobiography, he wrote, "I was a real daddy longlegs of a worm when it came to crawling. Not often does a man find himself eulogized for having behaved in a manner that he himself despises."

After his testimony and upon his return to the screen, Hayden became the first actor subpoenaed by HUAC to land a major acting assignment after admitting to having been a member of the Communist Party, if only for seven months.

A heavy drinker all his life, Hayden suffered a complete nervous breakdown in 1972. For a while, he gave up liquor, turning to marijuana and hashish—"grass and hash," as he called it.

In the 1970s he wore a gray beard. "I never want to be taken for a male starlet again like I was in the 1940s. Never again will I be a pinup boy for J. Edgar Hoover." Somehow over the years, he must have learned that the FBI director was in possession of that frontal nude of him.

In Sausalito in 1986, Hayden died of prostate cancer after a long battle with the disease.

Writer Howard Skiles said, "He was always somehow larger than life, a pillar of strength and energy, a force of nature. That he could also act was sort of like putting a few stray diamonds on top of a solid gold Cadillac."

Woolworth heir and a cousin of Barbara Hutton, Jimmy Donahue was the archetypal post-war playboy known for his wit, charm, and gay personality. He made a career of mischief—his critics said evil. In 1949, at the age of thirty-five, he befriended the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, and became the lover of both of them. Around the world at all the glamorous watering holes, they were an inseparable trio. The royal couple became obsessed "with our darling Jimmy."

When news of this *ménage à trois* became public, the *New York Observer* wrote, "It's like finding out that the epic love affair of Abelard and Heloise was really just a quickie in a Left Bank nightclub's men's room."

In spite of Jimmy's notorious reputation, he still tried to be a good Catholic. In 1949, he'd met Cardinal Francis Spellman, the Archbishop of New York, who was very grateful for Jimmy's generous bequests to the New York Foundling Hospital. Through Spellman's sponsorship, Jimmy became its chairman.

It didn't take Cardinal Spellman and Jimmy very long to figure out that they had more in common than their devotion to the Catholic Church. They both had a taste for well-endowed young male hustlers. With all those five-and-dime dollars from Woolworth's, Jimmy could purchase the very best.

As Jimmy's biographer, Christopher Wilson, stated: "Jimmy became intimately involved with Francis Spellman, the Archbishop of New York, a notorious homosexual. St. Patrick's Cathedral was a great cruising ground, particularly late Mass on a Sunday, and the Cardinal was rumored to have deflowered many young men."

Wilson also noted, Jimmy often went with the Cardinal "to get some new dresses," as Jimmy put it. Like J. Edgar, both men indulged in their penchant for drag. One tailor recalled the Cardinal calling out, "More lace! More lace!"

The author also claimed that after Jimmy broke up with the Windsors, Cardinal Spellman arranged for him to fly to Rome to meet the Holy Father. When Woolworth Donahue, Jimmy's brother, heard of this, he snidely remarked: "Now that he hasn't got the Windsors any more, I suppose he's gone to Rome to fuck the Pope."



“”She married a King, but screwed a queen,” as it was often said of the Duchess of Windsor, referring to her marriage to Edward VIII, which cost him his crown and to her affair with the homosexual **Jimmy Donahue**, the Woolworth heir.

He had a penchant for drag, as did his close friends J. Edgar and Cardinal Spellman.

He was born to be bad, and with his wealth and social position as the cousin of one of the world’s richest women, Barbara Hutton, Jimmy pursued a life devoted to decadence and debauchery.

J. Edgar and Clyde frequently visited New York and were often the guests of Cardinal Spellman. One Saturday night in 1950 he invited them to meet “this divine creature, Jimmy Donahue.” The reputation of the playboy was already well known to the G-Men, who had a file on Jimmy and his many exploits.

At the appointed time, J. Edgar, Clyde, and Cardinal Spellman arrived at the apartment of Jessie Donahue, Jimmy’s mother, at 834 Fifth Avenue. His mother was in Palm Beach at the time. A butler ushered them into a large living room filled with about twenty young and handsome men (average age of twenty-two) in provocative dress, each evoking an archetype—cowboy, truck driver, sailor, marine, boxer, or “nights in leather.”

The arriving trio were directed to an elegant sofa where Jimmy had arranged himself. As he offered his hand to J. Edgar, the FBI director, perhaps with envy, took in his scarlet velvet haute couture ball gown. He had on a pair of “Joan Crawford fuck me” high heels.

When J. Edgar shook Jimmy’s hand, he said, “If I had known, I would have dressed more formally,” no doubt a reference to their mutual love of cross dressing.

“You *must*, dear heart,” Jimmy said, “the next time.”

Details are missing on that night, since Guy Hotell wasn’t invited, but he heard about the party two days later. Apparently, three of the young men were professional strippers. According to Guy, Clyde confessed that he and J. Edgar around midnight disappeared with one of the well-muscled “Greek Gods” into one of Jimmy’s bedrooms for a three-way. In those days, J. Edgar and Clyde liked to seduce a young man in the same bed.

After that night, Jimmy became “one of the delights” of J. Edgar and Clyde, according to Guy. “They shouted his praise. He could arrange things. J. Edgar and Clyde shared something in common with the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. Each member of this sponging quartet adored it when Jimmy picked up the tab, as he invariably did.”

J. Edgar and Clyde learned something that Cardinal Spellman already knew. In the days when homosexuality was illegal, Jimmy gave the best of gay parties, where money was no object. “When it comes to men, I find that any guy can be had for a price. The only difference between a butch straight man and a gay one is a five-hundred dollar bill.”

Often J. Edgar and Clyde were entertained in Jericho, Long Island, within the palatial mansion which had originally been built by Alfred Vanderbilt, and which Jimmy had purchased. According to gay underground legend, the parties “were wild, wild, and then some” in the seclusion of that mansion, and where Jimmy was known to have spiked many of his guest’s cocktails with mysterious substances which included, among others, Benzedrine.



When it came to male friends, **Ethel Merman**, the Queen of Broadway, had unusual taste in men. The ones she hung out with included J. Edgar, Clyde Tolson, and Jimmy Donahue, who backed her Broadway revival of *Annie Get Your Gun* shortly before his untimely death. “Life is outrageous,” Merman said, “so why can’t Jimmy be outrageous if he wants to?”

When Jimmy came backstage on opening night to take Merman to the Stork Club, he also invited her handsome, 6’5”, curly-haired and blue-eyed leading man, Bruce Yarnell.

Merman went home alone that night. Jimmy invited Yarnell to his apartment, where, except for appearances on stage, he remained for two and a half weeks.

Yarnell always claimed that he worked undercover for the FBI, but he never told his friends exactly what he was spying on. Merman once asked J. Edgar if Yarnell had ever worked for his Bureau. “He smiled enigmatically and told me he’d rather not discuss it.”

It was inevitable that Jimmy would eventually be introduced by J. Edgar to his dear friend Ethel Merman. “We clicked from the first night I met him,” Merman recalled. “He was my kind of guy. Like my favorite FBI man, Jimmy was partial to gowns.”

“Jimmy was the Elsa Maxwell of the gay set,” according to Merman. When his mother, Jessie, was away, he threw fabulous parties at her home, Cielito Lindo, in Palm Beach. That massive pile was a monument to social ambition.

Sometimes as many as thirty-five waiters would be hired for the night, with the provision they would wear only a G-string and make themselves available later that night to whatever male guests requested their services.

Guy related to his would-be biographer, James Kirkwood, the greatest scandal that ever took place at Cielito Lindo. Apparently, a drunken and drugged Jimmy had taken one of the handsome young waiters to his bedroom for amusement. As part of his perverted fun, he told the man that he’d give him a thousand-dollar bill if he’d let him shave off his pubic hair. The hapless victim agreed. Perhaps not deliberately but in his drugged condition, Jimmy accidentally cut off the young man’s penis with a long, sharp razor. His screams echoed throughout the mansion.

Guy was fuzzy on what happened next. “Eddie was in Washington but he intervened somehow and got the whole thing hushed up. There was a big outlay of cash. I don’t know how much. Just how much would you pay a man for cutting off his dick?”

As Guy claimed, “Jimmy Donahue became Ethel Merman’s Stage Door Johnny, though she never lost her affection for Clyde and Eddie. They knew that with her they could indulge and drop all that macho pretense.”

Guy also recalled that one night Jimmy hosted a grand party for Merman at El Morocco in Manhattan. “The place was dripping with queens, and J. Edgar and Clyde sat drinking in the midst of it all. The only negative was when J. Edgar refused a drag queen’s request to dance with him. I filled in for Eddie and later was awarded with a blow job in the men’s room.”

On a few occasions, Merman entertained what she called “the boys” at her apartment in Manhattan. She later said that Cardinal Spellman, J. Edgar, Clyde, and Jimmy would arrive in business suits. “While Clyde and I sat in my living room, the boys would disappear into my bedroom where I had laid out some gowns on my bed. It took them about an hour before they made their appearance in my living room dressed in all their finery. We always had such a gay old time back then. To entertain them, I played my recording of *Annie Get Your Gun*. Sometimes Jimmy would play the piano and accompany me as I sang ‘There’s No Business Like Show Business’ to the boys. They applauded like there were fifty people in the room. It felt great.”

In her autobiography, Merman claimed that she was invited to only the more respectable parties at Jericho, where women in elegant gowns appeared. “Even so, the talk at table in Jimmy’s magnificent dining room got pretty racy. J. Edgar revealed sexual secrets of movie stars we’d never heard before, and I thought I’d heard them all. Did you know, for example, that James Stewart and Henry Fonda were lovers in the early 1930s? At Jericho, Jimmy was said to have hired partially deaf waiters so they couldn’t eavesdrop and call the tabloids the next morning.”

Jimmy and Merman remained friends for life. She’d once been hailed as the Queen of Broadway, but in her later years, engagements dwindled, as did her audience. Her friend, Dorothy Streslin, recalled that Jimmy would take her to a club in Manhattan on 53rd Street called The Lido. One night he invited J. Edgar and Clyde to hear her sing. As the manager said, “We had only about eight clients that night, but the applause of Donahue and those FBI boys made up for it.”

To show his devotion to Merman, on September 21, 1966 Jimmy attended opening night of her revival of *Annie Get Your Gun* at the Broadway Theater. He’d backed the production with his own money.

J. Edgar and Clyde flew in for the occasion and attended a black-tie dinner and dance at Goldie’s Restaurant on 42nd Street. In gratitude, Merman presented Jimmy with a pair of gold cufflinks. Jimmy died that year and was buried with those cufflinks.

When J. Edgar heard of his passing, he told Clyde, “I fear all the fun has gone out of our life. Jimmy knew how to have fun, and he knew that better than anyone.”

In Miami, in May of 1945, J. Edgar had appeared before the International Association of Chiefs of Police and delivered an address. “In the war, foreign powers tried to steal not only the secrets of the atomic bomb but other vital military secrets. With

the FBI's counter-espionage program, we encircled the spies and rendered them harmless."

At the time he made that speech, Soviet agents were stealing the concept for the development of an atomic bomb and passing this top secret data on to the Kremlin.

In a total breakdown of security, the Los Alamos project in New Mexico had hired an Army sergeant named David Greenglass to work as a machinist on elements of the interior of the first atomic bomb.

He passed the secrets he had gleaned from his work to his sister, Ethel Greenglass Rosenberg, a one-time member of the Communist Party. She in turn gave them to her communist husband, Julius Rosenberg. Through a courier, a chemist in Philadelphia named Harry Gold, these secrets made their way to Moscow. Within months, Russia was working on its own atomic bomb.

On August 29, 1949 the Soviets exploded their first nuclear test of "Joe I," named after Josef Stalin.

A German-born theoretical physicist, Karl Fuchs, was arrested in 1950 and tried for spying on the Manhattan Project for the Soviets. His statements to British and FBI intelligence, later at his trial, were used to further implicate Gold, who later became a key witness in the subsequent trials of David Greenglass and Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.



J. Edgar viewed the trial of **Julius and Ethel Rosenberg** as the most sensational spy case of the Cold War. They were tried, convicted, and sentenced for passing atom bomb secrets to the Kremlin.

In sentencing the Rosenbergs, Judge Irving R. Kaufman claimed that "this country is engaged in a life-and-death struggle with a completely different system." Although the Rosenbergs had their defenders—and still do—many of the nation's press referred to their crime as "worse than murder." Even the Communist aggression in North Korea was blamed on the Rosenbergs.

Some observers believe that the data Julius passed to the Soviets was not information associated with the eventual creation of the atomic bomb in the Soviet Union.

Gold's arrest on May 23, 1950 led to a link with Sergeant David Green-glass.

Under intensive pressure from the FBI, David and his wife, Ruth Greenhouse, presented evidence to implicate both Ethel and Julius. She was the sister-in-law of Ruth and David was her brother, of course. It was a very damaging case the FBI had of family members testifying against each other.

Both Ruth and David testified against Ethel, claiming that she had typed up U.S. nuclear secrets in the Rosenberg apartment in New York in September of 1945. David also testified that he had turned over to Julius a sketch of the cross-section of an implosion type atomic bomb that was actually the "Fat Man" dropped on Nagasaki, Japan in 1945.

The Greenglasses presented their allegations to a Grand Jury in August of 1950, their testimony leading to the eventual arrests of both Julius and Ethel. When their trial began on March 6, 1961, it captured the attention of a nation caught up in Cold War hysteria and the McCarthy witch hunts.

As author Ronald Kessler wrote, "Her round face and tiny mouth and his mustache and protruding ears became burned into the American consciousness."

Morton Sobell was also arrested as part of the Soviet spy network and tried with the Rosenbergs.

Gold's testimony was crucial to the trial, and J. Edgar ordered his agents to spend four hundred hours going over and over

his allegations. "I want him letter perfect when he goes on that stand," J. Edgar instructed his agents.

As former FBI man, William W. Turner, claimed, "The much-trumpeted FBI 'feat' in tracking down the spies was actually a case of closing the barn door after the horse was gone."

Both Ethel and Julius took the Fifth Amendment during their trial, saying that they refused to answer questions based on the fact that their answers might tend to incriminate them. On April 5 they were sentenced to death by Judge Irving Kaufman, their conviction helping both J. Edgar and McCarthy in their anti-communist campaign.

The Rosenbergs became the only two American civilians executed for espionage during the Cold War. Kaufman attacked them from the bench, claiming that their treachery might cost millions of innocent lives in the future.

Born to Jewish parents in New York, Ethel Greenglass and Julius Rosenberg, later man and wife, became the most high-profile communist agents during the McCarthy era.

Many Americans believed the Rosenbergs were innocent and launched an unsuccessful grassroots campaign to prevent their going to the electric chair. Charges of anti-semitism were raised. An international uproar rose, Pablo Picasso calling it "a crime against humanity," Jean-Paul Sartre labeling it as a "legal lynching that smears with blood a whole nation." Pope Pius XII appealed to President Eisenhower to spare the couple, but Ike rejected the request coming from the Vatican. The Rosenbergs went to their deaths at New York's Sing Sing Prison on June 19, 1953.

Julius died after the first series of electrocutions, but Ethel did not. Doctors determined her heart was still beating. Three more courses of electrocution were ultimately applied before eyewitnesses reported smoke rising from her head.

To J. Edgar's credit, he had opposed the death sentence of Ethel, but agreed that Julius should face the chair. Clyde was of the opinion that both husband and wife "should feel the juice."

Sobell, the co-defendant, received a sentence of thirty years in prison, but served slightly less than eighteen years.

The debate over their guilt or innocence continues. However, in 1995, once secret information decoded from Soviet cables, code-named VENONA, supported testimony that Julius was a spy but cast doubt on the extent of Ethel's involvement.

On the 50th anniversary of the Rosenberg executions, June 19, 2003, *The New York Times* in an editorial claimed, "The Rosenberg case still haunts American history, reminding us of the injustice that can be done when a nation gets caught up in hysteria."

During World War II, J. Edgar had ordered his agents to tap the telephone lines of aviator and movie mogul Howard Hughes. He had never trusted Hughes, especially when his aviation company began conducting business with the U.S. government. He became particularly alarmed when Hughes, at least briefly, considered making a bid to run for President of the United States. A report reached J. Edgar that, if elected, Hughes' first act of duty would be to fire the FBI director.

During the war years, J. Edgar could always spare two agents to spy on Hughes wherever he went. If he were dining at the swank Chasen's in Los Angeles, often with a beautiful starlet such as Faith Domergue, you could virtually count on a black sedan parked in shadows some one hundred yards away. From listening to secret tapes garnered from bugging, Guy Hotell said, "I am convinced that Howard Hughes is the greatest oral artist in the boudoir in the history of Hollywood."

In the summer of 1944, J. Edgar's agents trailed Elliott Roosevelt to Hollywood, where Hughes Aircraft lavishly entertained the President's son. Almost desperately eager, Hughes wanted Elliott to recommend his company to build war-time planes for the government.

In spite of massive opposition, denunciations, and protest, Elliott won the battle when he obtained the permission of Jesse Jones, Secretary of Commerce, to greenlight the project. Hughes was awarded a \$43 million contract to deliver nine prototypes and ninety-seven production models of the D-2 in less than ten months.

Hughes began to doubt his own D-2, telling his aide Johnny Meyer, "It sucks." On the night of November 11, 1943, a hanger housing the craft caught on fire, and the very flammable D-2 was destroyed. With his order for one-hundred planes still intact, Hughes reworked the design for the D-2, emerging with the superior D-5, which the Air Force designated as the XF-11. J. Edgar's agents reported almost daily to him on the disarray at Hughes Aircraft.

On Sunday morning, July 7, 1946, J. Edgar received a call that Hughes' reconnaissance plane, the bullet-nosed XF-11, had crashed on its test flight, plowing into homes in Beverly Hills. The aviator, or so J. Edgar was informed, had piloted the plane, and he was still alive. "Let me know if the bastard lives or dies, preferably dies," J. Edgar instructed his agents.

Hughes survived and came out of his coma to receive a blow-job, as he was recuperating in his hospital bed, from Ava Gardner.

Production lagged, and it appeared that Hughes Aircraft could not make its quota. The point became academic when Japan surrendered, and WWII came to an end. The Allies won without benefit of Hughes' XF-11s, which were never delivered.

He turned his attention to the need for reconnaissance planes to fly over Soviet Territory. "We need to see what the fucking communists are up to."

When Hughes announced he wanted to construct a flying ship the size of the Queen Mary, even his top aide, Noah Dietrich, denounced the idea as a "colossal boondoggle that will never fly." The aircraft's original name was *Hercules*, although the

public dubbed it the *Spruce Goose*. The aircraft's "skin" and its structural parts were composed of thin sheets of spruce plywood.

In the Greater Los Angeles area, J. Edgar ordered that three of his agents keep him apprised of the progress, or the lack thereof, of the *Spruce Goose*. The director called the aircraft, "Hughes' Folly."

In time, *Hercules* would weigh 200 tons, making it three times heavier than "anything that had ever flown through the air, including a flotilla of flying dinosaurs."

Hughes claimed that it would be capable of transporting 400,000 pounds of cargo as well as 700 fighting men and their equipment. Its hull would be taller than a three-story building.

J. Edgar learned that on November 16, 1942, Hughes had been sent a government check for \$18 million to construct three different prototypes of *Hercules*, each for delivery within ten months.

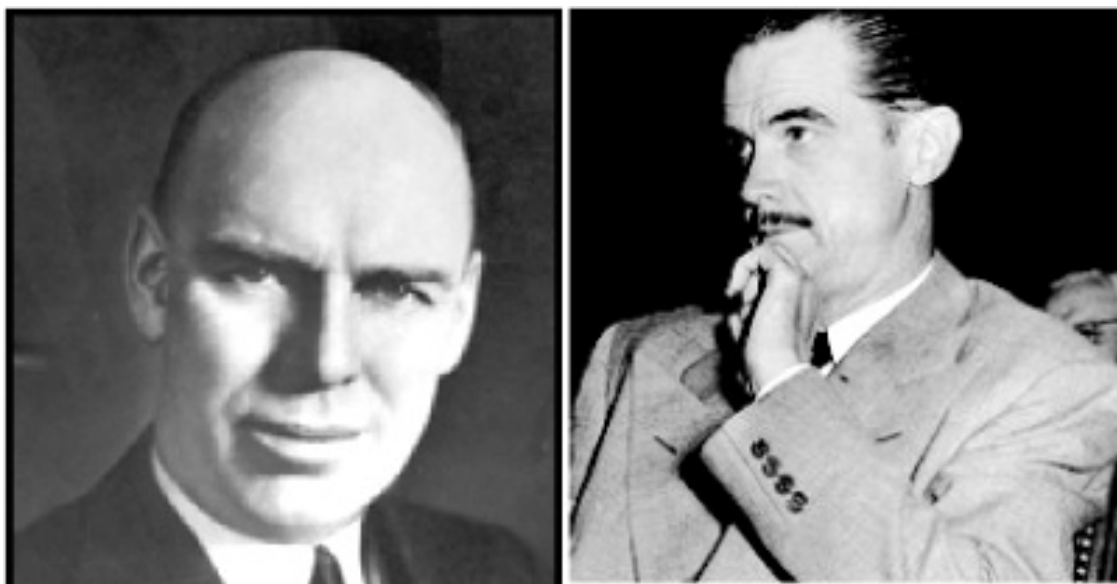
Of course, such a contract could never be fulfilled under those terms, and J. Edgar knew it. He called the War Department and urged that the Hughes contract be cancelled.

In July 28, 1947, Hughes had been summoned to Washington to testify about what had gone wrong with his wartime government contracts. Millions had been granted to him, but not one single aircraft had emerged.

The man out to get Hughes was a bombastic Republican senator from Maine, Ralph Owen Brewster, a Harvard-educated lawyer and a one-time governor of Maine. In his second term in the U.S. Senate, he had been named chairman of the Special Senate Committee on National Defense.

At the Senate hearings, Hughes turned the tables on Brewster and virtually put him on trial as "being in the pocket of Juan Trippe," head of Pan American, Hughes' bitter enemy at TWA. *Newsweek* called the Senate hearings with Hughes "the biggest circus act that has pitched its tent in Washington in years."

With millions of Americans listening on radio, Hughes attacked his inquisitors, especially Senator Brewster, charging him with accepting bribes from Pan Am. He called him, "One of the greatest trick-shot artists in Washington."



Senator **Owen Brewster** (left) and aviator mogul **Howard Hughes** (right) attracted the attention of the nation when they battled over Hughes' misuse of millions of dollars worth of wartime government contracts.

At one point during the hearings, Brewster threatened to demand testimony from some of the biggest movie stars in Hollywood, telling reporters "to get your note pads ready and get plenty of film for your cameras."

He threatened to summon "at least fifty Hollywood stars," including Rita Hayworth, Faith Domergue, Jane Russell, Lana Turner, Ava Gardner, Jane Greer, Jean Peters, Susan Hayward, Katharine Hepburn, Ginger Rogers, Fay Wray, and Bette Davis. Privately, to embarrass Hughes, he sent word that he might also include two of his male lovers, Cary Grant and Errol Flynn.

He vigorously defended the *Spruce Goose*, admitting that his only mistake had been in supervising "each portion of it in too much detail." With millions of Americans listening, Hughes declared he'd leave the country if his beloved *Hercules* didn't fly.

Facing reporters outside, he told them, "The *Hercules* will fly by the end of the year, and the XF-11 reconnaissance plane is the finest ever built. I did not waste the government's money."

The probe into his aircraft company had been a fiasco for the Republicans. Hughes flew back to Culver City, emerging relatively intact from what he called "a vicious smear campaign." Privately he told his aides that many of the attacks on him had originated with J. Edgar Hoover.

After the Senate hearings, HUGHES FOR PRESIDENT clubs were organized around the country.

On November 2, 1947, with much of the world looking on, the notorious *Spruce Goose*, with Hughes sitting in the pilot's

seat, actually became airborne, taking off from Long Beach, California.

Denounced as a “flying lumberyard” by Senator Brewster, the *Spruce Goose* flew smoothly for one mile, reaching a maximum speed of ninety miles per hour at an altitude of only seventy feet. The historic multi-million dollar plane, the most expensive in the history of the world, stayed airborne for one minute.

“Millions of taxpayer dollars spent on a worthless piece of shit,” J. Edgar concluded back in Washington.

Hughes, a dedicated capitalist, kept his eye trained on Washington and followed the hearings conducted by the House Un-American Activities Committee, ferreting out communists in the film industry. HUAC summoned Paul Jarrico, one of his studio writers to testify. Hughes fired him immediately, even though he had not finished the screenplay for the *Las Vegas Story* set to star Jane Russell and Victor Mature, both of whom Hughes had sexually pursued.

As one journalist wrote, “No one was more swept up by this fear of creeping communism than Howard Hughes.” He even shut down RKO until he had each employee sign a loyalty oath. Those who refused to do so were dismissed.

Although it had nothing to do with national security, J. Edgar assigned agents at the end of the war to trail Hughes on his sexual trysts with Tyrone Power and Lana Turner. When not with Hughes, these celebrated beauties were having an affair with each other.

When Turner and Hughes flew to New York to stay at the Sherry-Netherland, the FBI had their rooms bugged. By the summer of 1946, J. Edgar seemed so fascinated by the private life of Hughes that he had as many as twenty-four FBI agents assigned to follow his trail in Los Angeles, New York, and Washington.

The FBI even discovered that Turner and Hughes had sex when he piloted his Sikosky as it flew 12,000 feet above the earth on autopilot. Since they were alone in the plane, the question was raised as to how the FBI made that discovery. It was later learned that Turner bragged about it to her friends, including Peter Lawford and Ava Gardner.

The romance ended when Turner called him to report that she had syphilis, which she alleged she’d caught from the Turkish/Czech actor, Turhan Bey.

To J. Edgar and Clyde, even more intriguing than Hughes’ accomplishments—or lack of successes—in aviation was his list of conquests, male and female. The gender didn’t matter. He asked only that his conquest be beautiful.

J. Edgar’s friend, Joan Crawford, said, “Howard would fuck a tree. I turned him down.”

Very few other stars did. James Bacon, the Hollywood columnist, called him “the greatest swordsman.”

In his heyday, Hughes boasted of “deflowering two hundred virgins in Hollywood.” Jimmy the Greek, the celebrated gambler, said, “He must have got all of them.”

Hughes seductions included Jean Harlow, Bette Davis, Yvonne de Carlo, Marlene Dietrich, Ava Gardner, Paulette Goddard, Kathryn Grayson, Susan Hayward, Rita Hayworth, Katharine Hepburn, Veronica Lake, Hedy Lamarr, Carole Lombard, Ginger Rogers, Shelley Winters, Norma Shearer, Fay Wray, and Marilyn Monroe, who, as a struggling young actress, agreed to star in one of his “home movies.”

Hughes never mentioned the male idols of the screen he seduced, but in addition to Cary Grant, he bedded Gary Cooper, Clark Gable, Robert Taylor, Errol Flynn, Tyrone Power, Randolph Scott, and for years pursued Jack Buetel, whom he retained under exclusive contract since starring him in the controversial *The Outlaw* (1943).

Hughes didn’t always make a conquest. Among the men and women who got away were Elizabeth Taylor and a young John F. Kennedy.

Amazingly, in an act unprecedented for J. Edgar, at the end of the war, he sent Hughes a matching pair of blue leather file boxes which bore the lettering—FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION, DUPLICATED FILES. The director said he was sending Hughes this package “because of my high regard for you.”

The hoard revealed an extraordinary FBI bugging project that operated from 1943 to 1946, in which the mogul’s love nests in the Hollywood Hills and his suites in Las Vegas and Manhattan were tapped. Coming from those rooms came the clear voices of Ava Gardner, Errol Flynn, Yvonne De Carlo, Lana Turner, Cary Grant, and Jack Buetel.

From that moment on, Hughes developed a lifelong hostility toward J. Edgar. Often hiring former FBI agents, Hughes himself had a network of spies, accumulating data on both his business rivals and his lovers, either male or female.

For a long time, J. Edgar had pried into Hughes’ private life, and had even illegally secured medical records. He told his aides, “Hughes is a homosexual and his brain is half eaten up with syphilis, which he may have acquired in 1930 from that whorish actress, Billie Dove.”

From 1966 and lasting for two years, Hughes set out to build “My Kingdom on Earth,” a vast gambling empire. He became the biggest personal investor in Las Vegas, going on a buying spree that included the Desert Inn, where he took up residence on the ninth floor.

Nevada governor Paul Laxalt had exempted Hughes from making personal appearances before the Gaming Control Board. But rumors resur-faced that Hughes was dead and an impostor was in his suite. Forced to respond, Laxalt personally called J. Edgar and asked him to investigate to determine if Hughes were alive or dead.

After FBI agents sent to Vegas investigated for ten days, J. Edgar was forced to admit defeat. He called Laxalt telling him that “we cannot guarantee that Mr. Howard Hughes is dead or alive, or that he is actually the man inhabiting the ninth floor of the Desert Inn.”

There was a fear that a cabal of persons was secretly conducting vast Hughes operations, siphoning off the money. His wife, former screen actress Jean Peters, came to Las Vegas, but was not granted entry into his suite.

After the initial report, J. Edgar ordered his agents to keep investigating Hughes. In a second secret analysis, much later, it was determined that after the mogul’s involvement in a plane crash in 1946, he had become a drug addict. In an FBI memo, 64-1996-6, it stated that “Mr. Hughes takes at least six codeine tablets a day. He is in constant pain, especially in his thigh bones and pelvis. He contracted syphilis in the 1930s, and it was never adequately treated. The still lingering effects cause him agonizing pain. He also has an obsessive-compulsive disorder that practically paralyzes his brain at times, leading to dysfunctional decisions. He is extremely erratic in behavior, often injecting himself, the needles sometimes breaking off in his body and not removed. He often goes as much as forty-eight hours without sleep watching B-pictures from the early 1940s.”

As J. Edgar neared the end of his life in 1970, he was called upon to investigate the mental condition of Hughes, who was also entering the twilight of his life.

Since Hughes Aircraft had become the third largest supplier of weapon delivery systems to the Air Force, the Pentagon asked J. Edgar to check up on the mental stability of Hughes himself. Reports reaching the Pentagon ranged from the charge that Hughes was drugged 24 hours a day, definitely suicidal, or even that he was dead. Journalists have since called the probe “unique in the history of domestic espionage.”

“A tough assignment,” J. Edgar told his aides. “We’ve got to determine the mental condition of the fattest cat in the States.”

In ten weeks, FBI agents in Washington, New York, and Las Vegas interviewed dozens of people who were known to have had some sort of contact with Hughes, even waiters in Nevada. J. Edgar himself wrote the FBI’s conclusion, having his letter hand delivered to the Pentagon. As he stated in Report no. 62-1476-4, “Mr. Howard Hughes has become paranoid, vengeful, and an emotionally disturbed man, whose mind has deteriorated to the point that he is capable of both suicide and murder.”

When Hughes heard that the Air Force might move against him, he outwitted all of them by donating Hughes Aircraft to the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. Not wanting to move against a charity, the Pentagon capitulated, and President Eisenhower announced to the press, “Howard Hughes has created a high water mark for American philanthropy.”

Actually Hughes’ brain might not have been as damaged as J. Edgar’s reports indicated. His great gift turned out to be an incredible tax dodge. For every \$1 million the institute gave to medical research, it had to give \$2.5 million back to Hughes himself.

When the FBI investigated Hughes’ two other major corporations, the movie studio, RKO, and the aviator’s beloved TWA, J. Edgar received a report that both companies were “each in total chaos being run by a man who some have determined is certifiably insane.”

In 1971, President Richard Nixon sent J. Edgar the government’s final request for the FBI to investigate Hughes’ stability. In a personal “for-your-eyes-only” memo, J. Edgar concluded after a month-long investigation by his agents, “Mr. Howard Hughes is considered by many to be an unscrupulous individual who possesses a highly unstable nature, is ruthless and capable of almost anything.”

The continuing investigation into Howard Hughes was ongoing at the time of J. Edgar’s death in 1972. Hughes died in 1976, but the FBI still followed a directive J. Edgar had left in the Hughes file.

“Have agents fly to whatever city Hughes dies in and get his fingerprints to see if they match those we possess at the Bureau. It is very important that we determine that it is actually Howard Hughes who died—not some impostor.”

Whenever actress Lindsay Lohan goes into a court today, it attracts massive tabloid coverage. Back in 1949 and the early 1950s, Judith Coplon received the same treatment from the press but for different reasons. A twenty-seven-year-old *cum laude* graduate of Barnard College, and employed in the Internal Security Division of the Department of Justice, she outwardly appeared as the model postwar “government girl.” She was, in fact, a spy for the Soviet Union, having been recruited by the KGB back in 1944. In her sensitive position, she had access to counter-intelligence secret data.

J. Edgar and Clyde learned about her espionage as a result of a VENONA message received in 1948, sent to her under her Soviet code name of SIMA. The code-cracking VENONA was still a top-level secret, and could not be revealed in a trial. If it had, the Soviets would learn that their code to their foreign agents had been cracked.

Under J. Edgar’s confidential orders, sensitive but fake U.S. secrets were fed to Coplon, who in return relayed them to the Soviet Union.

With mounting evidence against her, she was tried in 1949 for espionage and a year later for conspiracy, both trials resulting in a conviction.

In the Coplon case, the judge had ordered that the FBI turn over the original documents in her file, including recordings and disks. Defying the judge, J. Edgar ordered the originals destroyed. President Truman later said, “During the Coplon trials, I

came as close I ever did to firing Hoover.”

Clyde had planned a glorious celebration to honor J. Edgar’s silver (i.e., 25th) anniversary as director. But he told his fellow agents, “That commie bitch comes along to ruin everything for us and to turn Eddie sour.”

Both of the convictions against Coplon were overturned in 1950 and 1951, a judge concluding that she was guilty of both charges, but J. Edgar’s FBI agents had lied under oath about illegally bugging her phone. Her privileged conversations between her attorney and herself were also bugged. A new trial, though possible, was never pursued.

Coplon remained in America, marrying her attorney, Albert Socolov, with whom she lived until her death in 2011.

Writing in *The New York Times*, Gertrude Samuels raised some questions: “Why do some people become traitors? What turns some native-born Americans, as well as naturalized citizens, into Benedict Arnolds and Quislings? What motivates them to betray their country and themselves?”

Historian Bernard DeVoto at Harvard denounced J. Edgar and his FBI dossiers on Coplon, labeling them “the irresponsible chatter of retarded children.”

J. Edgar wasn’t going to take that, and he ordered that Clyde and his agents launch a massive investigation to weed out communist professors not only at Yale and Harvard but at some fifty campuses around the country. In the wake of this, discreet firings followed, with many academic careers destroyed.

One professor, Howard Higman, earned a 6,000-page file, which was made available to him in 1991 under the Freedom of Information Act. Not only faculty members and deans were accused of “being soft on communists,” but university or college presidents were also targeted.

J. Edgar not only investigated communists, but continued to probe into the sexual lives of both politicians and entertainers. He sent Truman a confidential memo, claiming that one of his administrative assistants, David Niles, and Charlie Ross, his press secretary, were engaged in indiscreet and random affairs with women.

At a cabinet meeting, Truman denounced this latest report. “Being a victim of Cupid,” the President said, “is not being a victim of Moscow propaganda. Having a known homosexual as the director of the country’s internal security force, and making him a target for any hostile Soviet intelligence service, is far more dangerous than a little womanizing on the side.”



Once a household word during the early stages of the Cold War, the notorious **Judith Coplon** died on February 26, 2011, in a Manhattan hospital at the age of 89.

During her youth, she had been convicted in two separate trials of spying for the Soviet Union. Judges eventually overturned her convictions because of illegal wiretaps and a lack of warrants, although proclaiming her guilt nevertheless.

During their investigation of her, FBI agents vied for a chance to put her under surveillance. They soon learned that she entertained a frequently changing array of well-built male friends and, as they performed their studly duties, she didn’t close the curtains or turn off the lights. As Guy Hotell later said, “It was a live porno show going on every night.”

As a guest on the live broadcast of a radio talk show, Lester Cole, one of the “Hollywood Ten,” awkwardly encountered an ex-communist, the writer Budd Schulberg, who had testified as a friendly witness before HUAC. “Aren’t you the canary who sang before the *Un-American* Committee?” Cole asked. “Aren’t you just that canary? Or, are you another bird, a pigeon—the

stool kind? Just sing canary, sing, you bastard!”

The radio station manager cut off Cole’s mike.

For many years, J. Edgar and Clyde had maintained a file on Schulberg, a novelist, sportswriter, screenwriter, and TV producer. In 1941 he had written a highly successful novel, *What Makes Sammy Run?*, followed by another hit novel, *The Harder They Fall*.

What caught the attention of J. Edgar and Clyde was when Schulberg served in the Navy during WWII and was assigned to the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). He worked with John Ford’s documentary unit, and, following VE Day, was one of the first U.S. military men to liberate Nazi-run concentration camps. “What I saw in those camps caused me to have a nightmare every night for the rest of my life,” he later recalled.



In a characteristic pose (behind a camera), the glamorous **Leni Riefenstahl** became one of the three most famous German women associated with WWII—Marlene Dietrich opposing the Nazis and Riefenstahl exploiting their “power and glory” with her propaganda movies. The third most celebrated woman, known mainly after the war, was Eva Braun, Hitler’s longtime mistress who became his wife in their dying pre-suicide days in a Berlin bunker in 1945.

Author **Budd Schulberg** (*lower photo*) interrogated Riefenstahl in more ways than one during both a grilling and a “drilling” in Austria. Schulberg died in 2009 at the age of 95, the lone survivor of the OSS Field Branch that located and analyzed Nazi films, in attempts to identify men who were later charged with crimes against humanity. At the time of his death, he was working on a book entitled *The Celluloid Noose* about the Nürnberg trials.

At the end of the war, he was charged with gathering evidence against Nazi war criminals, which would lead to many of their deaths. His biggest assignment was to track down Hitler’s favorite filmmaker, Leni Riefenstahl, at her chalet in Kitzbühel, Austria. She was needed to identify the Nazi war criminals who had appeared in some of her Nazi-sponsored film footage, which had been confiscated by Allied troops.

After the war, her reputation was trashed internationally, and she was denounced as “Hitler’s girl friend,” who had glorified the Nazi Party through her films such as *Olympia* and *Triumph of the Will*.

While Schulberg grilled her, he learned that she had made use of slave labor in the form of concentration camp gypsies destined for Auschwitz.

When Schulberg returned to Hollywood, he himself was grilled by FBI agents in Los Angeles. Apparently at the time, the Bureau did not know that the author had been a member of the Communist Party. That would be revealed later.

The FBI wanted to know what Schulberg had learned when he’d interrogated Riefenstahl. He described his visit to her home, Seebichl Haus. “She made a spectacular calculated entrance, wearing yellow corduroy slacks with a golden brown leather jacket. I thought she was like so many actresses of her age I had met before, fading beauties who tried to compensate in make-up and grooming what they lacked in physical appeal.”

Later in the *Saturday Evening Post*, Schulberg had written about the “Nazi Pin-Up Girl.” To the author, Riefenstahl denied all charges of collaboration with the Nazis, claiming, “I was the victim of Goebbels. He made me do what I did. Otherwise, he threatened to send me to a concentration camp. I hardly knew Hitler. The talk of our having an affair is a libelous lie.”

To the FBI agent, Schulberg told an amazing story, whether true or not. When a report was filed, J. Edgar believed it was true.

In his confession, Schulberg admitted that he became infuriated at Riefenstahl because she was so evasive in denying her role in glorifying the Nazi Party and her intimate association with Hitler. “Call it the Jew in me, but I became so enraged I attacked her. I held a knife at her throat and warned her if she resisted me, I’d disfigure her. When I shot off in her, I said, ‘That’s what it feels to get fucked by a fat Jewish dick.’”

Afterward, he searched her home, taking away three suitcases of material. Several included pictures of a young Marlene Dietrich. In one, both women were bare breasted. He forced her to admit she’d had a lesbian affair with Marlene in the 1920s. That information only solidified J. Edgar’s long-held opinion that Dietrich was a secret Nazi.

Schulberg later bragged to Elia Kazan on the set of *On the Waterfront* that, “I think Riefenstahl liked getting fucked by me. After all, what fun could she have had with the tiny dick of the Führer? Do you think he made her lick his one ball?”

In 1951, Schulberg became caught up in the communist witch hunt. Screenwriter Richard Collins, testifying before HUAC, outed him as a former party member. When called to testify, Schulberg, trying to save his career, became a friendly witness, naming other Communist Party members.

Unlike most writers summoned before the committee, Schulberg’s career was rescued. In 1954, he won an Oscar for his screenplay of *On the Waterfront* and another for his 1957 *A Face in the Crowd*.

Other “stool pigeons” would follow Schulberg, including film director Elia Kazan, playwright Clifford Odets, and actor Lee J. Cobb.

Born in Istanbul to Greek parents, Kazan was one of the most honored and influential directors on Broadway or in Hollywood, and he introduced a new generation of unknown Method actors to movie audiences, including Marlon Brando and James Dean in such films as *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), *On the Waterfront* (1954), and *East of Eden* (1955). During his career, he received two Oscars as Best Director.

He was investigated by the FBI, who turned up evidence of his support of “dangerous left-wing causes.” He was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1952, and became a friendly witness, naming names. This move shocked Hollywood and cost him the friendship of his liberal friends such as playwright Arthur Miller.

After an investigation, J. Edgar and Clyde determined that Kazan had been a member of the American Communist Party in New York between the years 1934 and 1936.

At first Kazan refused HUAC’s request to provide names of other communists who had worked with him in the Theatre Group during the 1930s. Among the many names cited by him for their communist affiliations were Paula Miller, who later married acting guru Lee Strasberg.

Kazan, according to J. Edgar's dossier, became disillusioned with the party, and he turned against communism, especially after the Hitler-Stalin pact. Consequently, its members turned against him. As Kazan told Arthur Miller, "I hate the communists and have for many years, and I don't feel right about giving up my career to defend them. I will give up my film career if it is in the interest of defending something I believe in, but not this."

Arthur Miller dropped Kazan as a friend, but he received support from another playwright, Tennessee Williams, with whom he had collaborated on numerous plays and films. An outsider himself because of his homosexuality and controversial theatrical statements, Williams "became my most loyal and understanding friend through all those black months when I was being denounced as a rat," Kazan said.

Because of his affiliation with Kazan and "other undesirables," the playwright was also investigated by J. Edgar and Clyde. They accumulated a rich dossier on his homosexual lifestyle, even exploring the rumor that he'd given John F. Kennedy a blow job in Palm Beach after having been introduced to the President by author Gore Vidal.

Kazan also found a sympathetic soul in actor Lee J. Cobb, whom he cast in *On the Waterfront*, for which Cobb was Academy Award nominated in his supporting role.

Born to a Russian-Jewish family in the Bronx, Cobb was outed by J. Edgar, Clyde, and other FBI agents for his support of political organizations suspected of being communist fronts. For two years, he refused to testify before HUAC, but he was summoned in even more forceful terms in 1953. He relented and gave testimony, naming twenty people who were former members of the Communist Party.

As he tried to explain himself, he said, "The blacklist is just the opening gambit—being deprived of work. HUAC wore me down. I had no money, no work. I had a wife and children to support. Why should I subject them to this? I decided keeping my mouth shut wasn't worth the price, wasn't worth dying for. If testifying would keep me out of the penitentiary, I'd do it. I had to be employable again."

His career resumed with the controversial *On the Waterfront*, where he worked with Kazan and Budd Schulberg, two other HUAC "friendly witnesses," although they weren't all that friendly. *On the Waterfront* itself can be interpreted as an allegory and apology for testifying.

Frank Sinatra wanted to play the lead role, that of an ex-boxer, Terry Malloy, who is persuaded by a priest to inform on corrupt unions. At first Brando vowed never to work with Kazan again because of his outing of former communists. But eventually, Brando was persuaded to take the role. The star claimed that Kazan, Schulberg, and Cobb "squealed like pigs on castration day."

The one film that J. Edgar and Clyde wanted to see in 1952 was *High Noon*, starring an aging Gary Cooper and a young Grace Kelly. Rumor had spread that the film, "disguised" as a Western, was actually an attack on McCarthyism. Through a connection in Hollywood with director Fred Zinnemann, Clyde was able to get a copy sent to FBI headquarters in Washington where a private screening was held.

Cooper played a longtime marshal of a small town in New Mexico who must face a criminal released from prison who is threatening to kill him. The American Left saw the film as an allegory of people, especially those in Hollywood, who were afraid to stand up to HUAC or to oppose Senator McCarthy. However, the movie did eventually gain the respect of people with conservative/anti-communist views.

J. Edgar and Clyde agreed with those who interpreted the film as an attack on their anti-communist movement, and were instrumental in getting its writer, Carl Foreman, called before HUAC to give testimony.

A screenwriter and producer, Chicago-born Foreman came from a working class Jewish family. One of the top screenwriters in Hollywood, he had scored great successes with such films as the 1949 *The Champion*, starring Kirk Douglas, and his 1950 *Cyrano de Bergerac*, which won an Oscar for José Ferrer, who was also suspected of having "communist leanings."

Foreman was not only writing *High Noon* but producing it with Stanley Kramer. Called before HUAC, Foreman testified that he had been a member of the Communist Party in 1941 but became disillusioned with Stalin's policies and had resigned. HUAC defined him as an "uncooperative witness," which automatically put him on the Hollywood blacklist. Unlike Kazan and Schulberg, Foreman had refused to name names.

Back in Hollywood, Kramer tried to get him kicked off *High Noon*, but he had contracts and demanded his legal rights. Kramer later claimed, "Foreman blackmailed me to keep him on. He threatened if I didn't, he would go before the committee and name me as a communist, which I definitely was not."

Even so, Foreman knew that *High Noon* would be his last assignment in Hollywood. After completion of the film, he moved to England, where he worked on scripts such as *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, using a pseudonym when his writing was channeled back to Hollywood.

The super American patriot, John Wayne, agreed with J. Edgar and Clyde that the film was an attack on McCarthy and his anti-communist drive. As the chief promoter of the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, Wayne

led the fight to “have Foreman run out of this country.” The cowboy star denounced *High Noon* as “un-American.”

Ironically, even though he was the major big-name attacker of *High Noon*, Wayne agreed to accept the Oscar for Gary Cooper when he won that year as Best Actor.

Although Cooper won the Oscar, the film, *High Noon*, in an upset defeat, did not. The Academy Award for Best Picture went to Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Greatest Show on Earth*. This is still viewed as one of the biggest upsets in the history of the awards, ranking up there with Judy Garland’s loss for *A Star Is Born*. Director Zinnemann later claimed, “The Academy chickened out. They were afraid of McCarthy. DeMille was one of that crazed senator’s biggest supporters. *High Noon* deserved that Oscar but the nutty Right Wing won out that night.”

Another fervent anti-communist, and a future U.S. president, Ronald Reagan, disagreed with Wayne about *High Noon*. “The main character of the sheriff has a strong dedication to duty, law, and the well-being of the towns-people, and I applaud that,” Reagan said.

Eisenhower had the film screened at the White House and claimed, “I love it.” But, as far as presidents go, the real champion of *High Noon* was Bill Clinton. “It is my favorite film,” he said. He had it screened a record of seventeen times at the White House.

In 1959, Wayne wanted the last word when he teamed with director Howard Hawks to make *Rio Bravo*, which he considered the conservative response to the Cooper film. Hawks said, “I made *Rio Bravo* because I didn’t like *High Noon*. Neither did Duke. I didn’t think a good town marshal was going to run around town like a chicken with his head cut off asking everybody to help. And who saves him? His Quaker wife as played by Grace Kelly. That isn’t my idea of a good Western.”

David Niven, a close friend and former lover of Grace Kelly, spent one afternoon drinking with her at the Monte Carlo Country Club. He asked her what she felt about the political controversy that had raged around *High Noon*. “To hell with all that,” the future Princess Grace said. “I just wanted Gary Cooper to fuck me before he became too old to get it up.”



John Wayne led an attack on Gary Cooper's *High Noon* (poster above) calling it "the most un-American thing I've ever seen in my life" in a *Playboy* interview in 1971. Yet on Oscar night, he agreed to accept the Academy Award on behalf of his friend, Cooper.

Wayne also claimed that he had no regret for getting the film's creator, Carl Foreman, blacklisted from Hollywood. Cooper himself had

conservative views, but agreed to make the film anyway because he recognized its power and potential as a box office hit.

Grace Kelly and Gary Cooper (lower photo) were lovers both on screen and off during the making of *High Noon*.

J. Edgar was never afraid to tackle a high-profile target. “If I can investigate the private lives of U.S. presidents, I can most definitely take on lesser mortals,” he told Clyde and his most trusted agents. “And that includes Einstein himself.”

Albert Einstein, the German-born theoretical physicist, discovered the Theory for General Relativity and is today hailed as the Father of Modern Physics. In 1921, he won the Nobel Prize for Physics.

Arriving in New York in 1933, eighteen days before Hitler rose to power in Germany, Einstein was almost not allowed into the country. The State Department, the War Department, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and most definitely J. Edgar’s FBI had been told by pro-Nazi, anti-Semitic “sources” that the scientist was a secret spy for the Kremlin.

The Women’s Patriot Corporation had sent J. Edgar an urgent letter, asking him to use his influence to deny entry to Einstein. The group stated, “Not even Josef Stalin himself is affiliated with so many anarchic communist front groups.”

Fearing international ridicule for refusing entry to the world’s most famous scientist and a Nobel prize winner, the State Department relented and allowed him into the United States.

The immigration trouble alerted J. Edgar that the United States may have allowed a dangerous “subversive” into the country. When Einstein heard that Hitler had seized power in Berlin, he decided not to return to his native Germany. After several months in Belgium, he moved temporarily to England before immigrating to the United States. He accepted a position of teaching physics at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, an affiliation that lasted until his death.

After he settled into New Jersey, Einstein’s file at the FBI began to grow. Amazingly, some of the most damaging accusations presented to J. Edgar came from Heinrich Himmler, head of the newly formed Nazi Gestapo. From Berlin, Himmler wrote J. Edgar a number of derogatory letters about Einstein, considering him “a dangerous communist and enemy to world peace. As a Jew, he wants to sow dissent between the peace-loving American people and the peace-loving German people.”

Himmler charged that in the early 1930s, Einstein’s apartment in Berlin “was a center for all extreme radical cabals” and that his summer house at Caputh was “a hiding place for Moscow envoys.”

The Nazi also claimed that Einstein’s office in Berlin had “been a cable drop for Russian spies.” The Gestapo leader reported that Einstein’s secretaries had extracted coded messages from telegrams and letters passed to the scientist and had sent data to Soviet couriers who in turn delivered the secrets directly to the Kremlin.

In reality, Einstein did not have an office in Berlin, but worked out of his home. He also had only one secretary, Helen Dukas.

The FBI did turn up evidence that Einstein had an affair with Margarita Konenkov, a Russian immigrant married to the sculptor Sergei Konenkov. She was later outed as a Soviet agent by a former Russian spy master, Pavel Sudoplatov, in his 1995 memoir, *Special Tasks*.

J. Edgar and Himmler became so cozy that he invited the Gestapo leader to the 1937 World Police Conference in Montreal. Himmler and J. Edgar were still corresponding just months before the Nazi attack on Poland, igniting World War II.

The FBI director also maintained links with KRIPO, the Nazi criminal police agency, which was conducting murderous attacks on Jews, homosexuals, and Gypsies. J. Edgar continued to correspond with this Nazi police group up until three days before the Japanese attack of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Of course, after Germany declared war on the United States, J. Edgar went on a campaign to round up Nazi spies in America.

During the Spanish Civil War, the FBI discovered that Einstein supported the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, composed of volunteer soldiers from the American Communist Party battling the dictator Franco.

As journalist Phil Shannon wrote: “Einstein was attacked by a ludicrous parade of sources, including informants suffering from schizophrenia and dementia, deranged crackpots, con artists, blackmailers, pro-Nazis, far-right nutters, anti-Semitic bigots, and apostate Stalinists, with self-serving allegations. Even so, the FBI case against Einstein being a subversive was running on empty.”

Einstein’s mail was opened, his phone bugged, and he was tailed by an agent. The FBI even rummaged through Einstein’s garbage at Princeton, a technique known as “trash watch.” In nearly a quarter of a century, Einstein’s FBI file grew to some 1,800 pages, perhaps a lot more because J. Edgar ordered much of the really personal data destroyed upon Einstein’s death.

As J. Edgar told his most trusted agents, “I want first to demonize Einstein and then neuter him.” J. Edgar would continue his campaign to get the Immigration and Naturalization Service to deport Einstein, an FBI lobbying that lasted as long as Einstein did.

J. Edgar was not alone. In those pre-war years, open anti-Semitism and pro-Fascist points of view were popular expressions. A conservative columnist, Jimmy Tarantino, ran an editorial advocating RED-FRONTING EINSTEIN SHOULD BE DEPORTED. “So who needs Einstein?” Tarantino asked. “Not the American people.”

In 1940, Einstein became a naturalized U.S. citizen. He had a number of friendly chats with President Roosevelt, warning him that German scientists were working to develop an atomic bomb. He urged FDR to launch such research in America, assuming he would be asked to work on the project. “It will be a race to see which country destroys which country first,” Einstein told the President.

Einstein’s friendly talks with Roosevelt did not extend to J. Edgar, who was instrumental in preventing him from working on the Manhattan Project. J. Edgar convinced military intelligence that Einstein “was far too Red and would supply all our atomic secrets to the Kremlin.”

Ironically, the Manhattan Project was riddled with Soviet spies who went undetected by J. Edgar until it was too late.

Einstein was deeply disappointed he was not appointed to work on the Manhattan Project, because he wanted “to wipe Nazism off the face of the earth.” He saw many of his colleagues from Germany working on the bomb. One newspaper claimed that “without these European scientists, often Jews, the Manhattan Project would not have produced a firecracker.”

J. Edgar’s ear listened to every accusation presented against Einstein, regardless of how far-fetched. Charges included that the scientist was part of a communist conspiracy to take over Hollywood. He was also accused of working to invent a death ray or a “mental control” robot. Most of the accusations concerned unproven charges that he was a Soviet agent.

During the war, Einstein did contact J. Edgar to report several death threats, as Josef Goebbels had placed a bounty on his head. Einstein feared a Nazi spy assassination attempt on his life. One German magazine listed him under the category of “not yet hanged.”

In the 1930s Goebbels had proclaimed that “Jewish intellectualism is dead,” and he’d ordered the burning of Einstein’s books and papers. On hearing of Einstein’s fears, J. Edgar told Clyde and other agents, “We will not protect Einstein. The ugly fart is on his own.”

After the war, on J. Edgar’s instruction, Einstein’s file grew every time he joined another civil rights group. “These are un-American organizations,” J. Edgar claimed. “They are in essence Red fronts.”

In 1947, Einstein said, “I came to America because of the great, great freedom which I heard existed in this country. I made a mistake of selecting America as a land of freedom, a mistake I cannot repair in my lifetime.”

Although Einstein today is a beloved figure, that was not the case in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1945, a senior Democratic congressman from Mississippi, John Rankin, attacked Einstein. “It’s about time the American people got wise to Einstein. He ought to be prosecuted.” Rankin was a friend of the Franco regime in Spain. Rankin claimed Einstein was a “foreign-born agitator trying to spread communism around the world.”

J. Edgar had his agents turn up the heat on Einstein when he appeared on the once-a-week NBC television show, *Today With Mrs. Roosevelt*, on February 12, 1950. Two weeks before that, Truman had announced that the United States was surging ahead of Russia in the development of a hydrogen bomb, which he claimed would be 100 to 1,000 times more powerful than those he’d ordered dropped on Japan.

On the former First Lady’s show, Einstein had warned that the development of a hydrogen bomb might annihilate mankind. His appearance was greeted with a headline that proclaimed—DISARM OR DIE, SAYS EINSTEIN.

After hearing the broadcast, J. Edgar ordered agents to intensify their probe of Einstein. To his aides, he said that the Eleanor and Einstein show on NBC represented “Eve and the Snake combined. All they can offer America is a poison apple.”

Up until near the time of his death, Einstein was urging witnesses not to testify before Senator McCarthy’s subcommittee.

On April 18, 1955, Einstein died at the age of 76. Only then did J. Edgar close the FBI file on him.

By the end of the 20th century, Einstein’s fame arguably topped his contemporaries. In 1999, *Time* magazine named him “Person of the Century,” beating out even Franklin D. Roosevelt. His name has become synonymous with genius. A Gallup poll ranked him the fourth most admired person of the 20th century.

Today his estate still takes in ten million dollars a year from the sales of Einstein memorabilia, everything from coffee mugs to T-shirts.

J. Edgar also targeted celebrity Paul Robeson for intensive surveillance. It was an eerie prelude for his greater battle with Martin Luther King, Jr.

Somewhat forgotten today, the African-American Robeson was an athlete, an actor, a bass-baritone concert singer, and a major recording artist of his day. Eventually, he became tabloid fodder because of his political radicalism and activism in the burgeoning civil rights movement.

A nationally renowned football player from 1917 to 1920, he was the first major concert star to popularize Negro spirituals, and he was also the first black actor of the 20th century to star as William Shakespeare’s *Othello* in a production with an all-white cast. In 1930, he appeared opposite Dame Peggy Ashcroft’s Desdemona. His affair with the distinguished Ashcroft lasted on and off until the late 1950s. Two years before that, he’d appeared in the role of Joe in the London production of *Show Boat*, immortalizing himself by singing the definitive version of “Ol’ Man River.”

Robeson’s links with the Soviet Union began in 1934 when he journeyed to Moscow, finding the country free of racism.

However, when he stopped over in Berlin, he was nearly attacked by the Nazi *Sturmabteilung* (storm troopers).

After World War II, Robeson's fame as a civil rights activist grew steadily, which brought him into conflict with J. Edgar, who had him spied on every day of his life.

In July of 1946, horrified at the lynching of blacks in the South, Robeson appealed to President Truman. Joining him as co-chairman in the American Crusade Against Lynching was Albert Einstein, who became one of his closest friends. Robeson threatened Truman that if he did not do something about these lynchings, "the Negroes will." The President did not capitulate to Robeson's intimidation, and quickly showed him to the door of the Oval Office.

J. Edgar spread the word that Robeson was a card-carrying communist, but on October 7, 1946, Robeson issued a statement denying it. At one point he called J. Edgar "a cocksucking liar," but that was not printed, given the self-imposed censorship of that era.

Over dinner at Harvey's, J. Edgar and Clyde plotted to discredit Robeson by turning the second most popular African American, Jackie Robinson, against him. Robinson was the first black major league baseball player of the modern era.



Near the end of her life, the former First Lady, **Eleanor Roosevelt**, had become "A Lioness in Winter." After her death in 1962, the press hailed her as "the most famous woman on Earth."

On her NBC talk show, in direct contrast to Harry Truman's policies, Albert Einstein warned about the dangers of increasingly powerful atomic bombs.

After Einstein's appearance on her show, J. Edgar sent an urgent memo to FBI offices around the country: **SEARCH OUT ALL DEROGATORY INFORMATION ON EINSTEIN.**

J. Edgar was particularly angered at a speech Robeson had made on April 20, 1949, at the International Student Peace Conference in Paris. He claimed that in the event of a war between the United States and the Soviet Union, blacks would not support their country because of their second-class citizenship status within America.

Even though he did not have to, Jackie Robinson agreed to testify before the HUAC. "Hoover convinced me there would be repercussions if I did not appear," Jackie said. "I was afraid my career in baseball would be seriously damaged, and I would harm future integration of black professional athletes."

Before HUAC, Jackie said, "If Robeson wants to sound silly when he expresses his personal views in public, that is his business and not mine." Jackie's carefully worded statement could hardly be construed as an attack on Robeson. "Racial

discrimination is not a creation of communist imagination,” Jackie said.

Even so, Robeson considered Jackie’s testimony “a disservice to the black community.”

After the hearing, Jackie left Washington immediately, a black newspaper, *New Age*, suggesting that he ran out of town before “being Jim Crowed by Washington’s infamous lily-white hotels.”

J. Edgar told his aides that he found Jackie’s testimony “too nelly. I wanted more he-man attacks on Robeson.”

The FBI director pressured NBC in March of 1950 to cancel Robeson’s appearance on Eleanor Roosevelt’s television program, *Today With Mrs. Roosevelt*.

“I can just imagine what that man who loves white pussy and Horse Face, who, on occasion, went for nigger dick have to talk about,” J. Edgar told his aides.



Paul Robeson, the African-American singer born in Princeton, New Jersey, occupied a prominent place on J. Edgar’s hit lists of communists to pursue.

An outstanding athlete, singer, and actor, he appeared in the Broadway revival of *Show Boat* in 1932, and that same year, in the film version of *The Emperor Jones*—a rare example at the time of a black starring in a major Hollywood production. He is forever remembered for his recording of “Ol’ Man River” from the 1936 film version of *Show Boat*.

The singer earned the ire of J. Edgar because of his outspoken criticism of racism in America, claiming his people received fairer treatment in the Soviet Union.

For his stand, he became one of the tragic figures of blacklisting in the 1950s.

Largely because of J. Edgar’s interference, Robeson had his passport revoked in 1950 under the McCarran Act, the State Department citing the star’s frequent criticism while abroad of the U.S. treatment of blacks. Robeson was blacklisted from performing on stage, screen, radio, and television, although his right to have a passport was given back to him in 1958.

In 1952 Robeson was awarded the International Stalin Peace Prize by the Soviet Union, although he was banned from going there to accept it. When Stalin died, Robeson issued a statement to world press. Forgetting that Stalin, like Hitler, was responsible for the death of millions, Robeson claimed, “Throughout his deep humanity, by his wise understanding, Stalin leaves a rich and monumental heritage.”

“Yeah, right,” J. Edgar said, “that is, to those who survived the death camps.”

During Robeson’s blacklist, it became difficult in America to hear him sing on radio or even to buy his music. J. Edgar

even wanted to have MGM cut the segment from its popular musical *Show Boat*, in which Robeson had sung the memorable “Ol’ Man River.”

When a would-be film producer, Martin Richards, wanted to make a documentary on Robeson, he went to the Library of Congress only to learn that most of the newsreel footage on the star had been destroyed or else the sound erased. When pressed for its whereabouts, a librarian informed him it was sent to the FBI, which did not respond to the Richards’ request to turn over the lost footage. It is believed that J. Edgar destroyed the newsreels.

In his own appearance before the HUAC in May of 1956, Robeson refused to sign an affidavit affirming that he was not a communist. He reminded the HUAC that the Communist Party was a legal party before he invoked the Fifth Amendment against self-incrimination. He claimed that White America wasted the lives of sixty to a hundred million “of my people,” who died on slave ships or on plantations in the South.

In the spring of 1961, Robeson journeyed to the Soviet Union for the last time. Disguised as a tourist, an FBI agent followed him there. He reported that Robeson attended “a wild party” in his hotel room in Moscow before locking himself in his bedroom and attempting suicide by cutting his wrists. He was brought to recovery in a local Russian hospital, later claiming that, “I had this powerful sense of emptiness and depression.”

Plagued by years of ill health, Robeson at the age of 77 died on January 23, 1976 in Philadelphia, having suffered a stroke. The black press eulogized him, calling him “Gulliver among the Lilliputians.”

J. Edgar and Clyde never liked the movies of Charlie Chaplin and always viewed him suspiciously, beginning a file on him. The first entry on him was in 1921 when William Z. Foster paid a social visit at the Chaplin Studio in Hollywood upon his return from the Red International Conference of Labor Unions in Moscow.

By the time of J. Edgar’s death, the Chaplin file had mushroomed beyond 2,000 pages. Much of the data had been destroyed, however. Throughout three presidential elections when Foster ran for President of the United States on the Communist Party ticket, in 1924, 1928, and 1932, Chaplin supported his candidacy and helped finance his campaign.

Throughout Chaplin’s heyday as the king of silent films in the 1920s, and on throughout the Depression era of the 1930s, and into the early years of WWII, J. Edgar and Clyde continued to add to their Chaplin dossier. At times they seemed more intrigued by Chaplin’s sexual life than they did his left-wing political views.

The FBI established very early into their surveillance of Chaplin that he liked to seduce underage teenage girls. When he visited brothels, he always requested “the youngest whore.” He virtually outed himself as a child molester when he said, “The most beautiful form of life is the very young girl just starting to bloom.”

One of the most damaging reports to reach the FBI was that on occasion Chaplin liked to have sex with underage teenage boys who were “imported” from Mexico, seduced, and then sent back across the border.

Mildred Harris, Chaplin’s first wife and a teenager herself, spread that gossip around Hollywood. So did 1920s heartthrob Ramon Novarro, who also preferred sex with young boys or at least very young men.

The FBI files showed that Chaplin seduced some of the leading actresses of his day, including Louise Brooks, Hedy Lamarr, Carole Landis (who committed suicide), Pola Negri (who was mostly lesbian), Edna Purviance (his co-star in silent films), Claire Windsor, and the nymphomaniac Lupe Velez when she was not otherwise occupied with Gary Cooper.

Chaplin also slipped in seductions with Aimee Semple McPherson, American most famous and controversial evangelist, as well as with Marion Davies, the mistress of press baron William Randolph Hearst.

He’d impregnated first wife Harris, an actress, before she turned “sweet sixteen.” Lita Grey, his second wife and co-star of his 1925 *The Gold Rush*, bragged about his sexual prowess. “He told me that he was a stallion, and I had better get used to it. There were nights when he was good for as many as six ‘bouts,’ as he called them, in succession—with scarcely five minutes of rest in between.”

Edgar often speculated on the size of Chaplin’s penis, which the actor called “The Eighth Wonder of the World,” claiming it was a thick twelve inches. Mae West, an expert on male genital size, seemed to agree. “Chaplin was short and his nose average, but his pecker was really big-time.” J. Edgar always wanted to get a nude frontal of Chaplin, but never succeeded.

Orson Welles cast a dissenting vote about the size of Chaplin’s penis. “I once showered with him. It was a little peanut.”

Welles was referring to a shower they’d had together after a swim in his pool when he’d taken a script to him called *The Ladykiller*, in July of 1941. It was about the wife murderer Landru. Chaplin bought the script but changed the title to *Monsieur Verdoux*, which he didn’t release until 1947.

Of course, J. Edgar and Clyde continued to monitor data about Chaplin and his political views, or what other people, both pro-Chaplin and anti-Chaplin, had to say on the star. J. Edgar’s favorite remark came from Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the Russian Revolution, who claimed “Chaplin is the one man in the world I want to meet.” Lenin’s replacement, Josef Stalin, was also a great admirer of Chaplin, not just for his films, but also for his political views.

J. Edgar and Clyde had always plotted how “to get Chaplin,” and a great opportunity occurred during the war years. One would think they had more important activities to pursue with the nation at war, but J. Edgar made a decision to divert a lot of

the Bureau's resources to pursuing Chaplin's sex life.

The starlet, Joan Barry, became the one young woman Chaplin wished he'd never seduced. She brought a paternity suit against the actor in 1943, which led to an array of investigations and other charges.

As Gary Cooper said when he heard the news, "That gal dated high on the hog." She briefly had been the mistress of oil tycoon J. Paul Getty, arguably the richest man in the world at the time. Tiring of her, he passed her on to his friend A.C. Blumenthal, the financier behind many movies. He, too, tired of her and passed her on to Chaplin.

In 1941, Chaplin seduced Barry with the promise he'd give her a starring role in a picture he was going to make called *Shadow and Substance*. The movie was never made. Apparently, Barry was a young woman of whom her older male lovers tired of quickly, and Chaplin gave her some money and wanted to get rid of her. After being promised stardom, she didn't want to let go of her prize catch.

She showed signs of severe mental illness, which was confirmed when she began stalking him. One night she broke into his home with a gun and threatened him. He wrestled the gun from her and threw her on the floor where he proceeded to rape her until he'd climaxed three times, or so she claimed. His second wife, Lita Grey, had suggested that he was capable of doing that.

In his autobiography, Chaplin recalled that once he'd had dinner with J. Edgar "many years ago. After one overcomes a rather brutal face and a broken nose, one finds him quite agreeable."

Such was not the case in 1942 when Chaplin dined at Chasen's in Los Angeles. He spotted J. Edgar and Clyde eating steaks at a nearby table. The men did not converse, although Chaplin nodded to J. Edgar on his way out of the restaurant. Unknown to the actor at the time, J. Edgar was in Los Angeles to investigate charges that Chaplin violated the Mann Act which made it against the law to transport a woman across the state line for purposes of seduction.

It was learned that Chaplin had transported Barry to New York when he appeared at Carnegie Hall, rallying supporters advocating the opening of a Second Front in Europe as a means of aiding the Russians in the East. Not only had Chaplin seduced Barry himself, but he had passed her around to his friends at an orgy staged at his hotel suite. Allegedly Chaplin had called Barry "the party favor."

On hearing this, J. Edgar told his agents, "If this is a White Slave violation, we ought to go after him vigorously."

At some point Clyde had interviewed the Hollywood financier, Blumenthal, who agreed to speak off the record if he'd be granted immunity. He confessed that since 1925, he'd attended orgies with Chaplin. "At the first one, Chaplin showed up with Louise Brooks, and they went at it from nightfall until the next day." He also testified that Chaplin often hired young girls to service men at these orgies. Reportedly, Blumenthal told Clyde, "Chaplin liked fourteen-year-olds. His favorite pastime was penetrating virginal hymens." Blumenthal also claimed that Chaplin told him that he practically kept an abortion clinic in Mexico in business.

J. Edgar voyeuristically read Clyde's reports on Chaplin. "It looks like we can get the fucker on the Mann Act."

Beefed up by J. Edgar's FBI reports, Charles Carr, the U.S. attorney in Los Angeles, presented his accusations to a Federal grand jury in January of 1944. He walked away with four indictments against the actor, the first an alleged violation of the Mann Act, the other three involving charges that Chaplin had violated Barry's civil rights by conspiring to have her flee Los Angeles after she was arrested for shoplifting.

Chaplin had been impressed with criminal defense attorney Jerry Giesler when he'd defended Errol Flynn on charges of statutory rape. The lawyer took on Chaplin's case, defending him against a largely hostile press. *Variety* called for Chaplin to "be drummed out of the industry."

In retaliation, and against the advice of Giesler, Chaplin shot back, charging Barry with being "an agent for a pro-Nazi cult." Even though a war was raging, Chaplin claimed that many pro-Fascists in Hollywood "are attacking me because I ridiculed Hitler in my film, *The Great Dictator*." After that outburst, which no one believed, Giesler advised Chaplin not to speak to the press about the case.

Time magazine reported "Auburn-haired Joan Barry, 24, who wandered from her native Detroit to New York to Hollywood in pursuit of a theatrical career, became a Chaplin protégée in the summer of 1941. She fitted into a familiar pattern. Chaplin signed her to a \$75-a-week contract and began training her for a part in a projected picture. Two weeks after the contract was signed she became his mistress. Throughout the summer and autumn, Miss Barry testified, she visited the ardent actor five or six times a week. By midwinter her visits were down to maybe three times a week. By the summer of 1942 Chaplin had decided that she was unsuited for his movie. Her contract ended."

Conviction on all four counts would have subjected Chaplin to a sentence of twenty-three years in prison, with fines of up to \$26,000. The jury acquitted Chaplin during his first trial on a charge of violation of the Mann Act.

Attorney General Tom Clark called Charles Carr in Los Angeles and told him to drop the other three cases of conspiracy. "We don't really have a case here." Clark overrode J. Edgar, who wanted Carr to continue to press the case against Chaplin.

But Barry was not going to go gently into that good night. On October 2, 1943 she'd given birth to a baby girl named Carol Ann. She claimed that Chaplin was the father and filed a paternity suit against him.

The Little Tramp was back in the headlines again in a most unattractive way. Long before Richard Nixon played dirty tricks, J. Edgar was a master of the art. He fed unfounded rumors about Chaplin to Hollywood's two most viperish columnists,

Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper. When they reported his accusations, he then issued FBI reports, claiming that “the press alleges....”

In one column, published on December 27, 1943, Hopper wrote that Chaplin contributed \$25,000 to the Communist Party but only \$100 to the Red Cross. Parsons dredged up the old charge that the Queen of the Silent Screen, Mary Pickford, had once called Chaplin “a dirty old man.”

Chaplin, along with Barry and Carol Ann, her infant daughter, were ordered to take blood tests. The tests revealed that Chaplin’s blood type was O, Barry’s blood type A, and Carol Ann’s blood type B, making it highly unlikely that Chaplin was the biological father. Giesler moved for a dismissal of the charges against Chaplin. The judge denied the request. At that time blood tests could not be admitted as evidence in California state courts.

In a memo sent to J. Edgar on August 25, 1943, Robert Hood of the FBI in Los Angeles claimed that Chaplin’s attorneys were “buying up male witnesses to testify that they were intimate with Berry (sic) at the time Carol Ann was conceived.” He alleged that unlimited funds were being expended.

As bizarre as it sounds, Attorney General Clark and J. Edgar feared that Chaplin would skip bail and flee to the Soviet Union. He’d been invited by Stalin himself to pay a goodwill visit to Moscow. Barry testified that Chaplin had told her that he was considering a defection because Stalin had promised to make him a commissar over the lackluster Soviet film industry. Hood also told J. Edgar that Chaplin was taking lessons in Russian.

For her lawyer, Barry signed with Joseph Scott, whom a reporter compared to an Old Testament prophet. The trial opened on December 19, 1944, at which time jurors heard Scott denounce Chaplin as “a cheap Cockney cad, a pestiferous, lecherous hound, and a little runt of a Svengali.” He even suggested that Chaplin had taken shots to change his blood type, although that was impossible.

Lita Grey, Chaplin’s divorced second wife, claimed that her former husband had paid corrupt government officials to tamper with the blood test results.

The jury deadlocked on January 4, 1945, with seven voting for acquittal, five for conviction. The judge ordered a second trial which opened on April 12, 1945. This time nine jurors voted for convictions, the rest for acquittal. Instead of facing yet another trial, Judge Clarence L. Kincaid ruled that Chaplin should pay Barry \$5,000 plus \$75 a month in child support until Carol Ann turned twenty-one.

In the early 1950s, doctors diagnosed Barry as a schizophrenic and consigned her to a state mental hospital in California. Although she faded from his life, J. Edgar did not. More troubles for Chaplin were on the way.

On March 7, 1947, Senator William Langer of North Dakota visited the offices of J. Edgar where he was shown excerpts from the file on Chaplin. Angered, the next day he addressed the Senate, asking why “a man like Charlie Chaplin, with his communistic leanings, with his unsavory record of law-breaking, or rape, or the debauchery of American girls 16 and 17 years of age, should remain in this country.”

That same year HUAC subpoenaed Chaplin to come before their committee to testify. The actual hearing was postponed three times before it was finally cancelled. Working behind the scenes, J. Edgar had determined it was better to keep him off the witness stand and not allow him to present his side of the story. “Let the rumors and innuendos stand,” J. Edgar advised. Richard Nixon also warned that if called “Chaplin is likely to ridicule and lampoon us in a movie.”

Chaplin was invited to attend the premiere of his film, *Limelight*, in 1952. He accepted the invitation and flew to London, not knowing that J. Edgar would work to prevent his return to California.

J. Edgar met with James P. McGranery, President Truman’s final appointee as Attorney General. After reading the FBI file on Chaplin, Mc-Granery determined that the re-entry of Chaplin into the United States should be opposed on the grounds of “moral turpitude.” The Attorney General was particularly incensed at the number of abortions Chaplin was said to have arranged. He agreed with J. Edgar that Chaplin could be barred under the law banning “political or moral undesirables.”

On hearing of the legal troubles that awaited him back in the U.S., Chaplin decided not to return. He told the press, “Since the end of the last world war, I have been the object of lies and propaganda by powerful reactionary groups who, by their influence and the aid of America’s yellow press, have created an unhealthy atmosphere in which liberal-minded individuals can be singled out and persecuted. Under the conditions, I find it virtually impossible to continue my motion picture work, and I have therefore given up my residence in the United States.”

Eventually, Chaplin left England, settling in Vevey, Switzerland, with his fourth and final wife, Oona O’Neill, whom he’d married when she was eighteen years old. Her father, playwright Eugene O’Neill, had objected to the marriage.

Chaplin would not return to the United States until April of 1972, when he was invited by the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Sciences to receive an honorary Oscar.

With only weeks to live, J. Edgar spent his fading energy trying unsuccessfully to prevent Chaplin’s re-entry into the country. He failed, and the ailing eighty-two-year-old actor flew to Hollywood, where the Academy gave him the longest standing ovation in its history when Jack Lemmon presented him with his overdue Oscar.

J. Edgar had failed to pin the Red label on Chaplin, but, with the aid of Senator Joseph McCarthy, he would succeed in wrecking other lives because of some affiliation with communism, regardless of how tenuous.



By blackmailing **Richard Nixon** (*left*), J. Edgar managed to continue as FBI director during Nixon's first term as president.

On the surface, at least, J. Edgar maintained a friendly relationship with **Ronald Reagan** (*right*). Guy Hotell later said, "If told that Reagan would one day become president of the United States, Eddie would never have believed it. For one thing, he would think that by the 1980s, Reagan would be far too old to hold another political office. Besides, Eddie thought a divorced actor without a lot of brain power could never become president."

Had Reagan ascended to the presidency during J. Edgar's lifetime, J. Edgar had already prepared his blackmail on him. The FBI director told Guy, "As head of the Screen Actors Guild, Reagan once raped a young woman, and I covered it up."

As J. Edgar moved into the 1950s, his obsession with chasing after followers of "commonism" (he never could pronounce the word) remained at fever pitch. Riding piggy-back on McCarthy, the FBI director and the senator defined the final Truman years and the launch of the Eisenhower era. They continued on a headline-making streak that divided a nation.

After leaving office, Truman blasted Mc-Carthy on TV. "McCarthyism is the corruption of truth, the abandonment of our historical devotion to fair play. It is the spread of fear and the destruction of faith in every level of our society. This horrible cancer is eating at the vitals of America, and it can destroy the great edifice of freedom."

J. Edgar was called upon to defend the senator. "I view him as a friend and believe he so views me. Certainly he is a controversial man. He is earnest and he is honest. He has enemies. Whenever you attack Communists, Fascists, even the Ku

Klux Klan, you are going to be the victim of extremely vicious criticism.”

None of Truman’s criticism was quite as vicious as what one future president, Richard Nixon, told another future president, Ronald Reagan, one night in California when the two met together to see if they might join forces to help each other’s future careers.

“Isn’t it ironic?” Nixon asked Reagan, “that Hoover and McCarthy are chasing after Reds and faggots in the State Department, and both of them, the senator and director, have sucked more cocks than your secret girlfriend, this Marilyn Monroe thing.”

CHAPTER TEN

Twelve days after the launch of the Korean War, J. Edgar sent a daring plan to the White House that would suspend *habeas corpus* and imprison some 12,000 Asian Americans suspected of disloyalty. The plan was shown to Harry S Truman on July 7, 1950, calling for mass arrests “to protect the country against treason, espionage, and sabotage.” From a list provided by J. Edgar’s office, the FBI could apprehend any person viewed as potentially dangerous to national security. Since 1946, J. Edgar and Clyde had been compiling this list of possible traitors.

Since the arrests in New York and California would cause the prisons in those states to overflow, J. Edgar proposed that the prisoners be jailed at military facilities across the country. This provocative plan evoked J. Edgar’s participation in the notorious Palmer raids of 1920, which swept up thousands of people suspected of being communists or radicals.

In September of 1950, Truman vetoed as unconstitutional a law authorizing the detention of persons suspected of being a “dangerous radical.” Opposing him, Congress passed the Internal Security Act of 1950, also known as the McCarran Act. Congress voted to override the President’s veto. Truman never signed the bill.

Senator Joseph McCarthy had promised the Tydings Committee that he would name “the top Russian espionage agent in the United States,” an employee of the State Department. At that point in their relationship, Mc-Carthy was still on friendly terms with J. Edgar and Clyde, and was seen frequently with the two FBI honchos at Harvey’s Restaurant, where they continued to dine for free, or at the race track, as all three men were avid fans and secret gamblers. J. Edgar always placed “safe bets,” having been tipped off before as to which races were fixed by the Mafia.

Working around the clock, the best name that J. Edgar and Clyde could provide for McCarthy to throw under the bus was Owen Lattimore. Born in the U.S., Lattimore had been reared in China, where his parents taught English at a Chinese university. He became an author/educator and influential scholar of Central Asia.

After the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in June of 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Lattimore U.S. adviser to Chinese Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek. In 1944, Lattimore was given the post of helming the Pacific area for the Office of War Information. At this point he came under J. Edgar’s surveillance.

When Lattimore accompanied Vice President Henry Wallace on a mission to Siberia and Mongolia in 1944, the scholar aroused J. Edgar’s suspicions once again. He told his aides, “We don’t have proof yet, but I think Lattimore is marching to the drum beat of the Kremlin. Both he and that Wallace.”

At one point, Lattimore visited the Soviet Union’s concentration camp at Kolyma and later wrote favorably about it, claiming the inmates looked strong and well fed. That was the nail in Lattimore’s coffin as far as J. Edgar was concerned. McCarthy wanted a victim, and J. Edgar fingered Lattimore.

On December 14, 1948 Alexander Barmine, the former *chargé d’affaires* at the Soviet Embassy in Athens, wrote a letter to J. Edgar, claiming that Lattimore was a Soviet agent, based on what he’d been told by Soviet GRU Director Janis Berzin. Later, J. Edgar would arrange for Barmine to get in touch with McCarthy and have him repeat these accusations before the Senate Committee in 1951.

In a preliminary private meeting with the Tydings Committee before the actual public hearings, McCarthy lied and said he had not spoken to J. Edgar about the case. He also told Tydings and the senators, “If you crack this case, it will be the biggest espionage case in the history of the United States.” Finally, he vowed, “I am willing to stand or fall on the Lattimore case.”

Appearing before Tydings and other senators in March of 1950, Mc-Carthy outed Lattimore as the top Soviet agent in the United States. Privately he’d told Tydings, “When Soviet spies land in the United States, they first report to Lattimore for their marching orders.”

McCarthy cited Lattimore’s “tremendous power” at the State Department, and called him the architect of the Far East policy of the United States.



One of the major victims of Senator Joseph McCarthy's witch hunt for communists was **Owen Lattimore**, an expert on Far Eastern affairs. He is seen above (*left*) talking with **Chiang-Kai Shek** in 1941.

William C. Sullivan, J. Edgar's number 3 man at the FBI, said, "We investigated the hell out of Lattimore, read every letter and memo, everything he ever wrote, but we never found anything substantial to use against him. Mc-Carthy's accusations were ridiculous."

On that day, Lattimore was in Kabul, Afghanistan on a cultural mission for the United Nations. Denouncing the charges as "moonshine," he rushed back to America to testify before the Tydings Committee.

McCarthy summoned Louis F. Budenz, former editor of the Communist Party *Daily Worker*, who testified that Lattimore was a secret communist, but not a Soviet spy. "He often assists the Soviets in their foreign policy," Budenz lied.

After hearing the witnesses and McCarthy's reckless charges, the majority report cleared Lattimore, although some senators still felt he was a spy.

As it turned out, Lattimore did not work for the State Department at all. "We're still looking for his desk," said Tydings. It seemed that he had once given a speech to State Department employees on Far East matters five years ago. In response, the Tydings Committee published a report denouncing McCarthy and his claims against Lattimore as a hoax.

McCarthy got his revenge when Tydings ran for re-election in 1950 and was defeated by John Marshall Butler.

Roy Cohn, McCarthy's chief aide, distributed a *faux* composite picture of Tydings with Earl Browder, the former leader of the American Communist Party. The doctored photo merged a 1938 picture of Tydings listening to the radio and a 1940 photo of Browder delivering a speech. The suggestion was that Tydings was an eager listener to Browder's communist propaganda. The voting public in Tydings' state of Maryland fell for the libel.

Lattimore was not let off the hook so easily. In February of 1952, he was called to testify before the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee (SISS) headed by a dedicated anti-communist, Senator Pat McCarran, Mc-Carthy's ally. Except for the McCarthy/Army hearings to come, this twelve-day session was the most acrimonious of all the investigative hearings, marked by shouting matches, even threats of physical violence between the opposing sides.

Budenz was brought in again to testify that Lattimore was both a communist and a spy for the Soviets, contradicting his previous testimony.

Finally, after seventeen months of controversial hearings, and after having summoned sixty-six witnesses and thousands of documents, the Mc-Carran Committee issued a 226-page unanimous report. Lattimore was named as "a conscious and articulate instrument of the Soviet conspiracy," with the understanding that he had functioned in that role since the 1930s. He was indicted for perjury on seven counts. But within three years a Federal judge, Luther Youngdahl, would dismiss the charges, calling the so called evidence "insubstantial and not judicable."

Thanks to insider tips, McCarthy and J. Edgar usually won at the race tracks, but they lost the ball game for the McCarran Committee. The controversy, however, destroyed Lattimore's academic career. He became one of the more prominent victims of McCarthyism.

Both J. Edgar and McCarthy wasted little time fretting over the Latti-more case, moving on to their next victims.

The man with the perpetually bloodshot eyes, Roy Cohn, was one of the most brilliant, ruthless, and controversial lawyers in America. He met and gained the attention of J. Edgar and Clyde when he served on the Justice Department's prosecution team at the espionage trials of Soviet spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. In gay bars, he proclaimed that it was he who

influenced Judge Irving Kaufman to impose the death penalty on his fellow Jews, the Rosenbergs.

J. Edgar and Clyde bonded with Cohn, and soon he was seen dining with them at Harvey's Restaurant. "We share a lot in common," J. Edgar told him. The sharp wit of Cohn didn't need but a second to figure out what that meant, but he knew he had to take the first step in outing himself to gain greater intimacy with Clyde and his boss-lover.

Cohn would later confide to his best friend, literary agent Jay Garon, that "Eddie and I lived deep in the closet in those days, but I knew how to win him over and show him I was one of them. When Clyde excused himself to go to the men's room one night, I looked wistfully at him as he moved away, and whispered to Eddie, 'I wish I had a man like that in my life.' At first he looked astonished, but then his face relaxed. I had sent the signal. He'd received it. From then on, it was clear in our relationship that anything goes. And it did, year after year after year. Eddie and I were not only gay, both of us were two of the most despised people in America."

When McCarthy asked J. Edgar to recommend a legal aide for his staff, the FBI Director named Cohn. "He can spot Red a mile away, and he sees a commie around every corner," J. Edgar claimed. "Wait until you see him put a commie on the hot seat. Roy's grilling beats any police detective with a suspect under a blazing light."

"I'm considering this other aggressive young guy, Robert Kennedy, the ambassador's son," McCarthy said.

He was referring, of course, to Joseph P. Kennedy, who had been ambassador to England and was a close friend of J. Edgar's.

"Don't do it," J. Edgar cautioned. "There are already rumblings that your boys are anti-Semitic. Let's face it: you and I are. And all the Kennedys, including the founding *padre*, are anti-Semitic. If you appoint Cohn over Kennedy, it will show Congress that all your boys don't say Jew followed by the word bastard."

Talented, but with a character compared to both a porcupine and a serpent, Cohn told McCarthy, "I am a living rebuttal to the libel that all Jews are communist sympathizers." Smart and savvy, the twenty-six-year-old stood five foot eight. His hooded eyes gave him the perpetual look of someone denied sleep. Under slicked back black hair, he had a mysterious scar that ran down his nose.

During the day, Cohn castigated and sought out "commie sex perverts" in the Department of State, whereas at night he trolled the gay bars, preferring butch and clean-cut military types, preferably "blond and uncut," a rather kinky requirement for a Jewish boy descended from ancestors who practiced the age-old rite of circumcision on their infants.

In spite of McCarthy's own private life, he publicly claimed that homosexuals should not be allowed to work in government because they might be subject to blackmail. Without ever proving it, he stated that he knew the Soviet Embassy employed a series of good-looking men to entrap government workers into sexual situations where they could subsequently be blackmailed to turn over confidential information.

Within just a few weeks, Cohn was seen sitting at Table 50 in Manhattan, where columnist Walter Winchell held court at the Stork Club, with J. Edgar on one side of him and Clyde on the other. Cohn fed Winchell confidential information about "American traitors."

One night at the club, when Winchell had gone to meet Clark Gable at the bar, J. Edgar asked him how "things" were going with McCarthy.

"We're getting along great," Cohn said. "One weekend he took me to his lakeside retreat in Wisconsin owned by a friend of his. He drank a lot of bourbon which loosened him up a bit. He gave it to me up the ass."

If J. Edgar and Clyde didn't show surprise at this revelation, it was because they already knew that McCarthy was a closeted homosexual. J. Edgar lived in dread that news of McCarthy's homosexuality would reach someone in the press and discredit all of their anti-communist maneuvers, as it invariably did.



At a Senate hearing, **Joseph Mc-Carthy** (left) places his hand over the microphone as his chief counsel, a young **Roy Cohn** (right) feeds him confidential information.

In covering up his own homosexuality, J. Edgar was sometimes placed in the awkward position of concealing McCarthy's true sexual preference. In 1952, Attorney General J. Howard McGrath received a letter from a young Army lieutenant, David Sayer. He accused McCarthy of "brutally sodomizing me" at the Wardman Park Hotel in Washington after getting him drunk.

J. Edgar had Clyde conduct a perfunctory investigation, and it was indeed determined that Sayer and McCarthy, both of them drunk, had checked into the hotel at two o'clock one early morning without luggage. Occupants in nearby rooms reported a disturbance which had died down by dawn when an unshaven McCarthy departed the hotel. J. Edgar wrote Mc-Grath that the FBI had looked into the accusation and found it without merit.

At one point, Cohn was allowed to read the file the FBI kept on Mc-Carthy. Although his sexual affairs in Wisconsin were not known, as a young senator he was watched closely in Washington. Apparently at one time he had hired a University of Wisconsin graduate, John Steadman, with whom he had been intimate in their home state, to work with Veterans Affairs. Because of the housing shortage in post-war Washington, the young man had a rented room. McCarthy was seen leaving the man's room sometimes as late as three o'clock in the morning.

One night, McCarthy's friend was arrested for soliciting a soldier in the men's room of the Washington bus terminal. McCarthy placed an emergency call to J. Edgar, who arranged for Steadman to be immediately transported back to Wisconsin with no charges filed.

This incident did not entirely escape press notice. The *New York Post*, then a liberal newspaper, ran a seventeen-part series called "Smear, Inc., The One-Man Mob of Joe McCarthy." In 1947, the researchers, William V. Shannon and Oliver Pilat, wrote: "The man [meaning McCarthy] who flam-boyantly crusades against homosexuals, as if they were the menace to the nation, employed one in his office staff for many months."

In a private meeting, J. Edgar remained late at the office, talking with Clyde and Guy Hotell, who had just prepared a memo for McCarthy attacking homosexuals in the State Department.

"Roy Cohn and Joe McCarthy are our friends right now," J. Edgar warned them. "I'm a good judge of character. I find that both of these firecrackers have it in them to blow themselves up. I visited their office. They're sloppy and inefficient. They don't prepare their cases well. They hurl accusations and then turn to us for evidence, even if there is no evidence—a very risky business."

"What we've got to do is give them love and kisses but remember they are both rattlesnakes. They could bite us at any minute with their poison, even turn on us if things don't go well. We'll sleep in the same bed with them, but remember it's sleeping with the enemy. When they go down, we've got to see to it they don't take us with them. But for the moment, at least, we'll play around with these two lover boys."

Francis ("Flip") Flanagan was a veteran Capitol Hill operative who accepted the position of general counsel to the McCarthy staff. Roy Cohn was chief counsel, a position coveted by the young and aggressive Robert Kennedy, who was

appointed assistant counsel.

Flanagan and Cohn lunched together at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington. “You have a real enemy in Bobby Kennedy,” Flanagan warned Cohn. “First off, he’s not all that crazy about Jews. Second, you’re not exactly a member of the Palm Beach Polo Club. Finally, you’ve got the job he covets.”

Robert Kennedy’s first position, working for Joseph McCarthy and having to deal with Cohn, came about through the father of the Kennedy clan, Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr., a long-time friend of McCarthy.

On his first visit to Hyannis Port, McCarthy told Joseph and Rose, “I’m shanty Irish. You guys are lace curtain Irish.”

“We are just two Irish Catholics trying to make our way in a Protestant and Anglo-Saxon nation,” the Kennedy patriarch told him.

Before he left Cape Cod that weekend, McCarthy hit up Kennedy for a loan of several thousand dollars. The Kennedy patriarch obliged and didn’t ask what kind of jam the young senator was in.

He left Hyannis Port not only with some of the Kennedy bootleg money, but with a broken rib. When McCarthy broke his rib playing touch football, Jack Kennedy “benched him forever,” according to Bobby.

Years later, Bobby confided in Lem Billings a story he’d never told his brothers and certainly not Joe. Lem was Jack Kennedy’s best friend, a relationship that had begun at Choate in 1933 and continued for a lifetime.

A homosexual, Lem was in love with Jack, and the whole Kennedy clan knew it, but strangely tolerated Lem and his life-long obsession with Jack, whom he’d met while showering at prep school.

Lem also became Bobby’s confidant. Bobby claimed that when he was seventeen years old, he took McCarthy sailing on a small boat off the coast of Hyannis Port. “Of course, there were no toilet facilities,” Bobby said. “When you had to go, you pulled down your trunks and urinated over the side of the boat. All my brothers did that when sailing on a small craft. McCarthy came and stood beside me. At first I thought he had to take a leak. He looked down at my penis and said, ‘I could take care of that for you.’ I quickly pulled up my trunks and told him I didn’t go that route.”

This blatant proposition might have ended the relationship between Bobby and McCarthy but, surprisingly, it didn’t. In fact, in the years to come, Bobby would make McCarthy the godfather of his first child. And although privately McCarthy came on to Bobby, for public consumption, he dated two of the Kennedy sisters.

First, McCarthy dated Patricia Kennedy or “Pat” as she was called. She found that he had a “certain raw wit and charm when he wasn’t drunk.” But she eventually dumped him to marry the bisexual movie star, Peter Lawford. McCarthy then dated Eunice and told his colleagues in Washington, “This is the gal for me. The only gal I’ve ever loved.”

When Eunice dumped him to marry R. Sargent Shriver, he sent her a wedding present inscribed: “To one who lost, Joe McCarthy.”

Pat read it and said, “Oh, that Joe, pretending to be straight.”

Before McCarthy eventually proposed marriage to one of his office aides, he told Cohn, “Years ago, I figured if worse came to worst, I might have to marry one of the Kennedy gals.”

“It was Papa Joe who arranged for Bobby to work in Washington for the McCarthy committee,” Jacqueline Kennedy once recalled to author Gore Vidal. “Jack didn’t think it was a good idea, but he was overruled.”

Seeking his approval, Joe called J. Edgar. “A great way for Bobby to break into politics,” the FBI director told Joe. “McCarthy’s a great guy when he’s sober.”

“I made millions off of booze, so I can’t complain if a man has a drink or two,” Joe told J. Edgar.

Lawrence J. Quirk, RFK’s biographer, wrote: “Bobby was an ambitious 27-year-old with a black-and-white, good-guys versus bad-guys, rather narrow thinking that time and circumstances were later to force him to outgrow, and McCarthy’s howling and raucous anti-communist ‘crusade’ seemed like a right and good thing, something he could get his teeth into, something he could believe in.”

Latter day fans of the very liberal Bobby Kennedy have a hard time reconciling his early role as a “Red Witch Hunter” for McCarthy.

“At the end of his life, Bobby was completely different from the young man I met when I was dating Jack,” claimed Jacqueline in discussing her brother-in-law and the man who became her lover after her husband was assassinated in Dallas in November of 1963.

In Washington, McCarthy introduced Bobby to the tyrannical Cohn, who made his dislike of the Kennedy son very obvious. Bobby, as he admitted later, “despised the brash little Jew on sight.” Bobby also intensely disliked Cohn’s aide, G. David Schine, a hotel tycoon’s son who pursued anti-communism with a dilettantish interest, perhaps needing something to do.

After a week of working with Cohn and Schine, Bobby flew back to Hyannis Port for a meeting with Joe. “Schine and Cohn are a couple of queers,” Bobby told Joe. “Cohn is definitely the bottom, as that Schine seems to manufacture testosterone by the cupful. They go about investigating an alleged communist like a bull in a china shop.”

Behind their backs, Bobby mocked Cohn and Schine as “the lavender duo, too pushy and egotistical for me. Schine walks around the office like he’s packing a foot-long dick.” Some of Bobby’s experiences with them would be recalled in his book, *The Enemy Within*.

He told Jack and Teddy that, “Hoover and Clyde Tolson often dine with Schine and Cohn. Birds of a feather if you ask me. All four of them are hit-below-the-belt-kind of fags. They decide who is a communist and then set out to gather evidence, even when the person is innocent.”

One afternoon at a Senate hearing, tension between Cohn and Bobby exploded. Bobby had objected to Cohn’s briefs for McCarthy, claiming, “You’re leading the senator into a trap.”

Cohn told Bobby, “Listen, rich man’s son, mind your own fucking business. You’re an idiot.”

At recess, an encounter in the men’s room led to Cohn slugging Bobby. He struck back, bloodying Cohn’s scarred nose. At that point Schine, the most athletic and muscular of the trio, entered the men’s room and pushed Bobby away from Cohn. Bobby hastily headed toward the exit, as Cohn called out to him: “You don’t belong on the committee. Get lost!”



Eventually, **Robert Kennedy** (*top photo, left*) became one of the most liberal members of the U.S. Senate. But when he worked for the ultra-conservative Senator **Joseph McCarthy** (*right*), the duo were known as the odd couple. Bobby told his family that McCarthy had fallen in love with him and that was why he refused to go out drinking with him at night. “I didn’t want one thing to lead to another,” Bobby claimed.

In the bottom photo (left to right) are **David Schine**, **McCarthy**, and **Roy Cohn** testifying at a Senate hearing on communism. Schine and Cohn were lovers, as the hearings would soon reveal.

It was advice that Bobby took, although McCarthy claimed he regretted his leaving and called Joe Kennedy, telling him, “Your boy did a fine job. He’s the kind of man who will one day be president, providing he switches to the Republican Party.”

Even though he came to recognize McCarthy as a tyrant, Bobby still had a bond with him and personally liked him. “He was sensitive and yet insensitive,” Bobby later said. “He was very thoughtful of his friends, but he could be so cruel to others. He was always kind to me. I cared for him, although I realized what a heavy-handed character he was.”

Over the years, Bobby tried to explain to his very liberal anti-McCarthy aides why he felt compassion for McCarthy, who had ruined so many lives. Kennedy aide Kenneth O’Donnell recalled Bobby’s remembrance.

He said, “I guess there are two sides to me, a loving man to my wife and brothers. That’s the gentler side of me. McCarthy

brought out the Hun in me. I stuck with him, even though he fell in love with me. I assure you, it was an unrequited love on his part. Deep down in my darkest soul, I must have admired his aggression, although he used it for all the wrong reasons. Both of the two Joes in my life, my dad and the senator, were father figures to me. Both of them wanted to climb the highest mountain but fell off.”

In time, Bobby would move left of center in liberal politics, but he never completely disowned his former boss. “The saddest thing about the country’s ‘Grand Inquisitor’ was that he so desperately wanted to be liked, but ended up the most despised man in America,” Bobby told his aides.

Censored by the Senate, attacked and vilified after 1954, McCarthy walked through the corridors of power in his final months like a burned-out wraith. He died in May of 1957. Bobby flew to his funeral in Appleton, Wisconsin.

A reporter for the *Milwaukee Journal* was surprised to encounter Bobby at the funeral. “He stood away from the other mourners, almost hiding behind a nearby tree. It was obvious he didn’t want his presence known. After McCarthy was put into the ground, Bobby was seen hurrying to the Green Bay Airport. With his departure that day, I think the McCarthy era, which started with such a bang, ended with a whimper.”

For thirty-seven years, Drew Pearson wrote the nation’s most popular column, “Washington Merry-Go-Round” for the *Washington Post*. He was later assisted by Jack Anderson, who eventually took over the column for him. Most mornings, over coffee, the first editorial J. Edgar and Clyde read was Pearson’s column.

Although the newspaperman and the FBI director maintained a surface politeness with each other, they privately loathed each other. During WWII, Vice President Henry Wallace claimed that the FBI had Pearson under constant surveillance. J. Edgar called him “the slut of columnists who writes pathological lies.”

Privately, Pearson referred to J. Edgar and McCarthy as “the butterfly boys.” Sometimes, if he had enough to drink, he referred to them as “those two anti-commie pansies.”

Among political columnists, Pearson was the number one muckraker in America. He never had any qualms about publishing a story whether it was true or not. Based on leaks from within the government, his truth was often heavily embroidered, as he liked to emphasize the sensation in a news item. He combined facts with invented stories of his own.

FDR claimed Pearson was “a chronic liar.” On his payroll was a staff of chauffeurs, waiters, politicians spilling the secrets on their enemies, bribed military personnel, and even a thief or two skilled at office break-ins.

The newspaperman liked to reveal the salacious details of a subject’s sexual proclivities. In time, he would open the closet door of McCarthy himself. J. Edgar and Clyde both feared Pearson, knowing he could do to them what he was doing to McCarthy.

Sometimes J. Edgar felt Pearson had gone too far, and the two of them had epic battles. On December 12, 1941, Clyde through an informant told J. Edgar that Pearson was going to reveal “what really happened at Pearl Harbor and who was responsible.” In anger, J. Edgar called Pearson and threatened to have him thrown in jail—and “you know I have the power to do that and to toss the key.” Pearson didn’t run the column, which had placed the blame for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor clearly on J. Edgar’s failure to coordinate intelligence.

Pearson angered both General Dwight D. Eisenhower and J. Edgar when he was the first to report the 1943 wartime incident when General George S. Patton slapped a soldier, Charles Kuhl. J. Edgar, working with Army intelligence, never figured out who leaked that story.



The most widely read columnist in America, **Drew Pearson** (above), was a bitter enemy of Senator Joseph Mc-Carthy. “One time, he threatened to mutilate me so I couldn’t go on television,” Pearson claimed.

When it came to exposing McCarthy, the gadfly columnist was the man for the job. He leaked information about McCarthy’s homosexuality, his bogus war record, and even that he used campaign money to speculate in the gyrating soybean market.

Pearson once revealed that McCarthy, between bouts of Senate testimony, retreated to the men’s room to chug-alug a fifth of Irish whiskey while gulping down a handful of baking soda to quiet his diaphragmatic hernia.

The columnist also angered another general, Douglas MacArthur, when he wrote that he was actively campaigning for a promotion. MacArthur sued Pearson, but dropped his case when the columnist threatened to publish love letters from the general to Isabel Rosario Cooper, his Eurasian mistress.

J. Edgar wanted to move carefully around Pearson, who constantly threatened he’d write a series of articles about his private life with Clyde. In an impulsive decision to prevent that, J. Edgar made a deal to throw his friend McCarthy to this newspaper “wolf hound.” Secretly he had Clyde leak Pearson incriminating details about McCarthy.

Since 1950, Pearson had written columns attacking America’s “Red Hunter.” McCarthy charged that David Karr, Pearson’s aide, was “the KGB handler” for the columnist. An investigation by J. Edgar and Clyde turned up evidence that Karr had worked as a reporter in 1943 for the *Daily Worker*, the communist newspaper.

The battle heated up. In Las Vegas in 1952, McCarthy called Hank Greenspun, the editor of the *Las Vegas Sun*, a former communist.

Using secrets supplied by Pearson, who in turn had gotten them from J. Edgar, the hard-boiled publisher, Greenspun, exposed McCarthy as a homosexual within his newspaper.

Additionally, the *Las Vegas Sun* revealed that McCarthy had been sexually involved with Charles Davis, who was a confessed homosexual and onetime communist. The publisher also cited the arrest of one of Mc-Carthy’s “Intimates,” Edward Babcock, an administrative assistant, who had been picked up for soliciting a sailor “for lewd and lascivious purposes.”

An informant in Madison, Wisconsin revealed that McCarthy had spent the night in a Wausau hotel room with William McMahon, formerly an official of the Milwaukee Young Republicans during the Wisconsin Republican Convention. “From the sounds coming through the thin walls, these two perverts engaged in illicit sex with each other,” the manager charged. The staff at the White Horse Inn in Milwaukee also claimed that over the years the senator had checked into a various rooms with various young men.

McCarthy immediately threatened to sue Greenspun for libel. He suspected that Pearson—not J. Edgar—was the source of the rumors. J. Edgar advised McCarthy not to do that. “So far the story’s stayed in Vegas. Let’s keep it there.”

Enraged, McCarthy reluctantly agreed to do that after he calmed down and realized that a libel trial would virtually destroy his career, because the rumors were true and because he suspected that the defense would produce dozens of witnesses to testify about his various liaisons with young men.

However, back in Washington one evening, Pearson and McCarthy each selected the Sulgrave Club for dinner, eating at tables on opposite sides of the dining room and not aware of each other’s presence. However, McCarthy encountered Pearson in the cloakroom. The senator attacked the columnist.

At that moment Richard Nixon entered the cloakroom to separate the two warriors. “Let a peaceful Quaker put an end to this.”

The next day Pearson filed a lawsuit against McCarthy, charging him with “grabbing me by the neck and kicking me in the groin.” McCarthy counter-charged that Pearson was “a communist tool.”

On September 29, 1953, McCarthy married his office aide, Jean Kerr, a dedicated anti-communist. In the years leading up to their marriage, they had often fought and broken up. On three different occasions he had fired her.

J. Edgar, Guy Hotell, and Clyde speculated that he got married to quash rumors that he was a homosexual. The marriage did not succeed in doing that. If anything, after the McCarthy/Army hearings the rumors were red hot.

At parties and on other occasions, McCarthy came on strong with women, almost to the point of harassment. Some of the more naïve observers of the 1950s called him a womanizer; however, he never seemed to follow through on a conquest even when a woman indicated she might be willing to give him a tumble.

McCarthy’s wedding attracted A-list guests, including J. Edgar and Clyde, John and Robert Kennedy, Patricia and Richard Nixon, Secretary of the Army Robert Stevens, and even Allen Dulles, director of the CIA. From the Vatican, the Pope sent his blessings.

Willard Edwards of *The Chicago Tribune* wrote, “At the age of forty-five, McCarthy got married only to quash stories that he was a homosexual.” In writing that, he echoed an opinion already shared by J. Edgar and Clyde.

After the marriage, Clyde and J. Edgar behaved like a married couple visiting another married couple. As Cohn claimed, “Hoover used to come over with Tolson, and he loved Mrs. McCarthy’s cooking. All of us would sit around, let our hair down, and exchange confidences, a very relaxed evening, although we were some of the most controversial people in America.”

Drew Pearson’s main investigative reporter, Jack Anderson, won the 1972 Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting the same year J. Edgar died. Clyde Tolson called Anderson “the lowest form of human being to walk on the face of the earth.”

After Anderson began attacking J. Edgar and how he ran the FBI, the director told his aides. “We must silence his sources and spread scurrilous rumors about the fucker.”

At one point, Anderson hired a detective to sort through J. Edgar’s household garbage, although he turned up nothing incriminating. The FBI director, who had ordered many a garbage can associated with other suspects searched, was too clever to toss out anything revelatory about himself. As the detective reported to Anderson, “J. Edgar and Tolson must bare-back—not even a used rubber.”

From J. Edgar’s garbage, Anderson did learn that he drank Jack Daniels Black Label and brushed his teeth with Ultra-Brite. For a sore throat, he took Cepacol and for stomach acid, Gelusil.

After Pearson died, Anderson took over the “Washington Merry-go-Round” column and became the king of all muckrakers. He reached an audience of forty million readers and was published in a thousand newspapers.

Anderson’s feud with J. Edgar began in the 1950s when he accused the FBI director of allowing the Mafia to go unchecked. J. Edgar called Anderson “lower than the regurgitated filth of vultures.”

The columnist hastened the destruction of McCarthy and, in the years to come, wrote exposés of J. Edgar himself.



Jean Kerr (left) took time out on September 29, 1953, at St. Matthew's Cathedral in Washington to marry Senator *Joseph McCarthy*, who was called the most hated man in America.

As columnist Drew Pearson cattily remarked to his colleagues at *The Washington Post*, "That just proves there's somebody in the world for every person. Even Eva Braun loved Hitler."

Before her marriage, Kerr told reporters that she had firmly laid down "conditions" for their marriage.

Had he made a promise to her to give up young men? She declined to disclose what her conditions were. Robert Kennedy said, "I didn't think Joe was the marrying kind."

Almost no major columnist had ever done that, but in the wake of Anderson's attacks, other newspapermen followed suit. Whatever the scandal, Anderson was on the scene with his interpretation—the Kennedy assassinations, Chappaquiddick, Watergate, fugitive Nazis, white supremacists, the Iran-Contra scandal.

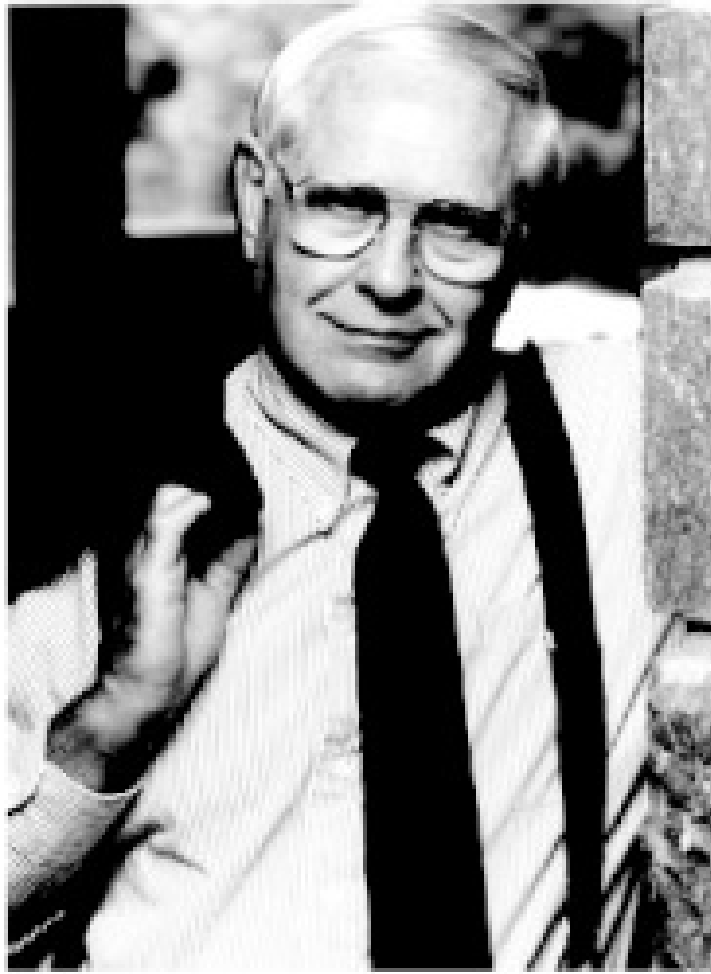
Over the years, Anderson was called "part circus huckster, part guerrilla fighter, and part righteous rogue."

As he neared the age of eighty, nothing infuriated J. Edgar more than when the columnist wrote, "Hoover should have retired ten years ago. He would better serve his country as an elder statesman who could offer advice to his successor."

The year J. Edgar died, Anderson was the target of an assassination plot brewing within the White House. For years, Nixon had blamed Anderson's publication of a story he had revealed on the eve of the elections of 1960, about a secret loan from Howard Hughes to Nixon's brother, Don, for his loss of the presidential race to John F. Kennedy. Nixon's resentments had simmered ever since 1960.

Nixon himself never authorized any attempt on Anderson's life. But reports that later came out about those "White House plumbers," G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt, claimed that this nefarious pair wanted to curry favor with Nixon by "righting a wrong of long ago." Doing away with Anderson would be "revenge at last" for Nixon, at least in their alleged view. If reports are to be believed, from within the White House, Liddy and Hunt plotted how to remove Anderson. Options they discussed included poisoning his aspirin bottle, staging a fatal mugging, or giving him a lethal dose of LSD. What saved Anderson's life was the diversion of the Watergate break-in.

Ironically, in this lifelong "Battle of the Titans," neither party ever fully succeeded in getting what he really wanted from the other. J. Edgar wanted to obtain Anderson's file on him, and the columnist wanted to obtain the FBI's file on him.



Of all the newspaper men who ever lived, J. Edgar detested columnist **Jack Anderson** the most. “I wish him dead,” J. Edgar often told Clyde and his aides.

With very few exceptions, Clyde always loathed the press, but in the beginning, he viewed Anderson as a friend of the FBI and fed him “special information.”

But when Anderson started publishing a series of articles attacking J. Edgar and the Bureau, Clyde turned, referring to him as a “turncoat,” ordering agents to “dig up the dirt.”

At the FBI, Clyde’s main job involved protecting “The Boss” from attacks.

Anderson once admitted, “I used J. Edgar as a role model by bugging phones, savaging my victims, and ignoring fairness in the pursuit of an exposé.”

J. Edgar never really destroyed either Drew Pearson or Jack Anderson, but he took delight in the disgrace of Joseph Alsop, a Harvard-educated “blue blood” of Connecticut whose ancestors had included Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and James Monroe. Entering journalism, he became a best-selling author when he published *The 168 Days* (1938) about FDR’s unsuccessful campaign to enlarge the Supreme Court.

In WWII, he trained in Burma and joined the famous “Flying Tigers,” until he was captured and interned in Hong Kong by the Japanese.

After the war, he became known for his newspaper column, “Matter of Fact.” Unlike Pearson and Anderson, Alsop insisted on the accuracy of his information even if it meant exposing the illegal investigative methods of the FBI. Although a Republican, he supported JFK’s bid for the presidency.

J. Edgar and Clyde were not fooled by Alsop’s marriage to Susan Mary Jay Patten in 1961. They knew that this noted art connoisseur and collector was a closeted homosexual like themselves. When McCarthy objected to an article Alsop had written about him in the *Saturday Evening Post*, J. Edgar called McCarthy, informing him that Alsop was a homosexual.

In a speech the following day, McCarthy did not overtly accuse Alsop of being a homosexual, but did refer to him as “not being healthy and normal” during one of his attacks on “perverts and pederasts.”

Confirmation of Alsop’s secret gay life came in 1957 when Clyde opened a package delivered to the FBI from the Soviet Embassy. In it, there were a dozen photographs of a drunken Alsop in a Moscow hotel room with a Soviet agent, a tall, incredibly handsome blond giant of a man. The American reporter was photographed performing fellatio on the Soviet hunk as

well as being sodomized by him.

When John F. Kennedy ran for president in 1960, Alsop lent him a vigorous support, even though he was descended from a long line of Republicans. When JFK took over the Oval Office, one of J. Edgar's first "official" duties was to visit him and show him the KGB photographs of Alsop and the Soviet agent. JFK dismissed J. Edgar and ordered him to destroy the photographs, a presidential command he did not obey.

In a confession, Alsop wrote a "detailed account of the incident and a narrative history of his homosexual sex life." It brimmed with revelations about his involvement with men on several continents, and even detailed his love affair with Arthur H. Vandenberg Jr., who had been the appointment secretary to Dwight Eisenhower.

For reasons of his own, Alsop delivered this highly personal document to the CIA, who in turn sent the dossier to J. Edgar and Clyde, each of whom read the papers with a certain glee.

In 1957, when Alsop wrote several articles critical of the Soviet Union, the KGB sent the incriminating sex photographs of him to some fifty journalists across America, although not one reporter chose to publish the information in the uptight Eisenhower era. At one point Alsop considered going public with details of his gay life to end the harassment, but ultimately did not.

In Gore Vidal's 1967 novel, *Washington, D.C.*, the character of a gay journalist was based on Alsop. Alsop's own memoir, lacking the spicy details, was called *I've Seen the Best of It* and published three years after his death in 1989.

General Eisenhower, in June of 1944, had successfully directed the greatest armada of all time, Allied troops landing on the coast of Normandy facing a blood bath. "It is not the end," he said, "but it is the beginning of the end. After the liberation of Paris, it's on to Berlin to destroy the Third Reich that Hitler had boasted would last a thousand years."

From a dirt-poor family in Kansas, Ike had risen to become one of the towering figures in world history even before he ran for President of the United States. Having commanded Allied forces in Europe during WWII, he'd become a popular hero.

He'd been offended by McCarthy's foam-at-the-mouth, anti-communist rabble-rousing, but didn't really understand J. Edgar's role behind the scenes. Ike was hardly soft on communism himself. As president he bullied North Korea into an armistice and presided over a bitter Cold War with the Soviet Union. He helped organize America's stockpiling of nuclear weapons, especially after Russia launched its Sputnik satellite into space in 1957.

J. Edgar, noting how thin Ike's "blackmail file" was, ordered Clyde and his agents "to dig up more dirt." He'd had plenty of blackmail on FDR, less so on Truman.

As Guy Hotell later recalled, "both Eddie and Clyde set out to look under every rock to see what they could find on Eisenhower and on Stevenson. With Stevenson, at least their investigation paid off. Ike had less scandal."

FBI agents looked into Ike's past, discovering he'd lost his virginity to a redhead known as Ruby Norman. "Ruby or Sadie always sounds to me like a hooker," the FBI director said.

Apparently, Ike was rather shy around girls until he met a teenager, Mamie Geneva Doud, the daughter of a Denver meat packer, whom he married on St. Valentine's Day, 1916, after a whirlwind romance.

During the war he was posted in London as the Supreme Commander. In England, he met a former model and movie actress, Kay Summersby, a member of the transport section of the women's Royal Army Corps. He was immediately attracted to this Irish lass, calling her "a double-breasted GI with a built-in foxhole."

Twenty years his junior, Kay virtually became his slave, pouring his coffee, laying out his clothes, and seeing that an aide kept his shoes shined.

Winston Churchill soon learned that Kay and Ike were a couple, as did King George VI. Ike and Kay showed up in Algeria, in Egypt, and in Palestine. She fell in love with her middle-aged general.

Apparently, Ike waited a long time before he put the moves on Kay, although eventually, J. Edgar and Clyde confirmed that they'd had an affair and were lovers, although the FBI did not know the true story of that relationship.

Long after J. Edgar and Eisenhower had died, a cancer-stricken Kay on her death bed worked on her memoirs called *Past Forgetting: My Love Affair with Dwight D. Eisenhower*. "It was like an explosion. We were suddenly in each other's arms. His kisses absolutely unraveled me. Hungry, strong, demanding, and I responded every bit as passionately. We were breathing as if we had run up a dozen flights of stairs."

But their passion evolved into disappointment for both of them. As she bluntly put it in her memoirs: "Eisenhower could not get an erection." Later at a secluded, guarded retreat, Telegraph Cottage, they tried on several occasions to make love. Finally, she concluded the obvious: Ike was impotent. At war's end, he decided that there was no more need for Kay in his life. He returned home to Mamie.

As author Nigel Cawthorne speculated, "One would wonder what damage the German propaganda machine could have caused if they had found out that Ike was impotent."

J. Edgar put it more colorfully, "World War II was fought between an impotent general and a Nazi leader with one ball."

In 1952, homosexuality was the love that dare not speak its name. For years J. Edgar and Clyde had been told that Ike's opponent, Adlai Stevenson, was a homosexual, although he tried to have affairs with certain movie stars to prove that he was straight. On his arm candy list were Ava Gardner, Shelley Winters, and Joan Fontaine.

The FBI interviewed Ellen Borden, the wealthy socialite whom Stevenson had married in 1928, divorcing her in 1949 after having three sons with her. Since 1935 they'd lived on a 70-acre plot of land near Libertyville, outside Chicago.

After her divorce and throughout the 1952 campaign, the ex-Mrs. Stevenson told such reporters as James ("Scotty") Reston that her husband was a homosexual. She also claimed that he had had numerous affairs and "is mentally and morally unfit for the presidency."

Suffering from what was diagnosed as "persecution paranoia," Ellen made an astonishing claim to journalist Arthur Krock. The bombshell she delivered was that one night in Chicago, Stevenson murdered a man and used his political influence to have the investigation squashed.

J. Edgar and Clyde seized on that accusation; if proven, the presidential race was all but over. The murder was said to have occurred in 1948. But after FBI agents combed through the records in Chicago, not a shred of evidence could be found to back up this charge.

Murder might be out of the question, but the homosexual label seemed to stick on Stevenson, or so J. Edgar and his agents determined. In Baltimore, Stevenson was said to have picked up a handsome young sailor, Bart Bennett Jr., and had taken him back to his hotel room "where he performed unnatural acts on me."

In another incident in Chicago, Stevenson was said to have asked a well-built room service waiter, Bruce Harwood, to revisit his bedroom after he finished work for the night. The young man placed the incident in April of 1950. Before an FBI agent, Harwood claimed that "Stevenson sucked my cock and gave me fifty dollars. He was fully dressed during our time in bed together."



Mamie Eisenhower (top photo) spent most of her life apart from her husband, General Eisenhower. After all, he had a war to win. When she moved into the White House, she said, “As an Army bride, I’ve spent most of my life in government housing, some places without electricity. For most of my life, money was as scarce as Ike was.”

Below is **Kay Summersby**, Ike’s wartime mistress. The beautiful English fashion model became his driver in wartime London. Away from Mamie, Kay

was the woman he loved.

Since these homosexual acts were allegedly committed in a private bedroom, it is not known what led to Stevenson’s arrest. Perhaps the two young men, when learning who Stevenson was, tried to shake him down for more money under threat of blackmail. When Stevenson refused to pay, the two young men may have carried through on their threat and gone to the police. At least that’s what J. Edgar suspected. He also believed that Stevenson not only paid off the two hustlers, but used his influence to get the arrests removed from his record.

What really put Stevenson on J. Edgar’s “Sex Deviate Index” at the FBI was a report that he had been arrested in a raid on a gay bar (the very existence of which was illegal at the time). He got out of jail by posting bond. Taking flight to Illinois, he forfeited that bail, although he was charged in a “morals arrest.” J. Edgar ordered Clyde to assign two of his agents to track down this record, which was discovered and put in the growing file on Stevenson. News of this New York morals arrest first appeared in award-winning Curt Gentry’s defining book, *J. Edgar, The Man and the Secrets* (1991).

“Hoover was the source of the whispers,” he wrote. “The FBI supposedly obtained from local police, statements that Adlai Stevenson had been arrested on two separate occasions, in Illinois and Maryland, for homosexual offenses. In both cases, it was claimed that as soon as the police had learned his identity, Stevenson had been released and the arrests expunged from the records, though not from the recollections of the arresting officers. Hoover used the law enforcement grapevine to spread the story, who in turn shared it with favored reporters. Although most newspaper editors had the story, none used it. But it was widely circulated, as anyone who worked in the campaign could attest.”

Among the politicians, McCarthy, as befitted his character, threatened to broadcast the arrest in a speech in Chicago he was delivering called “Pinks, Punks & Pansies.” The senator wanted to make the whispers about Stevenson public knowledge. Referring to his speech, he said Stevenson fitted at least two of the Ps—“pink” and “pansy.”

When the actual address came, in front of 1,700 supporters on October 27, 1952, in Chicago, it was carried on fifty television stations and more than 550 radio stations. McCarthy did not air charges of homosexuality, as threatened, but attacked Stevenson for being “the arch traitor of our time” for his defense in court of Alger Hiss. However, later in front of reporters for the *New York Daily News*, he constantly referred to Adlai as “Adeline.”

Although McCarthy did not carry through with his threat to out Stevenson as a homosexual, J. Edgar’s friend, Walter Winchell, was not so discreet in 1956 when Stevenson once again ran unsuccessfully against Ike. On his television program, Winchell claimed, “A vote for Adlai Stevenson is a vote for Christine Jorgensen,” a reference to the former GI, George Jorgensen, who went to Denmark in 1952 and had a sex change operation. George emerged as “Christine,” much to the delight of a bevy of handsome beaux wanting to try out this revolutionary new plumbing.

Winchell was forced off television after this broadcast, which shocked the easily shockable audiences of the Eisenhower era.

Confidential magazine reported that the rumors of Stevenson’s homosexuality “burned the breasts of a nation and was the nastiest, most widely circulated hearsay in the annals of rumor mongering.”

Ike had far more respect for J. Edgar than he did for McCarthy. Soon after taking office, Ike told his aides, “I don’t want to get into a pissing contest with that Wisconsin skunk,” meaning the senator. After the 1952 election Eisenhower assured J. Edgar that in spite of what he’d heard, “I still want you running the FBI.”

To show his gratitude, J. Edgar revealed to Ike that one of his chief aides, the son of an influential GOP senator, was a homosexual. Ike fired the hapless victim the next day without an explanation.

J. Edgar still viewed Eleanor Roosevelt as an enemy. She’d been a U.S. delegate to the United Nations’ General Assembly between 1946 and 1952, but out of respect for the incoming President-elect, she resigned her post, hoping to be reappointed. When J. Edgar heard of this, he made another visit to the Oval Office, with a dossier on the former First Lady, revealing her affairs with both women and men. Homophobic Ike passed on her, opting not to reappoint her.

After his ascension to the Oval Office, in 1953, Ike signed an executive order that stated that sexual perversion was sufficient grounds for firing somebody from any Federal job.

“There go J. Edgar Hoover and Clyde Tolson,” a defeated Stevenson mockingly told his aides.

After countless firings, the *Washington Post* claimed, “The ancient Aztecs of Mayans used to sacrifice virgins annually to propitiate the gods. The State Department sacrifices homosexuals to gain money from the House Appropriations Committee.”

During the Cold War, more homosexuals were dismissed from Federal jobs than communists.

Wanting to stay in the loop, J. Edgar kept more FBI informants in the White House during Ike's two administrations, and spied on him more than he had on any other president, even FDR. He uncovered little scandal, other than the fact that his wife, Mamie, was an alcoholic and often staggered drunk around the White House, blaming it on some inner-ear problem.

Unlike FDR, Ike appeared to be conducting no affairs within the White House. All J. Edgar could learn from his spies was that Ike had some odd personal quirks. The President would get up in the morning and emerge from the bathroom totally nude. His valet, John Moaney, would bend down on his knees and personally put on the President's white boxer shorts.

As a young man, in winter, Ike had developed the odd habit of sometimes wearing tall socks, heavy boots, and a dress overcoat—nothing else. His fellow soldiers in the barracks called him “the flasher.”

In 1960, J. Edgar made one final attempt to sabotage the political career of Stevenson. When JFK wanted him appointed Ambassador to the United Nations, J. Edgar arrived at the White House with his homosexual file on Stevenson. Both RFK and JFK ignored the file, and the President appointed Stevenson anyway. They had already been aware of these allegations for a long time.

Even when Stevenson was threatening to run again for President in 1960, with the support of Eleanor Roosevelt, both JFK and RFK told their aides not to air these gay rumors. As Bobby so graphically put it, “From what we've learned, it's been years since Adlai sucked a dick.”

It was said that the downfall of Senator McCarthy began on the day he allowed G. David Schine to work as an unpaid “chief consultant” to the Senate Subcommittee on Investigations. The strapping, tall, blond-haired Schine, a Harvard dropout, was the heir to a hotel fortune. His chief qualification for the job was that he had written an anti-communist pamphlet which his father distributed within his hotels.

Had Schine not wanted to be a “Red Hunter,” he might have fitted into the Tab Hunter 1950s movie star ideal. He was described as a pretty boy “in the style that one associates with male orchestra singers.”

Born to New York hotel magnate Junius Myer Schine, David was a Harvard drum major for the university band. *The Harvard Crimson* wrote, “Schine lives in a style which went out with the era of the Gold Coast.”

Roy Cohn told his best friend, the literary agent Jay Garon, that he'd picked up Schine in a bar and had begun an affair with him in a hotel room at the “Q Club” in Washington. Downstairs was the Quorum Club where Senators, lobbyists, hookers, and businessmen seeking government contracts came for food, drink and pick-ups. A young John F. Kennedy was a frequent visitor. Lyndon B. Johnson often showed up with his protégé, Bobby Baker.

A wheeler-dealer and LBJ's right-hand man, Baker once revealed to J. Edgar and Clyde that, “Lyndon is much more closed mouth about his extramarital affairs than Jack Kennedy.” He told the FBI men that Jack once introduced him to this beautiful French woman. “Bobby, look at this fine chick. She gives the best head in the United States,” Kennedy claimed.

Incidentally, the small town, good ol' southern boy, the ambitious Baker, was viewed by J. Edgar as the leading pimp in Washington, hooking up politicians with what were referred to as “ladies of the evening” back in the 1950s.

From all reports, David Schine was basically straight, but for the sake of his unbounded ambition he was “willing to drop trou,” as Guy Hotell claimed, “for the right party ready to advance his career. Obviously the unattractive Roy Cohn fitted his bill for career advancement. Bobby Baker referred to the unlikely duo as ‘The Beauty and the Beast.’”

Schine proved his heterosexual credentials when he went to Hollywood and was reported dating two screen beauties, Rhonda Fleming and Piper Laurie. Or, as Schine put it, “I always try to seduce women Ronald Reagan's already had, as I admire his taste.”

David's reported romancing with the beautiful Rhonda Fleming, with her flaming red hair, was superficial if they dated at all. There was gossip that they did. The actress often rode across the plains looking luscious in Technicolor opposite such stars as Glenn Ford. She made three pictures with Reagan, *The Last Outpost*, *Hong Kong*, and *Tropic Zone*. But he decided to marry starlet Nancy Davis instead.

Hailing from Detroit, the red-haired Piper Laurie toiled in programmers or out-and-out garbage, including Arabian Nights-type adventures such as *The Prince Who Was a Thief* with Tony Curtis, until Hollywood finally discovered what a skilled actress she was.

According to Piper's memoirs, *Learning to Live Out Loud*, published in 2011, her romance with Schine almost led to marriage. When she first dated him, she was unaware of his background and his relationships with Cohn and McCarthy. In fact, on their first date, he took her on the bus to the Cocoanut Grove night club at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, not knowing that his father owned it. They became lovers.

She claimed that Cohn often joined them for dinner at the Cocoanut Grove. At that time, she suspected that the young lawyer “might have a yen for me,” not knowing that he was a homosexual. Once, he put Mc-Carthy on the phone, and she spoke to him, not really knowing who he was.

Of course, during the McCarthy/Army hearings, Piper, along with the entire nation, became aware of Cohn’s relationship with Schine. She later wrote: “Perhaps Cohn had a “crush” on David, as some of the papers implied, and just wanted him around. I thought it was entirely possible Roy had romantic or sexual yearnings for David, who was a handsome six-foot-four Adonis, but the speculation that they were a homosexual couple was silly to me. David was an ardent lover of women’s bodies and loved making love. Perhaps I was naïve.”

In the 1950s, the nature of a bisexual was hardly as well known as it is today.

David eventually proposed to her, in spite of the national scandal he was involved in. She accepted and even wore the engagement ring he presented, but she finally decided to break it off.

“The truth was, the relationship with David never felt right,” she wrote. “He had fulfilled all of the superficial requirements for a husband, but I felt a darkness around him. He had never really opened himself up to me about McCarthy and Cohn, and I couldn’t understand or accept that. This was not the guy for me.”

Still a confidant of J. Edgar and Clyde, Joan Crawford told them she’d also seduced Schine on his Hollywood get-acquainted visit. He met her on a movie set one day, and she extended an invitation to dinner. Appealing to the voyeurism in J. Edgar and Clyde, she confided, “Dave has two and a half times more than Clark Gable; he’s as long as Gary Cooper, but not as thick as my former husband, Franchot Tone.”

Cohn was alleged to have been jealous of Schine’s extracurricular adventures, and a terrible row ensued upon his return to Washington.

J. Edgar and Clyde liked Schine far better than McCarthy did, because Schine’s father let them stay free at his Miami hotel during one of their “working vacations.” Even so, J. Edgar ordered that Schine and Cohn be put under surveillance.

Schine and Cohn once joined J. Edgar, Clyde, and Guy Hotell on one of their Florida trips. They shared rooftop suites across from one another with a swimming pool between them. “Dave paraded around a lot before us in the buff,” Guy said. “A low-hanging sausage and cut. After all, he was Jewish. Other than that, he looked like Hitler’s ideal of the Aryan male.”

J. Edgar snapped a frontal nude of Schine, which he added to his secret scrapbook.

Long before the Army hearings brought them down, Cohn and Schine set out on a whirlwind tour of Europe in the spring of 1953. Their job: to ferret out subversive literature from the libraries operated by the U.S. Information Agency. A London tabloid was blunt in a headline: COHN AND SCHINE, THE TWO LONDON LOVERS.

Theodore Kagan, Deputy Director of the Public Affairs Division in the Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, called Schine and Cohn “junketeering gumshoes.”

The downfall of Schine and Cohn began when “pretty boy” was drafted into the Army in November of 1953. He certainly met all the physical requirements. When he stripped down for his physical before an Army doctor, two young men whistled at the male beauty, which earned them a 4-F on the grounds of homosexuality.

Cohn was unable to get his lover exempted from military service in spite of repeated phone calls. He then changed his tactics and tried to get him commissioned as an officer. The Army denied that pitch on the grounds that Schine had dropped out of Harvard.

Frustrated, Cohn made repeated calls to the Secretary of the Army, Robert Stevens, seeking to give Schine, who would be a private, privileges during basic training, something almost unheard of.



The beautiful **Piper Laurie**, a budding starlet, and **David Schine** were snapped by a nightclub photographer on their first date at the Cocoanut Grove night club at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles in 1952.

At the time, Piper seemed unaware that David was the boy friend of Roy Cohn, who was serving as chief counsel on McCarthy's staff trying to ferret out communists in government offices. Since he took her there by bus, she feared he had little money.

Later, she found out that his father owned the hotel. Soon, David's lover, Roy Cohn, started joining them for dinner.

"David should be allowed a pair of mittens I gave him," Cohn said, "instead of the usual Army regulation gloves. Also I wish to buy him a pair of special boots, those with buckles and straps. I insist he be given a fur-lined hood with his overcoat. When on maneuvers, he should use a sleeping bag, which I have purchased for him, and an air mattress—not the cold, cold ground. It is imperative that he be given a pass every weekend to work with me on committee business."

Schine had to wear regulation Army clothing, but he did get more weekend passes than his fellow soldiers, reportedly to help with Mc-Carthy's investigation of rounding up communists. Waiting across from the barracks every weekend was Cohn in a chauffeured limousine to take his boyfriend to the Stork Club in Manhattan.

After an evening there, they would retreat to a free suite at the Waldorf-Astoria, arranged by Clyde himself, to "make up for lost time."

The chauffeur who used to drive them into Manhattan later claimed that once Schine got in the back seat of that limousine, Cohn couldn't wait to get at him. "He'd unzip his pants and give him a blow-job on our way into Manhattan," the driver claimed.

In his hunt for communists, McCarthy had the support of millions until he almost came unglued and began to attack the Army as being riddled with communists. Most Americans didn't believe that was true and seemed to turn against McCarthy when he attacked Secretary of Defense George Marshall, one of the country's most revered military men. McCarthy even accused Eisenhower of being lax in internal security in the Federal government.

American political circuses entered a new age when the McCarthy-Army hearings opened on April 24, 1954. By the millions, viewers were glued to their relatively new television sets. This was the first time TV expedited the downfall of a tyrant. More politicians would fall victim to the medium in the future. Television with its omnipotent eye could destroy a political career faster than all the newspaper columns in the country.

Instead of exposing communists in the Army, the military lawyers turned the focus on McCarthy's aides, especially the relationship of Schine and Cohn. The question was, what was the exact bonding of these two men, although the word homosexual was not uttered, following the decorum of the day. But it was clearly suggested. Cohn was left squirming in his seat when it was revealed that he had sought special privileges for his companion.

Secretary of the Army, Robert T. Stevens, claimed, "There is perversion here." He paused for effect before adding "a perversion of power." He reported a private remark that McCarthy had made to one of his aides. "Roy thinks that Dave ought to be a general and operate from a penthouse at the Waldorf-Astoria."

The Army called on Ray Howard Jenkins, a politically ambitious criminal lawyer from Knoxville, Tennessee, to press its case. "You and this boy, David Schine," Jenkins said on TV. He paused long enough to allow the word "boy" to sink into his audience. "You and this boy, David Schine, are almost constant companions, good, warm personal friends, are you not?"

Cohn admitted only that “we are friends pursuing the same goal on the committee.” But Jenkins had scored his point, with the clear suggestion that they were two lovebirds.

After that hearing, “the hazel-eyed dynamo,” as *Time* magazine called Cohn, became the subject of off-color jokes throughout Washington, even figuring into show business acts. Joe E. Lewis, the nightclub comic, sang, “I’m gonna love you like nobody’s loved you, come Cohn or come Schine.”

The hearings and the attack on the Army infuriated Ike, who in a surprise move enlisted the help of J. Edgar. At this point, the cunning FBI director decided that McCarthy and Cohn were going down, primarily because of the Schine affair.

Secretly, without McCarthy finding out, J. Edgar supplied the President’s staff and the legal brass of the Army with “forty-four counts of improper behavior and pressure Cohn had brought on the Army.” The FBI report included a threat that McCarthy and Cohn had made that they were going “to wreck the Army” if it did not give in to their demands regarding Schine. After reading his version of the report the FBI had prepared for him, Ike wrote across the top, “it’s a pip!”

He ordered the Army to release the FBI report, although it was not identified as having been compiled by J. Edgar and the FBI. McCarthy shot back, claiming that the military was holding Schine “hostage” to keep his committee from pursuing “the Red Army.” He didn’t mean the Army of the Soviet Union, but communists in the American Army.

Fighting back, McCarthy demanded that Eisenhower’s aides be hauled in to testify if the President himself had ordered this smear of Cohn and Schine. The White House evoked executive privilege, which would forbid his advisers to testify before Congress. Executive privilege would be invoked for years to come by future presidents as well, including Nixon.

The Army reached out for a “top gun,” Joseph Nye Welch, to represent it and to oppose McCarthy. A Boston attorney and a Republican, Welch was a senior partner in the prestigious firm of Hale and Dorr. For his backup team, he drafted two young lawyers in his firm, one of whom was James St. Clair, who would later represent Nixon in the Watergate affair. He also drafted Fred Fisher, Jr., who had once joined the National Lawyers Guild, a left-wing organization which defended so-called radicals against criminal prosecution, including the Hollywood Ten and some communists who had violated the Smith Act, a 1940 law that made membership in the Communist Party illegal. That law would ultimately be overturned by the Supreme Court.

A man of great decency that seemed to have moral outrage on his side, Welch was the proper antidote for McCarthy’s bombastic style. One of their most famous exchanges occurred when McCarthy aides produced a photograph of Schine and Army Secretary Stevens standing next to each other smiling. The next day Welch revealed that the original picture had been cropped and a third man removed from the photo. Welch asked, “Did you think this doctored photo came from a pixie?”

McCarthy interrupted. “Will counsel for my benefit define—I think he might be an expert on that—what a pixie is?”

Welch shot back, “I should say, Mr. Senator, that a pixie is a close relative of a fairy.”

The audience broke into hysterical laughter, and even the naïve TV viewers of the 1950s knew that fairy was commonly used to describe a homosexual. This was a very back-door way of outing the gay relationship between Cohn and Schine.

One newspaperman, daring for the time, wrote that Welch’s fairy reference “really fixed McCarthy and his pansy friends.” That remark seemed to open the floodgates. Drew Pearson weighed in, claiming that “the supposedly fearless McCarthy is deathly afraid of pint-sized Cohn because the aggressive lawyer knows all the Senator’s secrets, including extraordinary allegations about his personal life which can’t be repeated here.”

One reader wrote Pearson, “What is the big secret, the big mystery? It is obvious that Cohn is in love with Schine. Perhaps the hunk also has to service McCarthy too.”

“Why have McCarthy and Cohn shown such passion in keeping Schine out of the Army?” one editorial asked. “This sordid relationship should be exposed for what it actually is, but which good taste prevents us from doing so here. J. Edgar Hoover should investigate.” Of course, the FBI director knew all about Cohn’s relationship with Schine and McCarthy’s most closeted secrets.

McCarthy’s final break with J. Edgar came when the Senator claimed he had a “carbon copy of a personal and confidential letter that J. Edgar had sent Army brass at Fort Monmouth, citing thirty-four security risks.

J. Edgar shot back, charging that McCarthy did not have access to FBI files, only “memos based on those files.”

Richard Nixon was made aware of a very private meeting that J. Edgar had with Eisenhower in the Oval Office in 1954. “Hoover told Ike that Mc-Carthy had reached the point where he was actually impeding the investigation of communists. He also told him a hell of a lot more.”

Because of his unreliable heart, Eisenhower at least considered the possibility of not seeking re-election in 1956. J. Edgar was not in the loop about his actual plans.

But through his intimate connections with Cardinal Spellman and Joseph Kennedy, the FBI director had learned that these two ringleaders had had several secret meetings with McCarthy, wherein they’d promised to back him if he sought the Republican nomination for president in 1956.

Spellman promised he would deliver “an armada” of Catholic votes, and Kennedy claimed he’d be the chief source of money to get the campaign rolling until other millions started to flow into McCarthy’s coffers. The Vatican, however, didn’t plan to offer any support to Spellman, because, as the Cardinal told J. Edgar, “The Pope right now is pissed off at me. The

Vatican has had to cover up just one too many of my little indiscretions.”

It was at this time that J. Edgar turned over very confidential FBI reports that McCarthy, his aide Roy Cohn, and even Cardinal Spellman were homosexuals.

Eisenhower, according to what J. Edgar told Clyde and his other top aides, “looked shocked.” Perhaps owing to his homophobic Army background, Ike had zero tolerance for gay people and didn’t want them in any part of the Federal government, even as a mail carrier or a garbage collector.

It appears that J. Edgar’s revelations were too hot for Ike to handle. At that point, both Spellman and McCarthy had millions of loyal followers, and Ike obviously didn’t want to alienate them, and he especially didn’t want to offend millions of American Catholics.

There is evidence that the President met with Herbert Brownell Jr., his attorney general. As Curt Gentry wrote in *J. Edgar Hoover, The Man and the Secrets*, “Just how seriously Eisenhower and Brownell took this sensational charge is not known, but Hoover himself, from the tone of his memorandum, seemed to give it more than passing credence. The timing of Hoover’s decision to sever relations with McCarthy was fatal to the senator.”

Back at the Army hearings, McCarthy confronted Attorney Welch on another issue. Cohn had dug up the fact that Fred Fisher Jr. worked for Welch’s law firm. Before signing Fisher to help with the case for the Army, Welch had asked him, “Are there any skeletons in your closet?” That is when Fisher had admitted his membership in the left-wing National Lawyers Guild. Consequently, he was not appointed to aid Welch in the Army hearings. Therefore, Fisher was not an issue until McCarthy tried to make him one.

When McCarthy accused Welch of having a member of the Communist Party on his staff, Welch cut him off, “Let us not assassinate this lad further, Senator,” he said to McCarthy. “You have done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you no sense of decency?”

The impact of Welch’s rebuke virtually drove a dagger into McCarthy, as TV viewers across the country watched a political assassination, the beginning of the end of McCarthy’s reign of fear. Welch with his old-fashioned sense of American fairness won the day and ultimately scored a triumph for the Army.

On December 12, 1954, McCarthy was censored by the U.S. Senate. After that day, J. Edgar told his aides, “The Senator from Wisconsin is dead meat. Let’s wash the pig’s blood off our hands.”

Looking back over the old film clips of the era, one TV critic wrote, “The McCarthy-Army hearings were the birth of reality TV.”

Cohn, who resigned after the hearing, later wrote of McCarthy, his mentor: “He came into American homes as humorless, demanding, dictatorial, and obstructive. With his easily erupting temper, his menacing monotone, his unsmiling mien, and his perpetual five o’clock shadow, he did seem the perfect stock villain.”

After departing from McCarthy, Cohn moved to New York where he became a “killer lawyer,” specializing in winner-take-all divorce cases. In New York he led a promiscuous homosexual lifestyle, involving literally dozens of male hustlers.

Writing his deathbed autobiography, Cohn was dictating to his co-author Sidney Zion. “Are you familiar with the term killer fruit?” Cohn asked. “Truman Capote, who knows about such things, says it’s a certain kind of queer who has Freon refrigerating in his bloodstream. Diaghilev, for example. J. Edgar Hoover. Hadrian.”

AIDS claimed Cohn in 1986.

Schine would go on to marry Hillevi Rombin of Sweden, Miss Universe of 1955.

Schine had a successful media career. His credits included the role of executive producer of the 1971 hit film, *The French Connection*, which won an Oscar as Best Picture. His music company provided songs for such singers as Lou Rawls, and he was a musician himself, once conducting the Boston Pops Orchestra. Of course, some left-wing musicians refused to appear on stage with him.

Schine died on June 19, 1996 at the age of 68. His son, Berndt, was piloting a private plane that went down, killing himself but also his father and mother, David and Hillevi.

Upon Schine’s death, Tony Kushner wrote a one-act comedy, *G. David Schine in Hell*. In hell, he is reunited with Roy Cohn, Richard Nixon, Whittaker Chambers, and J. Edgar Hoover himself.

Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz “double dated” with J. Edgar and Clyde on their visits to California and often shared a table with them at the Stork Club in Manhattan. J. Edgar was the instigator of these soirées because Clyde was still jealous of J. Edgar’s attraction to Desi, which had led to physical violence at one point. Nonetheless, Clyde put up a brave front when he was forced into social situations with Lucille and Desi.

But something went wrong in J. Edgar’s relationship with Desi in the early 1950s. Without warning and without explaining it to anyone, including Clyde, J. Edgar turned on the couple. He really had little on Desi, but he’d found a scandal in Lucille’s life that could be used to destroy her career. He called his long-time friend, the columnist Walter Winchell, and had him broadcast a “blind item” on his weekly television show. Winchell went on the air on Sunday night, September 6, 1953. At her

ranch in Chatsworth, California, Lucille sat in her living room, listening to the broadcast as she did every week.

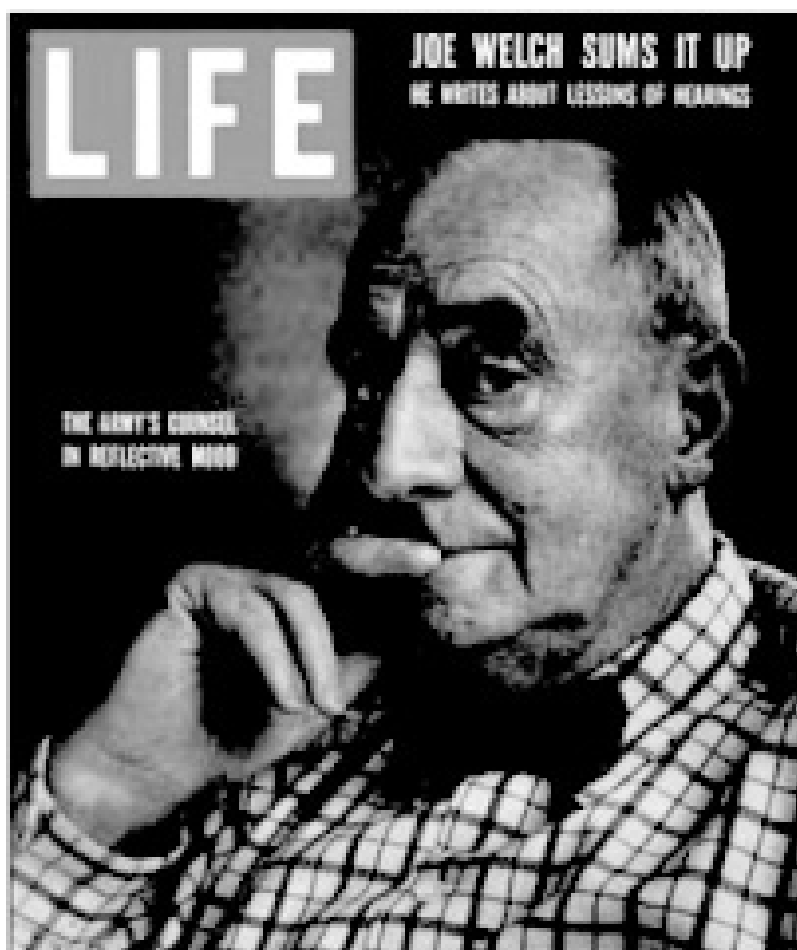
In his staccato style, Winchell, fed with information from J. Edgar, blurted out, “The top television comedienne has been confronted with her membership in the Communist Party.”

As Lucille recalled in her memoirs, she thought, “I didn’t know Imo-gene Coca was a communist.”

No sooner had the accusation been broadcast than Desi called. “Did you know Imogene was a communist?” Lucille asked him.

“Lucy, it’s *you*!” Desi shouted at her. “He’s claiming *you* are the communist.”

From that moment on, all Lucille could remember was that, “The shit hit the fan.”



The McCarthy/Army hearings virtually ended the communist witch hunt orchestrated by the senator from Wisconsin.

The Army wisely hired “a country lawyer,” **Joseph Welch**, who subtly exposed the homosexuality of David Schine, Roy Cohn, and even McCarthy himself without actually using the word “homosexual.”

Welch appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine on July 25, 1954.

Even though he was on the outs, Desi called J. Edgar, not knowing that he was the guilty party who had planted the item with Winchell. Still angry at him, J. Edgar refused his call.

Desi then called George Murphy and asked the song-and-dance man to call J. Edgar. Murphy, a famous movie star of that time, got J. Edgar on the phone. He later reported, “He was noncommittal, very formal, but said he’d look into it, before quickly putting down the phone.”

It wasn’t until years later that it was learned how J. Edgar was tipped off by about Lucille’s membership in the Communist Party. It had come from “America’s leading expert on communism,” Lela Rogers, long rumored to have been J. Edgar’s so-called girlfriend.

In 1936, the year Lucille had registered as a communist voter, she had worked at RKO Studios during the day and at Lela’s Little Theatre Group every Monday to Saturday night. Apparently, back then Lucille must have said something to Lela. As Lucille recalled, “During the Depression, it was less suspicious to be a communist than a Republican.”

On March 19, 1936, Lucille gave in to her socialist grandfather, Fred Hunt, and went to downtown Los Angeles, where she registered as a communist. Her eccentric grandfather evoked the Lionel Barrymore character in the popular 1938 film, *You Can’t Take It with You*.

Lela’s daughter, Ginger Rogers, completely disagreed with J. Edgar and her mother. “Lucille was no communist, any more

than I am, and I'm practically a member of the John Birch Society."

Even though she was the most famous actress in Hollywood, as American as mom and apple pie, Lucille knew that the merest link to communism would spell doom for her *I Love Lucy* series, and threaten the solvency of Desilu Productions. She lived in a state of constant fear until the matter was settled, hopefully in her favor.

Having decided not to go after Desi to seek his revenge (for what?), J. Edgar had supplied data about Lucille and her "communist affiliations" to the House Un-American Activities Committee.

William A. Wheeler, head of West Coast Investigations for the House Un-American Activities Committee, interviewed her. He was probing into the alleged communist activities of Hollywood stars.

Before that Winchell broadcast, Lucille had gone through two closed-door hearings about her alleged communist affiliation, once before the FBI and later before the House Un-American Activities Committee.

She and Desi had formed Desilu Studios, and their *I Love Lucy* series dominated weekly TV ratings for most of its ten-year run beginning on October 15, 1951. They were, in fact, the biggest stars in America.

Before a studio audience, Desi and Lucille prepared to film a segment of *I Love Lucy*, their first appearance since the communist charges broke.

Facing three hundred people, Desi said, "I want to talk to you about something serious. Lucy has never been a communist, not now, and never will be."

The applause of the audience lasted an entire minute.

"I was kicked out of Cuba because of communism," Desi continued. "We despise everything about it. Lucy is as American as Bernie Baruch and Ike Eisenhower. By the way, we both voted for Eisenhower—so ladies and gentlemen, don't judge too soon—read for yourselves. Read her story to be released tomorrow. Don't believe every piece of bunk you read in some papers." He then introduced Lucille, who came out in tears. "My favorite redhead, and that's the only thing red about Lucy and even that isn't legitimate."

Like a real trouper, she performed in her brilliant comedic way and went off the air saying, "God bless you for being so kind."

I Love Lucy stayed on the air, and it is still being broadcast on television sets around the world today.

Not all TV viewers were pleased with Desi's explanation. "My son didn't vote Red to please his grandpa—but he did die in Korea for his Uncle Sam," claimed M.S. Maloney of the Gold Star Mothers.

A major attack came from Westbrook Pegler, a popular columnist appealing to the zealots of the Far Right. He claimed that Lucille was cleared only because she was rich and famous. "She knew what she was doing when she registered with the communists, and I can tell you that the poor devils out there in Hollywood who fought the traitors in the movie business took terrible persecution. Socialist grandfather is a new variant on the whine of the crooked White Sox player who did it for the wife and kiddies!"

Trouble kept mounting, even though *I Love Lucy* remained number one on TV. The American Legion threatened to boycott Philip Morris cigarettes, her sponsor, and war veterans vowed never to watch her on television.

The Huntington *Herald-Dispatch* claimed, "Despite the almost frenzied efforts of the very best press agents and public advisers those capitalist dollars can buy, most thoughtful Americans are going to find it difficult to 'love' Lucy with the same old abandon."

Owned by William Randolph Hearst, the *Los Angeles Herald-Express* stubbornly ran a banner headline—LUCILLE BALL A RED.

Most protests had faded away when Dwight Eisenhower and his wife Mamie invited Desi and Lucille to a White House celebration dinner in honor of the President's birthday.

Between 1956 and 1971, the year before J. Edgar died, the FBI launched COINTELPRO (an acronym for Counter Intelligence Program). This was a series of often illegal and covert operations aimed at "surveilling, infiltrating, discrediting, and disrupting domestic political organizations."

The FBI authorized "whatever is necessary to destroy the enemy"—psychological warfare, smearing through *faux* letters, harassment, wrongful imprisonment, extra-legal violence and assassination. All this was done in the name of protecting national security.

Over a period of years, COINTELPRO operated against the Black Panthers and various perceived communist and socialist organizations. Persons associated with the civil rights movement, such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., became special targets, as did the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the NAACP, the Congress of Racial Equality, and various civil rights advocates such as Marlon Brando, whom J. Edgar viewed as the "New Left."

The American Indian Movement came under suspicion, as did the Students for a Democratic Society and the Weathermen. Any group protesting the Vietnam War was targeted. As society moved forward, leaders in the women's rights movements were designated as lesbians. Both the Nation of Islam and the Ku Klux Klan were also targeted.

While it flourished, COINTELPRO caused considerable damage to thousands of American lives until it was brought down. Senator Frank Church of Idaho headed a special Senate investigating committee which castigated COINTELPRO, calling its techniques intolerable in a democratic society. The FBI was accused of violating the First Amendment right of free speech. Church cited “ridiculous” secret dossiers such as President Eisenhower being sent reports on the political and social contacts indulged in by Eleanor Roosevelt.

When J. Edgar learned that COINTELPRO had been officially terminated as of April of 1971, he told his aides, “We will go on as before, only now we’ll be unofficial. We must continue our battle against the enemies of this nation with a lethal ferocity, using whatever means we may deem necessary.”

Two presidents had each expressed hostile reactions to Joe Kennedy, FDR calling him “one of the most evil and disgusting men I have ever known. Harry S Truman claimed he was “a god damn thief, a former bootlegger and drunk, and the most crooked man in the country. He makes our gangsters look like choir boys.”

J. Edgar himself had a troubled relationship with Ambassador Kennedy, making the patriarch of a political dynasty wonder if the FBI director were friend or foe. On May 3, 1941 J. Edgar had reported to Franklin D. Roosevelt that Joe had met with Hermann Göring in Vichy, France, and had donated a “considerable sum” to Germany.

Whether this was true or not is not known. Apparently, FDR dismissed this shocking revelation as “one of Hoover’s fantasies.” But as ambassador to England, Joe had opposed America’s getting involved in “England’s war with Germany.”

At times, J. Edgar worked to undermine the interests of Joe Kennedy; at other times he provided him with valuable information. Nixon said he felt that “Kennedy and Hoover worked on the barter system.”

Ronald Kessler in his book, *Sins of the Father*, wrote: “The two men used each other: Joe constantly praised Hoover as the finest public servant in the land, while Hoover helped Joe by providing secrets about his enemies.”

J. Edgar had long ago learned that Joe Kennedy and Spellman had plotted to run McCarthy for president on the Republican ticket in 1956. But after McCarthy’s censure by the Senate, Joe came up with another radical idea—run J. Edgar for President instead. The patriarch of the Kennedy clan had a cunning mind, which involved not just running J. Edgar for president, but plotting the political futures of his sons, especially Jack.

Joe knew that J. Edgar’s cherished dream had been to run for president in 1940, an ambition that was ruined when FDR decided to seek an unprecedented third term.

Instead of calling J. Edgar, Joe Kennedy wrote him a letter:

Dear Edgar,

I listened to Walter Winchell mention your name as a candidate for President. If that should come to pass, it would be the most wonderful thing for the United States. I would guarantee you the largest contribution that you would ever get from anybody.

Joe.

At three o’clock in the morning of the next day, J. Edgar turned on the light waking up Clyde. “Maybe old Joe has a good idea,” J. Edgar said to his sleepy companion. “My running for president might be a brilliant move. Eisenhower is dying. I could make our neighbor Lyndon my Vice President. That Kennedy fucker will put up some of his bootleg millions. J. Edgar Hoover, President of the United States. I like the sound of that. Of course, my first official duty will be to appoint you director of the FBI. Between my job and your job we will become the two most powerful men on earth. Nothing can stop us!”

But as dawn broke across Capitol Hill, Clyde had returned J. Edgar to the earth.

“He’s dangling the bait at me, but here’s one shark who isn’t biting,” J. Edgar told Clyde, Guy Hotell, and Lou Nichols. “I have no intention of running for president. Did old Joe Kennedy think I was going to walk into that trap he’s setting for me?”

Two weeks later, Joe followed up his letter with an hour-long phone call to J. Edgar at his home. He outlined why he thought he should seek the presidency. Actually Joe had a diabolical plan. He wanted J. Edgar to resign as FBI director and take on Eisenhower, knowing he would lose.

Privately Joe told his sons, Jack and Bobby, “Ike’s unbeatable. He’s brought peace and prosperity. Whoever gets the ’56 nod will be a sacrificial lamb put up by the Democrats.”

He said to Jack, “I want you to run for President in 1960. All of us know that Hoover has an extensive file on you which he could use to blackmail us. But if he’s no longer heading the FBI, you can appoint whoever you want for the job, maybe one of our stooges, maybe even Bobby here.”

Joe went so far as to have another job lined up for J. Edgar even if he didn’t win the presidency. “I’ll make you chief of my security.” Joe knew that in that capacity he would go from gathering blackmail on “my boys to keeping their asses wiped and their names out of the scandal magazines.”

J. Edgar assured Joe he’d get back to him. He waited a month before responding. “I feel I’m needed where I am,” was his

brief rejection.

A master of the two-face, J. Edgar also met privately with his ally at the time, Nixon, who confided in him. “When I’m president, and that’s likely to happen sooner than later, I want you to know I plan to keep you on as director of the FBI.”

“That’s mighty kind of you, Dick,” J. Edgar said.

“I’ve talked to Eisenhower’s doctors about his heart,” Nixon claimed. “They told me he’ll not live to serve out his term and that he might die at the beginning of his second term, the way Roosevelt died at the beginning of his fourth time, allowing that bastard, Truman, to become president. As a sitting president, I’ll be almost a shoe-in for the 1960 presidential race.”

“Good thinking, Dick” J. Edgar told him.

At the Democratic convention of 1956, both Jack and Bobby showed a rare streak of independence from their father and sought to win a spot on the ticket for Jack, running as Adlai Stevenson’s vice president. Joe had opposed that, knowing his son would lose. Joe feared “the Catholic issue” would make his son look like a loser on a ticket doomed for failure.

With Bobby’s arm-twisting skill behind the scenes, Jack came within thirty-nine votes of winning the nomination, losing to coonskin-cap wearing Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee. As predicted by Joe, Ike went on to win the election, with Nixon retained on the ticket as his running mate, even though Ike was none too happy about that.

In discussing the Stevenson/Kefauver ticket, Joe had referred to them as “the queer and the muff-diver.” Stevenson’s closeted homosexual life was familiar to him, and “that moral crusader,” Kefauver was known for patronizing whores in Washington and for his penchant for oral sex.

At the age of sixty-eight on September 13, 1956, Joe Kennedy entered a hospital to have his prostate gland removed. J. Edgar sent him a telegram, wishing him a speedy recovery. Joe responded by asking him to do whatever he could to prevent the showing of *Baby Doll*, a film based on a Tennessee Williams play. “It’s about a child bride, it’s indecent, and the worst thing that Hollywood has put out. I’ll definitely get it banned in Boston.”

Joe had a far more serious request in 1959 when Jack was plotting his run for the presidency on the Democratic ticket. “I know you have a file on my boy,” Joe told J. Edgar. “I’m sure you have one on me, perhaps even Bobby and Teddy, surely not Rose. She’s like Caesar’s wife. Above reproach.”

When Jack wins the presidency, better keep those files under lock and key,” Joe said. “Get my drift, Edgar? You scratch our backs and we’ll scratch yours.”

“You’ve just made me an offer I can’t refuse,” J. Edgar said. “First, we’ll see that Jack will run for president in 1960 and ’64, then Bobby in ’68 and ’72. By the way, how old is Teddy?”

On looking back on those dark days of the great American witch hunt, author Matt Wilson wrote: “J. Edgar Hoover was the director, not of the FBI, but of the Great American Inquisition.”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

In the 1950s, J. Edgar Hoover loudly proclaimed, “There is no organized crime in America,” although he knew differently, having frequently been seen in the company of such gangsters as Frank Costello. “There are only minor criminals acting independently,” the FBI director told reporters. He actually went so far as to have Clyde Tolson assign FBI agents to document the “nonexistence of organized crime in the U.S.”

As the *New York Journal-American* asked in an editorial, “How paranoid can you get: Form a committee to investigate something that doesn’t even exist? The trouble with that is that organized crime does exist throughout America, and it needs to be investigated, exposed, and arrests made.”

J. Edgar’s link with the Mafia is still a hotly debated subject, beginning with the allegation that gangster Meyer Lansky hired a “long-distance” photographer to snap a picture of J. Edgar performing fellatio on Clyde on the open terrace of their Miami Beach hotel suite.

Throughout most of his career, the FBI director was far more interested in rounding up suspected American communists than he was in routing mobsters. In his words, “I’d rather be dead than red!”

He found an ally in the mob in fighting communism, and understandably so. The Mafia thrived on exploiting capitalism, and it had also been a key factor in the FBI’s success in preventing sabotage at American ports during WWII.

When queried, Clyde maintained that a ruthless gangster such as Carlos Marcello was no more than a “tomato salesman.”

In 1959 in New York City, one of the hotbeds of organized crime, J. Edgar had assigned four hundred agents to weed out communists, but only four were assigned to investigating organized crime. All of that was about to change.

J. Edgar’s relationship with the mob dates back to the 1930s, when he was seen on several occasions meeting with Frank Costello in Manhattan’s Central Park. The FBI director was also spotted with this gangster at the Stork Club and at the Waldorf-Astoria. Costello was a source of illegal income for J. Edgar.

Along with Meyer Lansky, Costello and his “boys” dominated the illegal off-track betting market. J. Edgar and Clyde made major use of Costello’s services, according to Seymour Pollack, a former Lansky associate who later exposed J. Edgar’s arrangement with the bookies.

“Hoover used to place bets in the hundreds or thousands with Sherman Billingsley, the owner of the Stork Club in Manhattan, or with Walter Winchell, who turned them over to his bookie. Hoover was seen placing two-dollar bets at the window, but these were just for show. The big bets were done in secret.”

Lewis Rosenstiel, a multi-millionaire “philanthropist,” who had links to both Costello and Lansky, handled J. Edgar’s really big bets. One of his wives, Susan Rosenstiel, called it “a sweetheart deal. Hoover likes to gamble. My husband would call up his boys and place the bet. If Hoover won, he collected the money. If he didn’t, Lou covered his losses.”

The question remains, why did J. Edgar lose if he played only safe bets? Since horse racing dealt with jockeys and animals, mishaps occurred. One time, Fred Otash, Hollywood’s most famous detective, was caught doping a horse and was arrested at the Santa Anita racetrack. J. Edgar and Clyde were at the track that day and had placed high bets on the mob’s favorite horse.

The stricken horse didn’t run that day.

Otash suffered a felony conviction, which was later downgraded to a misdemeanor and eventually expunged from his record. He was given a suspended sentence, but he lost his “gumshoe license,” as he called it.

Rosenstiel had made his money by distilling and importing “booze” (as he called it) through his company, Schenley Industries. J. Edgar met him through another bootlegger, Joseph P. Kennedy.

As J. Edgar and Clyde soon discovered during the course of their friendship, Rosenstiel was a promiscuous homosexual who could “buy the best young men for sale,” as he boasted to his like-minded FBI friends. He also was known for staging some of the best gay parties anywhere, enough to rival J. Edgar’s other friend, the Woolworth heir Jimmy Donahue.



J. Edgar was seen on several occasions socializing with the Calabria-born **Frank Costello**, who was nicknamed “Prime Minister of the Underworld,” when he became the most influential Mafia boss in American history, eventually the capo of the Luciano crime family.

Although there were many attempts on his life, Costello lived to be 82 years old, dying in 1973. But his longtime enemy, Carmine Galante, a year later, bombed his mausoleum.

Marlon Brando, who played Vito Corleone in the 1972 film *The Godfather*, used Costello as his role model.

For years, Louis Nichols had been J. Edgar’s press agent, creating exaggerated stories about the FBI director’s accomplishments, real or imagined. But suddenly, even though Nichols was his mouthpiece, J. Edgar decreed to Clyde and others, “It’s time for Lou to go.”

There was a sinister motive for J. Edgar wanting to get rid of his faithful servant. On January 14, 1957, Drew Pearson in his column “Washington Merry-Go-Round,” had written that, “Louis Nichols has been busy ingratiating himself with key senators, who have the impression that he is grooming himself to be Hoover’s heir-apparent.”

That was followed by another column on September 5, 1957, that claimed, “The FBI’s amiable press agent, Louis Nichols, is cozying up to Vice President Nixon. Louis has his eye on J. Edgar Hoover’s job and is keeping close to the powers-that-might-be.”

After his enforced retirement from the FBI, Nichols approached Rosenstiel and asked him for a job. The former bootlegger immediately found a vacancy for him, giving him the title of vice president of liquor distributorship.

In his new job at Schenley Company, Nichols found himself working with J. Edgar’s former enemy, Thomas Dewey, who Rosenstiel had hired as general counsel for his business.

Nichols went from representing J. Edgar to representing a gangster. He was called to testify before various Senate committees. At one he claimed, “Mr. Rosenstiel has never, directly or indirectly, had any dealings or associations with Meyer Lansky, Frank Costello, or any other underworld characters. Needless to say, I would never have become associated with him if there was the slightest taint on his record.” Nichols must have wondered how J. Edgar and Clyde might ridicule his testimony.

Rosenstiel was still an intimate friend of Clyde and J. Edgar, so it was to their advantage that he tried to present a public image of his boss as squeaky clean. He did the same thing for years for J. Edgar. With such training, he was now putting up a good front for a man even more sinister.

The “Apalachin Meeting” near Binghamton, in New York State on November 14, 1957, has gone down in the annals of crime. The confab of mob leaders across America, with some imports from Italy, was held in the town of Apalachin at the home of mobster Joseph Barbara, known as “Joe the Barber.”

Barbara was the Mafia boss of Northeastern Pennsylvania. The town of Apalachin lies about 200 miles northwest of New York City along the south shore of the Susquehanna River near the Pennsylvania border. The meeting was called to resolve *La Cosa Nostra* disputes over gambling, prostitution, and narcotics smuggling. The control of crime-riddled Havana was another

hot topic to iron out, along with loan-sharking and the domination of New York's garment center trucking.

The meeting was the largest gathering of the mob in U.S. history. It is estimated that some one-hundred gangsters and their bodyguards showed up at Barbara's fifty-three acre estate. A local state trooper, Edgar D. Croswell, became suspicious of all these custom-made cars arriving in this small town, and he alerted local police to set up a roadblock.

One late-arriving member of the mob saw the roadblock being formed and called Barbara's estate to alert his fellow *Mafiosi*. The meeting hadn't even begun before its members dispersed in all directions. Some gangsters tried to escape in their cars but encountered the roadblock. Others abandoned their cars and fled into the woods, tossing their guns and cash so as not to be caught with it.

For weeks afterward, local residents reported finding one-hundred dollar bills scattered through the woods. Some fifty gangsters or bodyguards escaped, but fifty-eight mob members were apprehended.

When news reached J. Edgar in Washington, he at first dismissed the account, claiming that "this was not a gathering of a national crime syndicate, just a bunch of hoodlums getting together, probably for booze and babes."

To their surprise, J. Edgar and Clyde learned that Lucky Luciano, Frank Costello, and Meyer Lansky were not at the "summit." Clyde believed that this triad of gangsters tipped off local law enforcement officers because there was a civil war raging within *La Cosa Nostra*. The Neapolitan mobster, Vito Genovese, was trying to take control of areas formerly dominated by "The Unholy Three."

With news of the Apalachin meeting appearing on front pages across America, J. Edgar and Clyde were forced to respond to the menace. The FBI created its "Top Hoodlum program" to go after the syndicate's most powerful bosses. Even so, they worked behind the scenes, impeding the investigations of the Justice Department, providing little or no evidence to build up any prosecution against the arrested Mafioso.

It was during this major crisis for the FBI that J. Edgar had his first clash with Joseph Kennedy's son, Robert Kennedy. Having long ago abandoned "those queers," Joseph McCarthy and Roy Cohn, RFK was now working for Senator John McClellan's racket investigating committee.

Storming into J. Edgar's office, Bobby, the chief counsel for McClellan, demanded that J. Edgar turn over what dossiers he had on the arrested *Mafiosi*.

Bobby later recalled, "After the meeting at Apalachin, which 70 people attended, I asked Hoover for files on each of them and they didn't have any information, I think, on 40. And what information they did have consisted mainly of newspaper clippings in contrast to the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, which had something on every one of them. The FBI didn't know anything, really, about these people who were the major gangsters in the United States."

That dire situation for the FBI, as described by Bobby, was about to change and drastically so.

Clyde sent out a bulletin from J. Edgar to all agents to investigate the top mobsters in their districts. In Chicago, a group of FBI agents, described as the "Young Turks," asked for authorization to bug Murray Humphreys, a Welshman turned Chicago mobster, who was the chief political and labor racketeer in his city. He bore two nicknames, "The Camel" and "The Hump."

Laurence Bergreen in his book, *Capone: The Man and the Era*, described Humphreys as "skinny and dapper and handsome in a sinister sort of way, a representative of the new breed of racketeer, part thug and part businessman."

Approval was granted for bugging and a fantastic amount of information began to pour in at FBI headquarters in Washington. From this illegal wiretapping, J. Edgar and Clyde learned more than they ever expected to. They also approved the bugging of the home phone lines of gangster Sam Giancana, a partner of Humphreys. Giancana would loom large in their investigations during the rapidly approaching Kennedy era.

So pleased was J. Edgar with the information coming over the line from Chicago that he extended permission to all FBI agents to bug homes. "My goal is to learn every dark secret of every public official in America," he told Clyde and his aides. The FBI dossiers grew on crooked judges, crooked congressmen, crooked senators, crooked mayors, and crooked police chiefs. They discovered everything from murders to voting frauds, or even what bank was going to be robbed the following night.

J. Edgar and Clyde especially liked "the personal stuff." They learned that tough guy, mobster Mickey Cohen, the so-called celebrity gangster, was banging everybody from the very tender and very young ass of actor Sal Mineo to an experienced "star fucker," Liz Renay, the nation's winner in the Marilyn Monroe look-alike contest.

The wiretaps of Humphreys became their favorite. The FBI learned that whenever a mob member anywhere in the country ran afoul of the law, a call was placed to Humphreys of the Chicago syndicate. "The Hump" often bragged, "I can fix anything. Cash is better than having our enemy killed."

Bugging also revealed that The Hump had both a wife, Mary Brendle Humphreys, and a mistress, Jeanne Stacy. In addition, he preferred kinky sex on the side, employing a leading Chicago madam to supply him "with fresh meat." He liked to be worked over by a beautiful young girl and a beautiful young boy, preferably black. If not that, then "dark Puerto Rico," would do, but, according to his requests, he definitely preferred chocolate.

J. Edgar was embarrassed when he learned that his former boss, Tom Clark, who had been appointed attorney general by Truman, was on the take. He had been bribed to grant parole to four Chicago members of Al Capone's gang in 1947.

Humphreys' influence was so great that he even got Harry S Truman to designate Clark as a Supreme Court Justice. Some historians claim that appointment was brought about "by the mob's leverage over Truman himself."

Humphreys, with a criminal career which had included jail time, ended up dining with presidents and kings from Iran to the Philippines.

His mentally unstable daughter, Llewella, went to Italy where she had a torrid affair with Rossano Brazzi, a movie matinee idol of his day. Returning to America, she gave birth to a son, but in 1958, she was committed to a mental institution in Topeka, Kansas.

From Boston to New York, from Washington to California, the FBI-bugged phones supplied more and more damaging information on Jack and Bobby Kennedy and on Richard Nixon. "If the American public is dumb enough to elect one of these men for its president, I will certainly be able to extend my tenure as FBI director, even though I'll pass the age for mandatory retirement," J. Edgar claimed.

When Humphreys died of a heart attack on November 23, 1965, the *Chicago Tribune* presented his epitaph: NO GANGSTER WAS MORE BOLD. He was also immortalized in *The Godfather* books as the character of "Tom Hagen."

While he was learning the secrets of organized crime, J. Edgar took time out to read that his arch enemy of yesterday, master spy William J. Donovan, had died after resigning his post as ambassador to Thailand. He'd become afflicted with an arteriosclerotic atrophy of the brain.

From his apartment at 4 Sutton Place in Manhattan, "Wild Bill," as he was nicknamed, drifted off into la-la land, imagining Soviet tanks advancing over the Queensborough Bridge to conquer New York City.

Although publicly expressing his sympathy, J. Edgar spread the rumor that Donovan had died of syphilis which he'd contracted when he was head of the OSS during WWII. "It came about in one of the many sex orgies he'd staged with prostitutes," J. Edgar falsely claimed.

The death of his arch enemy had an emotional effect on J. Edgar. It was at this point in his life that he became increasingly paranoid. All FBI agents were ordered not to walk in his shadow. He ordered three of his agents to investigate any claim—"anywhere in the world"—believed to hold the secret of prolonging life. Within a period of one year, he visited fifteen different doctors in New York or Washington, imagining that he was suffering from various ailments. Apparently, most of these physicians assumed he suffered from hypochondria. By coincidence, his primary doctor was named Joseph Kennedy.

At night, J. Edgar convinced Clyde that both New York and Washington would suffer a nuclear attack in less than three years. That prediction was made in 1959. His crystal ball wasn't as far-fetched as it sounded, according to the memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev.

As the years went by J. Edgar's phobia about germs increased. He washed his hands at least three dozen times a day. He wouldn't touch a door knob leading into another room but insisted someone do it for him. This germ phobia almost paralleled that of the aviator mogul Howard Hughes. At the government's expense, an air filter system was installed in J. Edgar's private home. His claim was, "It can electrocute any germs."

A lot of this paranoia stemmed from an incident in 1958 in which J. Edgar had suffered a minor heart attack, reminding him of his own immortality. After that, he went on a strict diet, taking off thirty pounds in just three months, and ordering all FBI agents who were overweight to do likewise, even if it meant eating one celery stalk and one quarter of a small head of iceberg lettuce—no dressing—a day, perhaps three carrot sticks. One agent in Washington, following the diet too rigidly, collapsed and died at his desk.

The Eisenhower 1950s moved toward its inexorable end, as John F. Kennedy appeared as the possible nominee for President on the Democratic ticket, with Richard Nixon ready to grab the Republican nomination.

J. Edgar repeated to Clyde and his aides, "It doesn't matter which of these farts takes the prize. I've already got enough on both of them to end their presidency before it begins. If things keep going my way like this, I'll be director for life."

"What if it's Lyndon B. Johnson?" Guy Hotell asked.

"Dear old Lyndon and I have enough on each other to put both of us in jail."

It was only after Senator Joseph McCarthy died on May 2, 1957, that J. Edgar was informed about more tantalizing details of his private life. Clyde came to him with a report from two FBI agents that McCarthy had a fondness for "very young bellboys and elevator operators." In two cases that had come to the attention of the FBI, the boys involved were under sixteen years ago. "I knew ol' Joe was queer," J. Edgar told his aides. "I didn't know he was a pedophile."

To add more intrigue to the plot, J. Edgar also learned that in March of 1954 an attempt to assassinate the red-baiting senator had been planned but never carried out. On March 1, 1954, four Puerto Rican nationalists shot thirty rounds from semi-automatic pistols from the Ladies' Gallery (a balcony for visitors) onto the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives. Five congressmen were shot in the attack, including Alvin M. Bentley (R-Michigan) who took a bullet to the chest; Clifford Davis

(D-Tennessee), Ben F. Jensen (R-Iowa), George Hyde Fallon (D-Maryland), and Kenneth A. Roberts (D-Alabama). Although wounded, in some cases gravely so, all of them survived.

The attackers—Lolita Lebrón, Rafael Cancel Miranda, Andres Figueroa Cordero, and Irving Flores Rodriguez were arrested, tried, and convicted, each given a minimum sentence of seventy years after their death sentences were commuted by President Eisenhower.

Under intense grilling by the police, one of the very young terrorists revealed the plot to kill McCarthy. Somehow the Puerto Ricans had learned of the senator's fondness for young boys during a secret pleasure trip to San Juan, with a stopover in Havana, where he was known to have patronized a bordello featuring male prostitution.

The scheme involved having a handsome and well-muscled Puerto Rican fifteen-year-old boy dress up as a Western Union messenger. According to the plot, he was to deliver a fake telegram to the senator's hotel room during one of his visits to Manhattan. A tight-fitting uniform was tailored for him.

Many of the terrorists' plans went wrong, including their shoot-out at Blair House in an attempt to assassinate Harry S. Truman, whose family was staying there because of much-needed repairs going on at the White House.

The plot called for the fake messenger to knock on McCarthy's hotel room door and ingratiate himself inside using his seductive wiles.

When J. Edgar learned of this alleged scheme, details of which were later printed in Curt Gentry's exposé of the FBI, he ranted and raved.

"It is now 1962," he shouted at his aides. "This happened in 1954. Why wasn't I informed of this at the time? I'm going to get to the bottom of this incompetence."

From all reports, during his early days, J. Edgar "was wound up as tightly as a coiled spring" (Guy Hotell's words), but in later life he began to unwind a bit. He knew he had blackmail evidence on such future presidents as Kennedy and Nixon and that he could enjoy life more."

The debate continues to this day whether J. Edgar were gay and, if so, was he also a cross-dresser? That controversy raged anew after the November, 2011 release of the film, *J. Edgar*, directed by Clint Eastwood and starring Leonardo DiCaprio as J. Edgar with Armie Hammer as his faithful companion, Clyde Tolson.

Long before the release of that movie, the man (or woman) on the street had long ago heard that J. Edgar and Clyde were gay. J. Edgar dressed in drag has been depicted in comic strips, editorial cartoons, books, and is a favorite of stand-up comics.

Investigators Vasili Mitrokhin and Christopher Andrew made the somewhat outrageous claim that the rumor about J. Edgar's cross-dressing was hatched as a KGB plot to discredit the FBI.

At least three American presidents—Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon—often mocked J. Edgar behind his back as a cross-dresser. His one-time boss, Robert Kennedy, then attorney general, once quipped to David Powers, "Do you think Hoover will show up today in one of Jackie's discarded Dior gowns?"

And J. Edgar's across-the-street neighbor, Lyndon Johnson, had first encountered the director tending his roses wearing what might have been his mother's housecoat.

In the Eastwood movie, *J. Edgar* (DiCaprio) gets beaten up by Clyde (Hammer) when he suggests that there might be a Mrs. Hoover, a reference to the Queen of the Sarong, the movie goddess Dorothy Lamour. Had she been alive and had sat through a screening of the film, she would have surely either cackled or else stood up and shook her fist at the screen, screaming, "That's bullshit!"

Whenever someone in his FBI office asked why he never married, J. Edgar pointed to a glossy studio portrait of Dorothy in a low-cut dress. He showed viewers her inscription which read, "With my sincere admiration and friendship—Dottie."

But that was the inscription from one of his best friends, hardly his lover. In Toluca Lake, California, one night, in the home of Gordon Howard, the California tycoon, Dorothy Lamour, in the presence of her husband (Bill Howard), author Darwin Porter, and TV director Stanley Mills Haggart, said, "Those romantic stories about Eddie and me are ridiculous, of course. I met Eddie when I was dating Sherman Billingsley at the Stork Club. A photographer was there from the *Daily News*. Sherman asked me if I would go over and pose with Eddie like I was his girlfriend. He didn't want him photographed cozying up with his real date for the evening, Clyde Tolson."

"At first I was reluctant to do so, but I found Eddie and Clyde to be great guys, and I started hanging out with them, especially in California when they came out to enjoy the race track season. They stayed with Bill and me. We always knew they were lovers, and Eddie liked to dress up on occasion. So what? He had a tough job and needed to relax from all the pressure of Washington and all that pretense of having to be a macho straight."

"In my opinion, Clyde was always deeply in love with Eddie. He loved Clyde back as far as he was capable of loving anyone. His mother did such a number on him I think he was afraid of loving a man. It was hard for him to give of himself. But Clyde was the only person he really opened up to, and that was very hard for him to do."

"In our home, he was very relaxed and let his hair down, or what hair he had to let down. Bill was always a little uptight,

afraid one of the guys might make a pass at him. That was his Army background speaking. But he liked the boys, especially when Eddie prepared his lethal cocktails and manned the barbecue.”

A much more learned response came from the widow of Dr. Marshall Ruffin, the psychiatrist who had attempted to help J. Edgar come to terms with his homosexuality. Mrs. Ruffin typed her husband’s notes, claiming that the psychiatrist had written that the FBI director was “a bisexual with a failed heterosexuality.”

According to her, J. Edgar at her husband’s diagnostic clinic in Washington had confessed his homosexual link to Clyde Tolson and his penchant for cross-dressing.

“Hoover was definitely a homosexual, and my husband’s notes would have proved that. Everybody then understood he was a homosexual—not just my husband.” After seeking treatment, J. Edgar had ordered Dr. Ruffin to destroy all notes of their interviews.

Up until the day he died, J. Edgar continued to punish any person who publicly asserted that he was gay. In 1952, an officer in the CIA, Joseph Bryan III, had told guests at a lavish dinner party (he was rich) that J. Edgar had a crush on a friend of his. “He’s made several advances but my buddy turned him down. He’s straight. Hoover is not.”

Word reached J. Edgar about this “outrage.” Somehow through methods not known, Bryan was intimidated “to back down and recant his charges,” Guy claimed.

At the end of the Eisenhower era and at the beginning of the Kennedy presidency, Clyde was no longer the strapping Midwestern “Gary Cooper type” who had so enchanted J. Edgar in 1928. He had prematurely aged and was frequently in and out of hospitals. By 1957, he’d had three minor strokes and also suffered from duodenal ulcers and an abdominal aneurysm.

One of his eyes caused him such a problem he’d been hospitalized three times with it. After he’d gone through open-heart surgery, his speech had become hesitant. “I’m going to die, Eddie,” he said. But he lived through that major operation and other ailments, even outliving J. Edgar, who was in far better health than his long-time companion.

Clyde wanted to retire, but J. Edgar insisted he keep his position, even though in time he could no longer fulfill his duties. On many days, he was too ill to report for work.

Of course, the physical passion of J. Edgar and Clyde had run its course, according to Guy Hotell. “I spent many a night at their place,” he claimed. “They slept in separate bedrooms. I think Clyde no longer had sex with anybody. But Eddie was the lusty toad he always was. He went out on his own to have sex. He couldn’t pick up a guy in a bar like an ordinary citizen. But he found Roy Cohn, Lewis Rosenstiel, and two or three connections on the West Coast that would supply him with young men for sale.”

This was more or less confirmed by FBI agent John Dixon, who often met J. Edgar when he came by train to Manhattan, arriving at Penn Station as part of “a private visit.” As Dixon or other agents remembered it, J. Edgar was often driven to the Rosenstiel’s elegant townhouse.

One of the richest men in the world, Rosenstiel had known J. Edgar since the days of Prohibition, when he and Joseph P. Kennedy had made millions in bootleg liquor. By coincidence, Rosenstiel was also one of the best friends of Roy Cohn, with whom J. Edgar had worked so closely during the McCarthy hearings.

“He was just a little Jew lawyer when I met him,” Rosenstiel said. “A cocky little bastard who loved cock even more than I did.” Cohn and Rosenstiel bonded almost immediately, and became in time two of the biggest connoisseurs of male hustlers in Manhattan.

It was well known to J. Edgar that Rosenstiel had a close “working relationship” with the gangster Frank Costello. Costello and Rosenstiel, in gangland parlance, were referred to, respectively, as “the Italian with the muscle and the Jew with the brains.”

A Sicilian gangster, Costello was called “Prime Minister of the Underworld,” and he became one of the most powerful of the Mafia bosses when J. Edgar knew him.

The FBI director also knew that Rosenstiel had business links with “the brains behind the Mafia,” Meyer Lansky. They owned several enterprises, including casinos in Las Vegas. Both Rosenstiel and Lansky were said to have incriminating photographs of J. Edgar engaged in gay pursuits. Rosenstiel had secret cameras installed in his Manhattan townhouse and the bedrooms bugged.

The leading U.S. distiller, Rosenstiel also owned a 2,000-acre estate in Connecticut. He bugged the “playroom” in the basement where sex orgies were staged. The young men at these parties were personally selected by Cohn himself, who, incidentally, was Rosenstiel’s chief counsel. At the time J. Edgar began visiting his Manhattan townhouse on East 80th Street and his country residence, Rosenstiel was taking in \$50 million a year, an almost unheard of sum in 1950s dollars.

During one of their frequent Florida vacations, J. Edgar and Clyde (if he were well enough) flew on Rosenstiel’s private DC-9 airplane and stayed at his mansion when not sailing on his super deluxe yacht.

Some of the public knew of J. Edgar’s association with Rosenstiel, but the friendship was interpreted as the FBI director socializing with a famous philanthropist. Rosenstiel donated some \$100 million to New York or Florida hospitals and to the

University of Notre Dame or Brandeis University. In time he also became the principal benefactor of the J. Edgar Hoover Foundation.

J. Edgar also advised Rosenstiel about which politicians in Washington might be receptive to a gift, especially if he wanted to get legislation passed to benefit his distribution of liquor throughout the country. Reportedly, half a million dollars ended up in the coffers of Lyndon Johnson, the Senate Majority Leader.

According to reports, Rosenstiel was exceedingly generous to J. Edgar. When J. Edgar published the FBI ghost-written *Masters of Deceit*, Rosenstiel purchased 25,000 copies and mailed them to colleges and libraries across the country.

Susan Rosenstiel became his fourth wife. She'd been married for nine years to a husband she described as "99¼ percent homosexual." A month into her marriage to Rosenstiel, she discovered that he preferred sex with young men more than he did with her.

That discovery was made one day when she came back to their town-house unexpectedly and caught her husband in bed with Cohn. Rosenstiel told her that they were relaxing, going over some legal matters.

Before slamming the door in their faces, she said, "Governor Thomas Dewey is also one of your attorneys. I've noticed you don't have legal sessions with him naked."

At one party at their Manhattan townhouse, Susan recalled J. Edgar, Cardinal Spellman, Cohn, and her husband wining and dining with Sam Giancana, the Chicago Mafia godfather, and Santos Trafficante, who ran the crime syndicate in Florida and Cuba.

When Castro came to power and seized all of Trafficante's Cuban enterprises, he vowed revenge when he was deported as an undesirable alien. J. Edgar was made aware of several unsuccessful attempts he made to assassinate Fidel Castro.

Ironically, during that summer of 1958 when J. Edgar was associating with gangsters, he finally was forced to admit that the Mafia did, in fact, exist after years of denying it. He issued a statement to the press: "The Mafia does exist in the United States as a special criminal clique or caste engaged in organized crime activity." He also claimed that gang members consisted mostly of Italian or Sicilian origin.

Eventually, after her bitter divorce from Rosenstiel, Susan became more "loose-lipped" about her multi-millionaire former husband, revealing shocking details about gay orgies to one of J. Edgar's biographers, Anthony Summers.

To Summers, she claimed that her husband took her on two different occasions to a male orgy taking place in the Blue Suite of Manhattan's Plaza Hotel, which had been rented to Cohn. She was invited because a few of the VIPs liked a woman to watch as they engaged in homosexual sex. She was told that J. Edgar would be there, but she was not to acknowledge that she knew who he was. "He might be dressed a little different," Rosenstiel warned her.

Ushered into the suite by Cohn, she was introduced to a man on the sofa as "Mary," an old-fashioned gay term to describe a fellow homosexual.

As she recalled, "He was wearing a fluffy black dress, very fluffy, with flounces, and lace stockings with high heels, and a black curly wig. He was sitting there in the living room of the suite with his legs crossed."

Later she claimed, the party retired to the master bedroom where she witnessed the arrival of two blond boys, presumably imported as the party favors of the evening. Indeed at this time Cohn had "imported" two young male hustlers from Denmark that he kept at the Plaza for two weeks, according to Cohn's best friend, the famous literary agent, Jay Garon. Although Garon did not attend the orgy described by Susan, he told the author that he went one night to the Blue Suite at Cohn's invitation where he got to spend two hours in the bedroom with the "oversexed Danes."

At the orgy, according to Susan, J. Edgar "took off his lace dress and panties. He was wearing a short garter belt. He lay down on the double bed, and the two boys worked on him with their hands. One of them wore rubber gloves."

She later claimed that both Cohn and her husband performed sodomy and fellatio on the two overworked hustlers from Scandinavia. Susan said that J. Edgar had the two men "only play with him. I didn't see him take part in any anal sex."

She also claimed that within a year she returned to Cohn's suite at the Plaza for another orgy where J. Edgar was also in drag. "His clothing this time was even more outlandish," she charged. "He had a red dress and a black feather boa around his neck. He was dressed like an old flapper like you see on old tintypes. After about half an hour some boys came, like before. This time they were dressed in leather. And Hoover had a Bible. He wanted one of the boys to read from the Bible. As he read—I forgot the passage—the other boy played with him wearing rubber gloves. And then Hoover grabbed the Bible, threw it down, and told the second boy to join in sex."

She recalled that she saw Edgar only once more, and that was in 1961 when he visited their estate. He arrived in a limousine at Connecticut accompanied by Cardinal Spellman.

At this particular dinner, Cohn, Spellman, and J. Edgar, the honored guests, dined on lobster and caviar, while enjoying the beautiful gold dinner service that had once belonged to Queen Marie of Romania. Everything was washed down by bottles of Mouton Rothschild served by a butler who looked like movie actor Basil Rathbone.

She did not attend "the entertainment" conducted in the den, but one of the hustlers, Derrick Stiller, said that Rosenstiel paid him and six other hustlers picked up at the Haymarket Bar in Manhattan to perform sex acts in alcoves with J. Edgar, Cohn, Rosenstiel, and Spellman.

This Blue Suite at the Plaza, the one referred to by Susan Rosenstiel, was rented to Cohn under an assumed name. Suite 233 was used by the lawyer in one of the shadiest and least explored episodes in his notorious career. Two New York tabloids learned of it but didn't risk publishing the details.

Cohn led an extravagant lifestyle, including having an expensive yacht, a lavish home, and a huge hustler bill. He was perpetually running short of cash when he would resort to blackmail, as he did so often in all of his high-profile divorce cases.

He employed boys, ages ten to fourteen, to service pedophiles in Suite 233, at which time they were secretly photographed. Of course, the child molesters were rich and always paid off rather than risk imprisonment.

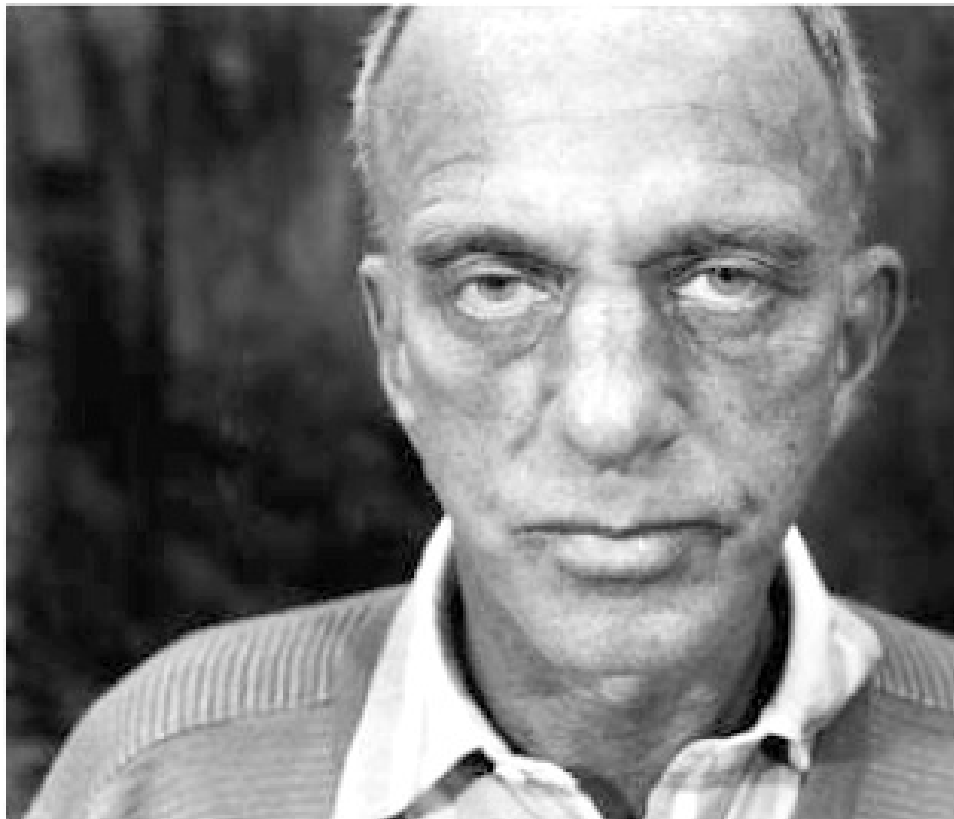
J. Edgar virtually had to know about this, but never moved against Cohn, who was called "the man who knew too much."

"A blackmailer could always blackmail another blackmailer," Richard Nixon once said.

Susan continued with her revelations in 1970 when she was called to testify before the New York State Joint Legislative Committee on Crime, which was chaired by State Senator John H. Hughes. It was also learned during this investigation that Louis Nichols, once J. Edgar's trusted "mouthpiece," earned his salary of \$100,000 a year by using his influence in Washington to get Congress to change the liquor tax laws, which saved Rosenstiel millions upon millions of dollars.

By so doing, Nichols increased the value of his own liquor stock by \$7 million. When J. Edgar learned that, he went into a rage. "I made him. I picked him up off the street, and now he's pulling in millions based on the job I got for him. I'm working for a government salary, and he's hauling money to the bank in wheelbarrows."

Subsequently, J. Edgar assigned agents to follow Nichols. When Nixon lost the presidential election of 1960 to John F. Kennedy, and was considered finished politically, Nichols didn't think so. When Nixon flew into New York on business trips, Nichols would meet him at the airport in a chauffeured limousine.



When this picture was taken, **Roy Cohn**, the most notorious attorney in New York, was facing death.

To the public, he continued to deny that he was a homosexual. He also refused to admit that he was dying of AIDS, insisting that it was cancer of the liver.

Columnist Liz Smith recalled encountering him at Le Cirque in Manhattan. "He looked awful. I'll never forget it. His face was very drawn, and he had sort of white chalky stuff at the edge of his mouth, like he was sick."

When he died, many of his enemies asserted, "So there is a God after all."

"This is brown-nosing," J. Edgar said. "I think Lou would lick the dingleberries off Nixon's asshole, if asked. He must think Nixon will be president one day. Take it from me, Nixon is finished in politics."

Although they remained friends until the end, Cohn's professional relationship with Rosenstiel ended in a disaster for him. In 1975, as Rosenstiel lay comatose and dying, Cohn came into his hospital room. He forced a fountain pen into Rosenstiel's feeble hand and lifted it to sign a Last Will and Testament, naming himself and Cathy Frank, Rosenstiel's granddaughter, beneficiaries.

Although he was accused in the 1970s and 80s of professional misconduct, including perjury and witness tampering, he was never convicted on any charge, in spite of overwhelming evidence.

However, in 1986 a five-judge panel of the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court disbarred him for “unethical and unprofessional conduct, including misappropriation of client’s funds, lying on a bar application, and pressuring a client to amend his will,” the latter a reference to Rosenstiel. Cohn lost his license but it didn’t really matter, as death within a month from AIDS came on August 2, 1986.

By that time, J. Edgar was long gone and never lived to see his former friend’s disgrace.

After the McCarthy hearings and the senator’s censure, J. Edgar abandoned him. But he still maintained some affiliation with Cohn, never really trusting the dangerous attorney, who might turn on him at any minute.

As author Burton Hersch put it, “Like scorpions investigating coitus, Roy Cohn and Hoover would continue to circle each other with wary fascination for decades.”

A veteran cop turned private eye, the notorious Fred Otash lives today in the annals of Hollywood scandal, at least those scandals that were never exposed. He wrote a book called *Investigation Hollywood* in 1976, but it was a fairly vanilla account of some of his incredible adventures.

Before his death, he was said to be gathering notes for what he proclaimed “would be the most shocking book ever published on Hollywood.” Apparently, he never completed the book; if he did, the manuscript seems to have disappeared.

One adventure that Otash could have written about would be his revelations about J. Edgar. The detective was a client of Lewis Rosenstiel. A close associate of Frank Costello, Rosenstiel flew Otash to Manhattan to bug his residence from the basement to the rooftop. Like President Richard Nixon, Rosenstiel wanted everything documented. He trusted nobody, especially his friend, J. Edgar. “I want to entrap him,” Rosenstiel told Otash.

In a call to his editor at Henry Regnery Company in Chicago, his previous publisher, Otash claimed he was going to send in a new manuscript “to blow the roof off the ceiling.” Long after J. Edgar and even Clyde were in their graves, Otash was ready to tell what he knew not only about them but about a bevy of indiscreet movie people ranging from Howard Hughes to Lana Turner.

In his pitch for a big advance, Otash claimed that J. Edgar had been bugged and even secretly photographed having sex with a hustler at Rosenstiel’s Manhattan address. Otash also said that he had “more than one” photograph secretly taken of J. Edgar in drag.

If his claims were true, his memoirs might have been the most scandalous book of the year. Otash also said he would crack the Marilyn Monroe Case—murder or suicide?—and “reveal stuff on Clark Gable, Judy Garland, Mickey Cohen, the Brothers Kennedy, and Frank Sinatra that would cause heart attacks.”

As a detective, Otash specialized in extortion plots, sexual sadism, bugged bedrooms, cardinals and archbishops who swing, kidnappings, suicides, and presidential dalliances. In all, he was privy to more inside stories than any other detective in Hollywood history.

Most of his early duties involved the setup of abortions for the mistresses of movie stars. “I’ve had enough kids aborted to populate a small country,” he said.

He was also the chief investigator for the tabloid scandal rag *Confidential*.

Although he was called in on the Lana Turner/Johnny Stompanato murder case, he was employed by the mob specifically to report on the affairs Kennedy was having on the West Coast. Today, he’s best remembered for his private work investigating Marilyn Monroe and the Kennedy brothers. In the wake of Marilyn’s death, J. Edgar ordered that Otash’s files be confiscated and never returned. Perhaps they were destroyed, or else they exist today in some dark vault.

Otash told James Ellroy, the novelist, that he sometimes spied on JFK in action. Otash claimed that from what he’d seen spying on JFK, that he was “a two-minute man” and “hung like a cashew.” In Ellroy’s novel, *American Tabloid* (1995), the president was called “Badback Jack,” because he used his bad back as an excuse for his lack of virility.

On October 8, 1992 an obituary writer, Myrna Oliver, wrote: “Otash prowled Hollywood by night in a chauffeured Cadillac full of women he called ‘little sweeties,’ and much like a fictional private eye conjured up by Raymond Chandler, drank a quart of Scotch and smoked four packs of cigarettes a day.”

Private detectives are supposed to keep silent about their revelations, except to their clients. But Otash often bragged of his inside knowledge.

Whenever he met a friend, he’d often begin his conversation by saying, “Did I tell you about the time....” Then he’d relate a shocking incident from his vast repertoire. He once told columnist James Bacon one of his scandals. Of course, the journalist couldn’t print it but privately gossiped about it.

One incident Otash related to Bacon allegedly occurred when he was a security guard at the Hollywood Ranch Market, which was experiencing a great deal of shoplifting. One afternoon, he caught James Dean stealing both a ham and a tinned caviar, “the expensive stuff, although he could afford to pay. It was my job to see that he was arrested. Charges were filed

against him, but I learned later from someone in the police department that the case was mysteriously dropped. Someone important had intervened.”

“Believe it or not, four months later I caught Dean stealing another ham at the market—no caviar this time,” Otash claimed. “Instead of arresting him, I put the ham back on the rack and invited him for a freshly squeezed orange juice. I told him to cut out this shoplifting shit since he was making good money. What I really wanted to know was who got him off on the last charge.”

“He looked at me with that smirky grin he had,” Otash said. ““It was the most powerful man in America,”” he claimed. ““But I had to sing for my supper when I was driven in this big black limousine to La Jolla.””

“As a detective, it didn’t take me long to add two and two,” Otash said. “I knew that Clyde Tolson and Hoover were staying in La Jolla at that time going to the race track. Suddenly, it made sense. Hoover could get anybody off from anything in those days, and Dean was his type. I’m also certain if you looked at that infamous book of Hoover’s celebrity nudes, Dean posing with a big hard-on in that tree would be among his prized possessions. Some Dean biographers have written about the actor’s claim to have been seduced by this ‘bigwig in Washington.’ It must have been Hoover. Eisenhower is definitely not a suspect.”

In 1945, at the end of World War II, Scotty Bowers, a well-built, curly haired blond from southern Illinois, moved to Los Angeles. Shortly thereafter, he opened Scott’s Gas Station at the corner of Fairfax and Hollywood Boulevard. Within eight months, it had become the most popular gas station among gays in Hollywood.

Getting a lube job at Scotty’s came to mean something else. He hired as many as a dozen young men to pump gas and to escort certain gentlemen callers into the back rooms. There, the car owners could perform fellatio on these handsome, strapping former servicemen, or else become passive recipients of sodomy. Scotty hired only “tops.”

Among the many patrons of the gas station were director George Cukor and the very closeted Spencer Tracy. Robert Taylor often stopped by to get “filled up,” and Tyrone Power took some of the young men home with him to “perform the down and dirties,” in the words of one gas jockey hustler.

“Most of Scotty’s men were gorgeous,” or so claimed Vivien Leigh, who visited the gas station accompanied by her friend Cukor. Most of Scotty’s men were bisexuals and could accommodate either gender. Sometimes one of the gas jockeys was hired for private sessions at the homes of a married couple. Stars seeking lesbian encounters could also find Scotty’s services fulfilling.

In his investigation, author Paul Young quotes a source who claimed that “Scotty was smarter than some of his competitors. He refused to accept money from his boys or his clients. He’d only accept gifts: gold watches, silver trinkets, stocks, bonds, you name it. Some of his regular clients, who greatly appreciated his services, even went so far as to give him pieces of property.”

The subject of many newspaper and magazine articles, Scotty, in his late 80s as of this writing, is a Hollywood legend. When not running his gas station, he moonlighted as a bartender at star-studded Hollywood parties where he met many of his admirers.

Over the years, various stars had need for his services including Katharine Hepburn (“no women with skin blemishes”), Cary Grant, Rock Hudson, Tennessee Williams, even the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. (She was a closeted lesbian, the former king a closeted homosexual.)

Late in life, Scotty wrote his long-overdue memoirs, called *Full Service*, a reference, of course, to the dual “services” provided by his filling station. The subtitle to his book is called “Secrets, Sex, and High Society in Hollywood’s Golden Age.”



“You know, I’ve had my cock sucked by some of the biggest names in Hollywood, and this really big wig in Washington,” **James Dean** once said.

Detective Fred Otash figured out that that bigwig was none other than J. Edgar himself, who ordered that Dean’s arrest for theft in a supermarket be removed from police records.

J. Edgar’s scrapbook contained a collection of obscene pictures secretly snapped of Dean, including one taken at a Hollywood party where he fellated a black man in front of other guests.

Arguably, the most shocking revelation in *Full Service* is the weekend Scotty spent in the company of J. Edgar Hoover. He recalled meeting a rich young doctor from La Jolla at a lavish party off Doheny Drive in Beverly Hills. In the book, the physician is referred to only as “Ted” (with the last name withheld).

Scotty bonded with this doctor, who invited him to take care of food and beverage arrangements at a party at his home in La Jolla two weeks hence.

Right on schedule, Scotty arrived in just fourteen days at an elegant, modern beachfront home where Ted, clad in a bathing suit, welcomed him. Scotty found his kitchen fully stocked with everything from caviar to lobster, so he soon realized that he was the choice hunk of meat on the menu that weekend.

After Scotty had showered and “slipped into something more comfortable,” he noticed from his bedroom window a large black sedan pulling into the driveway, its windows dark tinted. A young chauffeur, around twenty-eight years old, emerged from behind the wheel to open the door for his passenger. Out emerged a stocky man in his mid-60s with thinning black hair. He wore dark glasses.

A few minutes later Scotty was introduced to the distinguished guest as “John.” At the time, the face of J. Edgar Hoover was one of the most recognizable in the world. The FBI director and the handsome young driver disappeared for two hours behind the closed door of an upstairs bedroom, which contained a king-sized bed.

When J. Edgar and the driver, who was called “Rick,” emerged from upstairs, Scotty noticed that he wore a shoulder holster with a revolver strapped to his well-muscled body. Apparently “Rick” was J. Edgar’s bodyguard, perhaps a young agent at the FBI.

In his memoirs, Scotty wrote, “So the rumors were true.” According to his account, sex began after an elegant dinner, Ted pairing off with Scotty, and J. Edgar disappearing inside the Blue Room upstairs with the young bodyguard.

“The evening didn’t end there,” Scotty said. “We swapped around a bit—no group sex, no gangbangs, no foursomes, no orgies. Everyone was one-on-one, with two couples going their separate ways” and having their separate sexual encounters.

He claimed that he had sex with J. Edgar five times that weekend and just as often with Ted. Both Ted and J. Edgar tried out Rick, but Scotty was not asked to sample his charms. In bed, Scotty claimed, J. Edgar was “a very pleasant and gentle man,” unlike his public image, but he gave no more tantalizing details. Did they kiss? Was J. Edgar a top or bottom? How was the penis? Cut or uncut? Large? Average? Small?

During the weekend, Ted opened the locked door to a spare bedroom filled with a large wardrobe of women’s clothing. Scotty claimed he was asked to serve Saturday night dinner in drag. He also said that J. Edgar appeared that evening in costly gowns, changing his selection of wardrobe two or three times that night.

On Monday morning, Scotty said goodbye to Ted, J. Edgar, and his young driver, as he headed back to Los Angeles. He wrote that Ted remained a client for years “but I never saw Hoover ever again.”

At a luncheon at Washington’s Mayflower Hotel, Joseph P. Kennedy complained to J. Edgar, “I should have had my boy Jack gelded when he was fifteen years old. He can’t meet a woman he doesn’t fuck. Already he’s gone through half the stars in Hollywood from Marlene Dietrich to Gene Tierney, even Jayne Mansfield—and that big-busted cow was pregnant at the time.”

“At least he’s not dating any more Nazi spies,” J. Edgar said, noticing the frown that crossed the ambassador’s brow.

The FBI director was referring to an affair JFK launched in November of 1941 with Inga Arvad, when he was an ensign in the Office of Naval Intelligence in Washington. She called him “Honeysuckle,” and he nicknamed her “Inga-Binga.”

At the age of fifteen, with her thirty-six-inch bust, she’d won the Miss Denmark contest. In 1936 she’d had an affair with Adolf Hitler during the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin. Der Führer found her “the perfect example of Nordic beauty.”

This torrid affair came to the attention of Clyde and J. Edgar. The director told his aides, “The bitch is the Mata Hari of Washington, and that upstart Kennedy brat is fucking her and giving away naval secrets which she’s reporting to Hitler himself.”

JFK knew that J. Edgar’s G-Men were following him and bugging his bedrooms. One night in bed with Inga, he addressed the hidden microphones. “Whoever is listening, the next sound you hear will be of me fucking her.” He also said, “Hoover’s on the take from the Mafia, which pays his heavy gambling debts. With the high costs of dresses and wigs these days, he needs financial assistance from the mob.”

With the intervention of the ambassador, his son ended the affair and was shipped off to the Pacific.

J. Edgar and Clyde had met Arvad. The Nazi spy had been introduced to them at a party. Later she wrote that Clyde is “like a good boy expecting a promised candy bar.” That comment angered J. Edgar.

The interference of J. Edgar into JFK’s wartime affair caused a lasting bitterness between the two adversaries.

At their Mayflower Hotel luncheon, the ambassador leaned back after his third glass of Irish whiskey and informed J. Edgar, “The family has decided it’s time to run Jack for President of the United States, in spite of the fact he’s a Catholic. We know we can depend on you to keep the lid on any scandal.”

“You can count on me, Joe,” J. Edgar said. “We’ve been friends for years, and I’ve demonstrated to you that you can trust me.”

“I’m counting on that,” Kennedy said.

What J. Edgar didn’t tell Joe Kennedy was that privately he was backing Lyndon B. Johnson for the Democratic nomination in the presidential race of 1960 which would pit JFK against Richard Nixon, another of J. Edgar’s allies. Even though behind his back LBJ called J. Edgar “the queer bastard,” they pretended to be warm friends—at least when they met up with each other.

Two weeks later at the same Mayflower Hotel luncheon table, J. Edgar informed Nixon that “you can count on me.” He paused. “One-hundred percent.”

Clyde was also at the luncheon, and he assured Nixon that, “We have a way of containing any embarrassing revelations that might rear their ugly heads. If an ugly head pops up, we’ll chop it off with the sharpest axe the FBI has to offer.”

J. Edgar and Clyde were well aware of the sexual misadventures of the candidate they mocked as “The Jack Rabbit,” willing to hop between any open legs. Even more alarming was the information they were gathering that Joe Kennedy still had the mob connections he’d formed when he was a bootlegger during Prohibition.



In the annals of political seductions, **Inga Arvad** (*right figure, above*) had a definite taste for powerful men, each of whom presided over huge portions of the world. She was seduced by both **Adolf Hitler** (*left*) and a young U.S. Navy officer, **John F. Kennedy**.

She often spoke of Hitler's "kind heart." J. Edgar became suspicious that hotto-trot Jack Kennedy was revealing government secrets to his mistress.

This revelation led to JFK's being sent off to the Pacific to command PT 109—and the rest is history.

Clyde had shown J. Edgar a photograph taken on a California golf course which revealed Joe playing golf with Johnny Roselli, who was the West Coast mob chief for Chicago Mafia boss Sam Giancana.

The FBI also had photographs secretly taken of Jack meeting with Meyer Lansky in 1957 in pre-Castro Havana. The Senator from Massachusetts had flown in with one of his best friends, Senator George Smathers of Florida, to patronize "only the most beautiful of the city's putas."

Through wiretaps, J. Edgar and Clyde learned that Joe was funneling money into a war chest presided over by Sam Giancana, whose instructions were "to buy the West Virginia primary" if necessary. As a Catholic, JFK was facing a difficult contest in a heavily Protestant state. But through buying off the unions and key officials, JFK emerged triumphant in the primary.

Joe also knew that the Chicago mob boss, Sam Giancana, his former ally from bootlegging days, knew that during the actual election in November, winning Illinois was crucial because it was a political swing state and would be essential for his son's election as president.

The FBI surveillance of Jack produced another dangerous link with Giancana. They shared the same mistress, Judith Campbell, a party girl who looked like Elizabeth Taylor. Introduced to JFK by his friend, Frank Sinatra, after the singer had tired of her, Judith had met Jack when he was a senator and hadn't yet announced his run for the presidency.

Born in New York City to a wealthy family who soon after moved to Los Angeles, Judith grew up in a 24-room Mediterranean villa where she met such celebrities as family friend Jack Warner and Cary Grant.

She later claimed that Bob Hope, one of her father's best friends, molested her in a beach house when she was a little girl. In later life, according to the FBI report, she "deep-throated" such Sinatra Rat Packers as Peter Lawford, Sammy Davis Jr. and Dean Martin.

In 1960, when Jack was running for president, she arranged a secret meeting at Miami Beach's Fontainebleau Hotel between JFK and Giancana. J. Edgar had ordered an FBI agent to spy on this rendezvous. To complicate matters even more, Judith was also a part-time mistress of Johnny Roselli, Giancana's "henchman" in Los Angeles.

Before he became president, Jack was revealed to prefer three-ways with two women at a time. Even though she denied it in her highly unreliable memoirs, Judith Campbell was often hired as "the second woman."

On the eve of the Democratic Convention in Los Angeles, Clyde had ordered agents to bug JFK's hotel suite. The bugging revealed that the man about to be nominated as the Democratic standard bearer had previously arranged a sexual tryst with both Marilyn Monroe and Judith Campbell in his bed.

When J. Edgar learned this, he told his aides, “I guess Kennedy could-n’t get the real Elizabeth Taylor to join Monroe and himself, so he had to settle for Marilyn and a Taylor clone.”

The FBI also learned that JFK had “enjoyed” two beautiful mulatto prostitutes when he’d been a guest of Frank Sinatra at his desert villa in Rancho Mirage, near Palm Springs, California.

Tapes of these sexual trysts with JFK, Marilyn, Judith, and the mulatto prostitutes were turned over to Lyndon Johnson’s campaign, as the Texas senator was hoping to knock out Kennedy and carry the Democratic banner for himself that year. Although Johnson and his aides found the recordings voyeuristically amusing, they didn’t seem to have a clue about how to release them, at least to the general public.

Just hours before the actual nomination on the floor, other disturbing information would be sent to the Johnson campaign from J. Edgar.

“The fag issue was also raised about twenty-four hours before the nomination,” said Senator Smathers, who was a confidant of both JFK and LBJ.

Even though Bobby and Jack were notorious womanizers, the Johnson camp had been swamped with rumors that they were “queer on the side.”

In David Talbot’s book, *Brothers: The Hidden History of the Kennedy Years*, the author said:

“The Kennedy brothers’ boyish good looks set off homophobic anxiety attacks among their enemies, including the sexually repressed Hoover. But this particular whispering campaign about the brothers, who were notoriously heterosexual, never went anywhere.”

J. Edgar had already made Johnson aware that JFK’s best friend, Lem Billings, was a homosexual and “probably gives him an occasional blow-job.” The Kennedys had also been able to suppress charges against Billings when he was arrested for “lewd conduct” in a men’s room in Washington.

At the last minute, J. Edgar and Clyde produced pictures of Bobby and Jack in drag taken at a drunken party on Martha’s Vineyard.

Smathers was at that party. “It was Halloween. The whole thing was just a gag. For a laugh, Jack and Bobby put on some of Pat Lawford’s clothes and paraded out to amuse the guests. Some jerk took a picture. It was bullshit! They are not cross-dressers. Come on. Hoover is the fucking cross dresser. I think Lyndon understood that and never released the pictures. After all, he had his own sexual scandals that might do him in.”

On the road to the White House, both Jack and his brother Bobby had to deal with two dangerous adversaries, even though publicly they had to praise both Johnson and J. Edgar. As Talbot reported, “Jack and Bobby and their top aides were aware of Hoover’s secret life and knew he wore funny clothes. The Kennedy brothers and Hoover had a stalemate. They knew enough about Hoover and Hoover knew enough about them.” It appeared that each warring faction had enough ammunition to shoot down the other.

Even before he was nominated, Jack had sent J. Edgar a confidential memo, assuring him, “You will be one of the first appointments I make.” Privately they had a very different opinion. In 1964, after Jack was assassinated, Bobby made a recording which he thought would be read only by future historians, but his comments through some informant reached J. Edgar. “Hoover is a dangerous man, a habitual blackmailer,” Bobby charged. “He’s rather like a psycho. Jack and I thought we could control him.”

Facing the press, JFK had high praise for J. Edgar’s accomplishments. Privately, he told aides David Powers and Charles (“Chuck”) Spalding, “The two most overrated things in the world are the State of Texas and the drag queen running the FBI.”

When it was clear to Johnson that he would not get the nomination, he still wanted to be on the ticket as Kennedy’s vice presidential running mate. LBJ told Smathers, “One out of every four presidents dies in office. I’m a gambler, and I like to take a chance. Perhaps someone will shoot Kennedy, and I can take over.”

During the campaign, Johnson also revealed to Smathers, “The queer bastard [a reference to J. Edgar] keeps sending me all this incriminating shit on Kennedy I can’t use. Take that Nazi spy he used to bed. News that Kennedy had slept with Hitler’s mistress who had also sucked off Herman Göring would cost him the Jewish vote. News that his best friend is a homosexual would cost him the Christian right—that and news he’s a whoremonger. That he’s fucking Marilyn Monroe might actually win him votes from redneck men, because that’s what they’d like to be doing themselves.”



Judith Campbell (later **Exner**), an Elizabeth Taylor lookalike, had a roster of potentially dangerous lovers, including Johnny Roselli, Sam Giancana, Frank Sinatra, and John F. Kennedy, whom she'd met while he was still a senator from Massachusetts.

Later in life, when she was criticized for her affair with a sitting president, she said, "I was 25 years old and in love. Was I supposed to have better sense and more judgment than the President of the United States?"

Before TV audiences in the 1970s, she told viewers that at the time, she didn't know who Senator Kennedy was. "I was not up on politics." Not believing her, audiences booed her.

When Johnson sent news that he wanted to be the "nominee for Veep," Jack told Bobby, "We're trapped. He's got us by the balls. I bet Hoover has turned over his complete FBI file on me to the Johnson camp."

Evelyn Lincoln, JFK's personal secretary, said, "I saw it happen. I was in and out of the room when Bobby and Jack made the decision they had to run with Johnson, even though they despised this tall Texan and didn't want him on the ticket. Johnson literally blackmailed himself onto the ticket."

In one of the closest elections in American history, the Kennedy/Johnson team narrowly defeated Richard Nixon.

It is still called "the stolen election." When Judith Campbell was leaving Chicago to go to Washington to have sex with the President-elect, Giancana told her, "Your boyfriend has become the leader of the Free World because of me."

Two weeks after the presidential election in November of 1960, Nixon called J. Edgar to thank him for his support. He was seemingly unaware of J. Edgar's behind-the-scenes support of Johnson. "The Kennedys taught me a thing or two about dirty tricks, and I thought I was the master. One day I'll get my revenge. I'll teach the fucking bastards what dirty tricks are all about. Watch me go!"

During his usual grapefruit and cottage cheese salad luncheon at the Mayflower Hotel, J. Edgar shared Nixon's promise of revenge with Clyde, Guy Hotell, and Louis Nichols.

The heir to the Camelot legacy, and the sexiest of all the Kennedys, John F. Kennedy, Jr. was born on November 25, 1960, a premature birth. His original due date was December 12. His father was President-elect John F. Kennedy, who had not yet moved Dwight D. Eisenhower out of the White House. His mother, Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, remained at the Kennedy compound in Palm Beach, not returning to Washington until the January inauguration of her husband.

John Jr. moved into the White House in February of 1961 and was given one of the largest rooms in the building, which Jackie had already transformed into his nursery. He'd inherited his sister Caroline's crib, on which Jackie had removed the pink bows and replaced them with blue ones. His bottle, prepared on a nearby gas stove, was given to him at six every morning. His morning nap was on the Truman Balcony, which a previous president had added to the White House and which was seeing its first infant in nearly seventy years.

Overnight, John Jr. had become most famous baby in the world, and he'd grow up to become America's Prince Charming,

idolized by millions, especially when the cute little boy attended his father's funeral after the assassination. In 1999, millions more mourned JFK Jr.'s own untimely death in a private plane crash flying to New England to attend the wedding of a relative.

But before that happened, a glamorous life unfolded for him as the adorable son of the two most glamorous figures ever to inhabit the White House.

Almost from the date of John's birth, there were threats from kidnappers—some real, some from the deranged. He had been assigned a three-man Secret Service team to protect him.

The FBI director ordered that all these letters be sent to him, so that his agents could carry out an investigation.

J. Edgar knew that the kidnapping of the most celebrated baby in the world would provoke an international incident, dwarfing the infamy of the Lindbergh baby. "We don't want to be caught asleep when some kidnapper hoists a ladder to Junior's bedroom at the White House and hauls off this precious cargo. Jack Kennedy would have our heads."

From the very beginning, J. Edgar was fascinated by the infant. A spy he had planted in the White House fed him information. He learned that the nannies who changed John Jr.'s diapers nicknamed him "Big Boy." J. Edgar concluded that the boy had inherited his penis from the Bouvier side of his family, not from his father.

J. Edgar's informants picked up the most esoteric and trivial information on the young boy. He didn't like children's theater because he wanted to see dramas "where someone gets their head chopped off." Nikita Khrushchev in Moscow sent him a Russian puppy named "Pushinka." The boy also loved to visit a snake farm near Camp David where he would let a harmless cobra he named George crawl all over him.

John Jr.'s first attempt at a presidential "assassination" was when the communist dictator Marshall Tito of Yugoslavia was giving a speech at the White House. Playing upstairs on the Truman Balcony, Junior dropped a toy gun, its fall caught on camera, causing the Secret Service consternation.

J. Edgar was among the first to learn that John Jr. was a serious exhibitionist. When he learned to walk, he often appeared half-naked in the White House halls. When he grew older, he once visited a nude beach on Cape Cod, appearing completely naked.

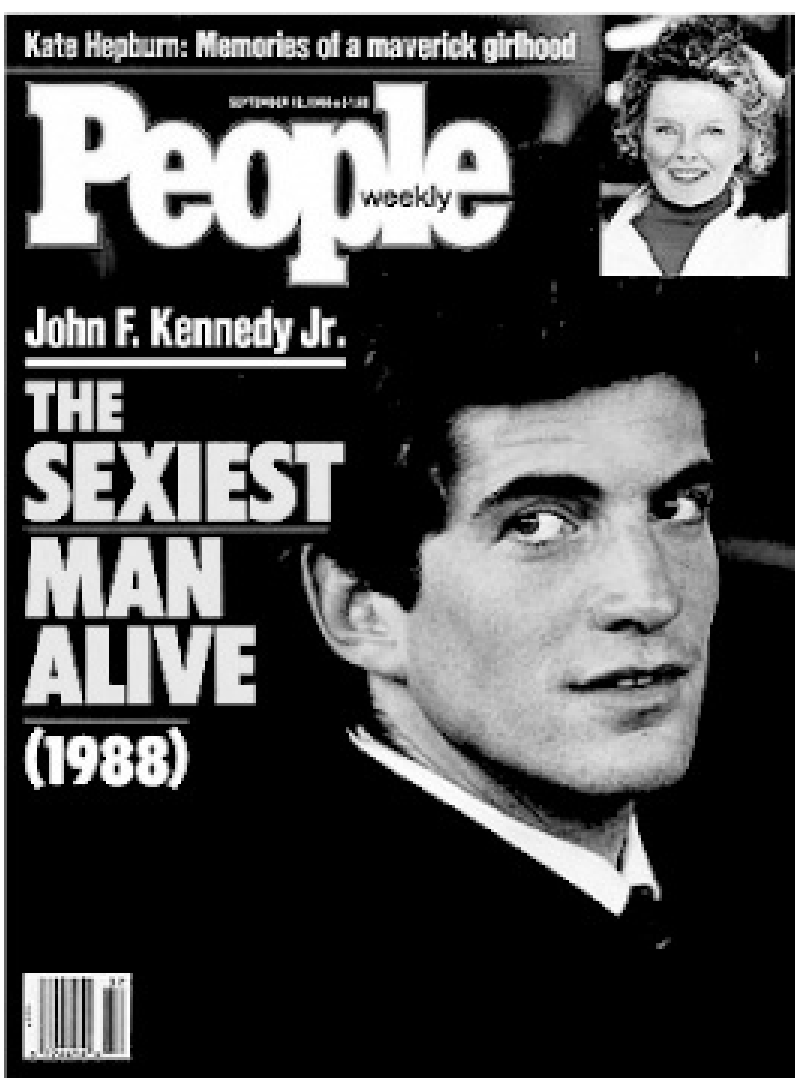
J. Edgar was long dead when John Jr. appeared nude after his thirtieth birthday in 1990 on a beach in St. Barts in the French West Indies. A New York travel agent, Shelby Shusteroff, photographed him but has never made her coveted shots public, in spite of offers of huge amounts of money. Shusteroff claimed that the pictures were not taken for financial gain but for her own pleasure.

As a student at Brown University, John Jr. purchased a white-haired pig, which he kept in the basement of the Phi Phi fraternity house. He fed it well and planned to sell it for slaughter. To make the pig grow fatter, he personally castrated it with a Boy Scout pocket knife.

During his fraternity initiation, he was forced to swallow a live goldfish and then had to crawl around on a tile floor covered with the entrails of animals. He was then blindfolded and forced to search for a peeled banana in a toilet bowl filled with feces. He was later stripped down and tied, whereupon members proceeded to paddle his naked buttocks.

The kidnapping threats would continue throughout John Jr.'s life, and grew especially heavy during his second year at the New York University School of Law. He refused the FBI's offer of around-the-clock police protection.

A fellow classmate, Baird Jones, told biographer C. David Heymann, "Kidnapping threats were commonplace. I happened to know the people who ran the mailroom at NYU. One day they showed me some of the threatening letters. It was incredible stuff, totally insane. One card stipulated that unless several million dollars changed hands, John would be kidnapped or killed. It surprised me that John was able to go about his business—ride his bike around town, get on the subway—without the slightest hesitation."



J. Edgar died before John F. Kennedy, Jr. (photo above) became a promiscuous young man about town. But the FBI began compiling a dossier on his when he was still a boy.

As “the most famous baby in the world,” he was frequently subjected to kidnapping threats by extortionists who wanted to get their hands on some of the Kennedy millions.

J. Edgar was especially interested in what was said to JFK, Jr. by other people. At a party which he attended with his “guardian,” Ted Sorensen, he was introduced to buxom Jayne Mansfield, with whom JFK Sr. had had an affair.

She told the young boy, “I preferred a man like your father as president. He was the kind of leader who will do it to a woman rather than to the nation.”

Under the Freedom of Information Act, the FBI files on John Jr. have been published, but they are among the most censored released by the Bureau. Almost none of them make any sense as the wording, for the most part, has been completely blacked out with a heavy pen. Many contain only the most innocuous words, as the juicy details have been censored.

Throughout JFK Jr.’s FBI file, the word “kidnapping” occurs the most frequently, although there are references to “abduction.”

As documents, the files are virtually worthless, and many of the really scandalous have been removed. One document dated October 10, 1996, states,

“Supposedly, this was aborted because ... scheme did not work.... was in charge of the plan and for making all the arrangements for the kidnapping. The plan also involved ... who.... After kidnapping Kennedy, he would be taken to.... Kennedy would be held there until....”

The stuff that would make tabloid fodder was accumulated after J. Edgar’s death in 1972 when JFK Jr. was only twelve years old. The FBI kept some sort of watch over JFK Jr. even beyond his death, investigating his mysterious plane crash, especially the charges that a bomb had been placed on board his private plane.

One of the most bizarre kidnapping schemes occurred after JFK Jr. was named *People* magazine’s “Sexiest Man Alive.” Three natives of Bogotá, Colombia, planned to abduct JFK Jr. when he was biking through Manhattan’s Central Park.

Somehow he was going to be flown by private plane to Colombia. There, while held captive, he was going to be forced to

make pornographic movies, both gay and straight, which his abductors felt—perhaps rightly so—would make millions of dollars—like a Paris Hilton sex tape, only so much more. Obviously that plan was never carried out.

In the spring of 1974, John Jr. was mugged in Central Park, with no Secret Service agent in sight, while riding his Italian-made ten-speed racer along a bike path to the tennis courts. His assailant turned out to be a twenty-year-old heroin addict who lived in Spanish Harlem. He stole John's bike and tennis racket but was later apprehended. Not wanting the publicity, Jackie urged that charges be dropped.

Considering some of the evidence the FBI collected on John Jr. as a grown-up young man, it is understandable why much of the data has never been made available. Perhaps many of his files were destroyed.

Like his promiscuous father, his son liked to seduce actresses, models, or just beautiful women.

Before his marriage to Carolyn Bessette, a six-foot-tall, blue-eyed beauty, JFK Jr. had a rather tender romance with Christina Haag, who lived with him in Washington during the summer of 1987. She recaptured their love affair in a memoir called *Come to the Edge*, published in 2011. Their romance blossomed when they were cast together in an off-Broadway play in New York City. The affair was a tale of the loss of young love.

He also had tumultuous affairs with actress Daryl Hannah and Madonna, neither relationship meeting the approval of his almost obsessively protective mother. He was said to have had a fling with Sarah Jessica Parker when she could escape from Robert Downey Jr. He claimed she once met him at JFK airport wearing a mink coat with nothing on underneath, a story denied by the actress.

By the late 80s and 90s, JFK Jr. had become tabloid fodder. In 1996, the *National Enquirer* headlined a story, JFK JR. & MODEL IN SEX TAPES SCANDAL, a reference to a rumored affair with supermodel Elle MacPherson.

He also dated other gorgeous models, including Julie Baker, a dead-ringer for his mother Jackie. One of his more bizarre relationships was with Paula Barbieri, the ex-girlfriend of O.J. Simpson and a model and actress.

His alleged affair with Princess Diana at the Hotel Carlyle on New York's Upper East Side made headlines around the world. One paper reported that Diana told Simone Simmons, her "natural healer" and clairvoyant, that John Jr. was "so much better than Charles."

Model Naomi Campbell struck out, but things heated up with singer Apollonia, who was "the main squeeze" of Prince, with whom she'd co-starred in the 1984 film *Purple Rain*. Jenny Christian, his girlfriend at Phillips Academy, claimed "he was extremely handsome, and it was a great romance."

There were so many more encounters watched by the FBI, including actresses such as Melanie Griffith and even Julia Roberts. He struck out with Irish singer Sinéad O'Connor who once "shredded" the Pope. Maybe she hated Catholics. Also linked in the press to John Jr. were Sharon Stone and Princess Stephanie of Monaco. His so-called romance with Brooke Shields never seemed to get airborne.

John's tragic death in a plane he piloted occurred on July 16, 1999. Also brought to a watery grave was his wife, Carolyn, and her sister, Lauren Bessette.

One tabloid carried a report that Bill Clinton had once told John, "We're going to run Hillary for President in 2008, and we want you to be on the ticket as her vice president. Your turn will come in 2016 and 2020."

Beginning in the spring of 1961, J. Edgar ordered that Marilyn Monroe should be put under surveillance. He wasn't all that concerned about her affairs with a parade of other men, plus an occasional woman such as a "weekend fling" with the "notoriously heterosexual" Elizabeth Taylor in a suite in Las Vegas. Instead, the FBI director focused mainly on her involvement with the Kennedy brothers and Peter Lawford, who was married to Patricia Kennedy at the time.

The diligent FBI agents came up with some tantalizing details: JFK had first seduced Marilyn when she was a budding starlet named Norma Jean Baker. When JFK returned from the Navy in 1946, he'd visited Hollywood, where he stayed with his close friend, actor Robert Stack. Stack's job was to introduce the future congressman from Massachusetts to a galaxy of stars and starlets, all of whom seemed eager to meet "the ambassador's son," as he was called. JFK was then at the height of his male beauty, charm, and flash, and it was easy for Stack to arrange liaisons for his horny young buddy.

JFK would have no recollection of the experience, but Marilyn did when she met him in 1954 during the course of her marriage to Joe DiMaggio. Now the international star, Marilyn Monroe, she remembered him and, when DiMaggio went to the bathroom, she gave JFK her phone number.

The next morning, Marilyn called her best friend, Jeanne Carmen. "Senator Kennedy couldn't take his eyes off me last night," she said.

During the final weeks of Marilyn's crumbling marriage to DiMaggio, she began an affair with JFK that was consummated during the times he was in California. Their venues ranged from the raunchy Malibu Cottage to the Chateau Marmont in Hollywood. She told columnist James Bacon, "Jack doesn't indulge in foreplay too much because he's on the run all the time."

Henry Rosenfeld, Marilyn's New York confidant, said Marilyn not only saw JFK at an apartment of a friend in Manhattan on 53rd Street near Third Avenue, but also visited him at his permanent suite at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington where, on

occasion, he would also seduce Judy Garland.

Joe bragged to his son that he'd seduced Marilyn in 1950 when director John Huston had introduced them when she was making the film noir *The Asphalt Jungle*, a movie in which the budding starlet had a minor role.

When JFK became president, Marilyn in her delusion became more and more convinced that a divorce with Jackie was imminent. Her friend, Jeanne Carmen, warned her that the President would dump her when the novelty of seducing her had worn off."

"Not so!" Marilyn said. "We'll grow old together. I'll even learn to sit in a rocking chair like he does."

According to Lawford, he used to dress Marilyn up like an ugly secretary with a stringy black wig and slip her into the Carlyle. He even claimed that the blonde bombshell was slipped aboard Air Force One in dowdy disguise "for an airborne fuck."

The FBI learned that when Bobby was appointed Attorney General, JFK used the bedroom installed above Bobby's office at the Justice Department. During these sexual trysts, Bobby was conveniently absent.

When JFK flew to California, the meetings between Monroe and himself took place at the home of Patricia and Peter Lawford. Of all his sisters, Pat was the only one aware of his adulterous relationships.

Jeanne Carmen, in her tabloid tattle called *True Confessions of a Hollywood Party Girl*, claimed that she had a three-way with Marilyn and JFK at the Lawford home. She said the President told her that she should view Marilyn and herself as "pioneers of the New Frontier of the 1960s."

News of all these scandals were sent to J. Edgar and Clyde. Guy Hotell said "such stuff was their favorite bedtime reading. *Little Red Riding Hood* was too scary."

There was so much more to come. After the finalization of Marilyn's divorce from DiMaggio in 1955, she rented a small apartment in New York City. But she didn't invite JFK there since too many people might observe them. He would have her slipped into the swanky Hotel Carlyle to his penthouse suite. The hotel is famous as a venue for discreet liaisons among the most celebrated people in the world.

Her friend, Henry Rosenfeld, claimed Marilyn was as excited as a teenager to be having an affair with the handsome man who was going to become President of the United States. She confided to columnist Earl Wilson, "I think I make his back feel better—don't print that."

Before leaving a night club, she said, "Earl, you're a dear. Take a good look at me. You're looking at the future First Lady of the United States."

"But what about Jackie?" Wilson asked.

"He'll divorce the old bag. I heard it from Jack himself that she won't do all the things I'll do. She's too much of a lady, I guess."

Launched into an affair with Marilyn, the hottest thing on celluloid, Jack placed a call to his father Joe Kennedy in Palm Beach. His father had been seducing movie stars since the 1920s, notably his long-running affair with silent screen vamp Gloria Swanson. But J. Edgar and Clyde were aware of many others—Constance Bennett, Evelyn Brent, Betty Compson, Viola Dane, Marion Davies (Hearst's mistress), Marlene Dietrich, Phyllis Haver, Sonja Henie, and, if Joe is to be believed, Greta Garbo.

In November of 1961, J. Edgar and Clyde at FBI headquarters had received an anonymous package. In it were sexually explicit photographs of Marilyn and the President. Who took these photographs is not known. The package carried a Los Angeles postmark. It is not known if the President knew of this delivery.

J. Edgar rather accurately concluded that in his private life JFK was "the most reckless man ever to occupy the Oval Office." As evidence, he cited his appearance in November of 1961 at a reception at the Beverly Hilton Hotel. "For all the world to see back then, Marilyn Monroe was his date," J. Edgar said.

J. Edgar learned that Joe was plotting Jack's re-election in 1964 and viewed Marilyn "as a walking time bomb." He called her and some sources claim he offered her a million dollars—"the price of silence."

The next day Marilyn told Carmen that she'd decided to drop JFK after all. "I've always thought that diamonds are a girl's best friend. Money can make a gal change her mind."

But as negotiations lingered into the Christmas season of 1961, and before her deal with Joe was consummated, he suffered a stroke. This once feared figure was left sitting in a wheelchair, helpless, mute, and drooling.

When J. Edgar with Clyde flew to see him, Rose Kennedy refused their admittance. She didn't want these two powerful power brokers to gaze in pity on a once-powerful man.

With Joe alive technically, but physically out of it, both J. Edgar and Clyde realized that they had to deal with JFK and RFK on their own. "The Jack Rabbit can be controlled, not that other rodent who sits in the Attorney General's office. We'll increase our surveillance of him. We've concentrated too much on Jack Kennedy. I hear Brother Robert is as much of a womanizer as his older brother, except he's more discreet. Round up your men. Let's keep our so-called boss under surveillance."

Using whatever means within his control, J. Edgar and Clyde pursued the nocturnal life of both Bobby and JFK with a certain ferocity. Instead of the Kennedy brothers, they called them “the Kennedy bastards.”

With Joe Kennedy, their founding father, out of commission, Clyde predicted the brothers would grow wilder and wilder in their indiscretions.

The reports arriving at the FBI suggested that JFK was heavily sedated most of the time to avoid back pain.

J. Edgar’s spies among the Secret Service in the White House were reporting on nude parties with prostitutes. Although J. Edgar at one point had no concrete evidence, he was informed that JFK, on occasion and as noted in numerous biographies, was fond of having himself photographed with beautiful women, sometimes pictured during fornication with him or else when one of the hired women was fellating him.

“I want to get hold of some of those pictures,” he told Clyde and his aides. “No excuses.”

It was rumored that Peter Lawford was called in to photograph a nude session with Marilyn and JFK at his home in Santa Monica. Marilyn confided to both Jeanne Carmen and Shelley Winters that the photos were taken in a large bathtub at Peter’s home. Marilyn also claimed that Peter joined JFK and herself for a three-way.

The existence of these notorious photographs of Marilyn and JFK were first exposed in C. David Heymann’s biography, *A Woman Named Jackie*. The whereabouts of the photographs, if they exist at all today, are not known, but J. Edgar was rumored to have obtained a copy of one of them.

Late in 1961, J. Edgar and Clyde began to pry into the private life of Bobby, watching him almost as closely as they did JFK because, as Attorney General, he was in a position to cause them the most damage, especially in his advocacy of civil rights and his attack on organized crime. He’d once sent a memo to J. Edgar: “Hire more African-Americans in the FBI—and not just as a janitor or chauffeur.”



Marilyn Monroe (pictured in the top photo, above) sings her most famous song, “Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend,” in the hit movie, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*.

All three Kennedy brothers (left to right, Bobby, Teddy, and Jack) got to sample her charms, one at a time. Like some plaything, she was passed around from brother to brother. The brothers became duly alarmed when an out-of-control Marilyn threatened to destroy their carefully constructed political dynasty.

Marilyn entertained fantasies of marrying either Jack or Bobby, but not Teddy. “I call him my overgrown Teddy Bear—nothing more,” she told her best friend, Jeanne Carmen.

In the FBI headquarters in Washington, J. Edgar shouted at Clyde and his aides, as he tossed the *Washington Post* on the floor. “Robert Kennedy is no saint. He must have paid someone to write this feature story on him. He’s as big a whoremonger as his brother.” Then he stormed into his office.

Within weeks, he was accumulating damaging evidence on his boss, the Attorney General. “He keeps his wife home barefoot and pregnant,” Clyde said. “He travels all the time, and he always has a woman sent to his hotel bedroom.”

RFK’s latest affair was with the beautiful actress Lee Remick, who was ten years his junior. The report on him said he’d

begun an affair with her after she visited Washington on the arm of her husband, Bill Colleran.

Another report claimed that Remick was overheard at a party saying, “I’m bored with my marriage and seducing married men is a big turn-on for me.”

J. Edgar learned that her affair with Bobby had begun in 1962, the year when she won the Oscar as Best Actress for playing the alcoholic wife of Jack Lemmon in *Days of Wine and Roses*.

Through wiretaps, J. Edgar listened in on a conversation between Bobby and his brother-in-law, Peter Lawford. The Attorney General claimed he was flying to the West Coast and wanted to meet Remick. Lawford responded, “Sure, I’ll introduce you. I’m also having an affair with her. But welcome aboard. The more the merrier.”

Flying into Los Angeles, Bobby, according to the FBI report, spent the weekend with Remick at some friend’s secluded home in Malibu.

Apparently, Remick fell for Bobby after their first two nights together. Before he left Los Angeles, she was urging him to divorce Ethel. She promised she’d divorce her husband.

Like Marilyn Monroe chasing after JFK, Remick pursued Bobby, even making unscheduled trips to Washington which she described to her husband as fundraising efforts for the Democratic Party. In 1962 Remick and Bobby were seen staying together in a villa on Palm Beach.

Bobby, according to reports, wanted to keep Remick on the string for occasional romps in the hay. He had no permanent plan for her in his life and he became alarmed to see her developing an obsession about him.

From both Bobby and Lawford, JFK heard what a “great gal” Remick was in bed. The President became intrigued and asked Lawford to schedule a meeting between them when he flew to the West Coast. He also advised Lawford that “Bobby’s not to know.”

Lawford, according to FBI surveillance, delivered Remick to JFK’s hotel suite in Los Angeles, where she spent most of the night. She later told Lawford, “He wasn’t the lover Bobby is. He just sort of lies down on his back and expects the woman to do all the work.”

Bobby eventually heard about his brother’s seduction of Remick. He told his office staff to, “Tell her to stop calling me. It’s over. I’ve moved on.”

From the beginning of Marilyn Monroe’s affair with Bobby Kennedy, J. Edgar, Clyde, and their agents monitored the development of the sexual tryst. It began in early February during Bobby’s trip to Los Angeles where he stayed at the home of his sister, Patricia Kennedy Lawford and her actor husband Peter. It would last on or off until the last day of her life and a confrontational meeting at her home in Brentwood only hours before she died.

When Peter asked RFK what star he most wanted to meet in Hollywood, his first choice had been MM.

In a letter to Arthur Miller’s teenage son, MM praised Bobby’s sense of humor and also claimed, “He’s not a bad dancer either.”

Peter later warned Bobby, “When Ethel’s in the room, you shouldn’t hold Marilyn so close when you dance with her. Her bosom was pressing into your chest, not to mention something else.”

Joan Braden, a family friend of the Lawfords, recalled Marilyn’s arrival at their home in Santa Monica. The blonde star was dressed in black lace, wearing no brassière. Throughout the night, Bobby devoted all his attention to her, finishing off a bottle of champagne with her. She even taught him how to do the twist. Right in front of Pat and Peter, Marilyn asked Bobby, “As Attorney General, have you ever arrested a woman in bed?”

“No, but I’ve done other things to them,” he said.



Peter Lawford, brother-in-law to the Kennedy brothers, claimed “Bobby caught the adultery infection from Jack.” Such was the case when he encountered a gorgeous 26-year-old movie star, **Lee Remick** (photo above). According to reports, “Bobby couldn’t take his eyes off her.”

Close friends claimed, “They were destined to hit the sack.” Bobby wanted a casual affair, but Lee fell for him. She wanted each of them to divorce their respective spouses and marry each other, “but there was no way that Bobby was going to leave Ethel and all those children,” according to Lawford.

After that night, Bobby made frequent trips to Los Angeles, promoting his book on organized crime. *The Enemy Within*, which he wanted developed as a film project.

Bobby’s sister, Jean Kennedy Smith, wrote from Palm Beach, “Dear Bobby, I hear you and Marilyn Monroe are the new, hot item among Hollywood gossips.”

After he finished a fourteen-country goodwill tour with Ethel, Bobby immediately called Marilyn for a rendezvous. Their affair was about to begin. At the time, Marilyn was also sending handwritten love poems to JFK at the White House.

One of Marilyn’s closest friends, Jeanne Carmen, who lived nearby, remembered opening the door to Marilyn’s house to discover Bobby Kennedy on the doorstep. When she heard who it was, Marilyn came rushing out of the bathroom. “She jumped into his arms,” Carmen said, “and they started kissing madly. We had a glass of wine together before Marilyn reminded me that I had important business to take care of.”

After that, Marilyn logged many calls to Bobby at the Justice Department. “She called him almost daily during the summer of 1962, her last on Earth,” claimed Ed Guthman, a Kennedy press aide. Then he added a tantalizing note, one that hasn’t yet been fully documented within the Kennedy scandals. “Judy Garland placed almost as many calls to Bobby as Marilyn. What was going on between Dorothy and Bobby? I never found out.”

When Bobby wasn’t on the West Coast, they talked for hours on the phone,” claimed Hazel Washington, Marilyn’s maid at the time. “I think they invented phone sex. Marilyn actually made love to Bobby on the phone. I heard everything.”

“Jack was the first to sample the honeypot,” Marilyn told Robert Slatzer, her friend. “Bobby had his turn. I wasn’t in love with Jack, but I fell in love with Bobby.” Carmen also claimed that she went with Marilyn and Bobby to a nude beach near the present Pepperdine University north of Santa Monica. Marilyn, according to the report, wore a black wig, and Bobby had on sunglasses and a fake beard. Each of them went unrecognized. “Could you imagine what a sensation it would have been if a nude Marilyn Monroe and a nude Attorney General had been snapped on the beach by some photographer?” Carmen asked.

Bobby bragged about bedding Marilyn to Kennedy aide David Powers. Powers at first didn’t believe him, calling him “the biggest bullshitter in the world.” He later claimed, “Bobby wouldn’t have the balls to play like that in the big league.”

But Bobby claimed it was true. “Not only have I had Marilyn, but I think she’s in love with me.”

Nearly every person in America has heard about President Kennedy’s affair with Marilyn. And at least a million have heard about her affair with Bobby. But only a few thousands know that she also had an affair with Teddy.

That revelation came to light in 2010, thanks to disclosures within formerly confidential files from the FBI. In June of 2010, after Teddy Kennedy’s death from cancer in August of 2009, the Bureau released some 2,352 pages of formerly secret

documents.

According to the files, there were several orgies staged at JFK's suite at the Carlyle. At least three included Marilyn Monroe as "guest of honor." Rat-packers Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., Peter Lawford, and even Patricia Kennedy attended at least one of the orgies.

The FBI named Mrs. Jacqueline Hammond as a source of much of this information. Hammond was the divorced wife of a former U.S. ambassador to Spain.

Marilyn's eight-month affair with Teddy, which began at an orgy within the Carlyle attended by all three of the Kennedy brothers, extended until right before her murder.

Jack's younger brother, Teddy, had been very competitive about Judith Campbell Exner when she was the mistress of the president. He pursued her, and one night in Las Vegas, he openly propositioned her. But she turned him down, finding him "childishly temperamental."

After that orgy at the Carlyle, Teddy pursued Marilyn. One night in New York, she agreed to let him come to her apartment, where he found candlelight, roses, champagne, and Marilyn in a see-through nightgown.

"Teddy was all too eager," said Lawford when he learned about their coupling. "But the night Teddy met Marilyn at the Carlyle, he had to wait his turn, taking sloppy thirds after Jack and Bobby had finished with her. I was glad to hear that Teddy got to have Marilyn all by himself for a night and didn't have to wait in line."

Teddy's seduction of Marilyn, although known by many Kennedy aides, never surfaced in any public way during the star's lifetime.

The FBI documents were so explosive that Teddy's widow, Victoria, fought to have them squelched forever. She was ultimately defeated by a law court which upheld the Freedom of Information Act.

Teddy told Senator George Smathers, "I'm now screwing the woman whose poster Jack used to jack-off to when he was in the hospital. Marilyn Monroe herself. She told me I make better love than either of my two brothers." Unknown to Teddy, she'd also told Bobby that he was a "far better lover than Jack."

Author Christopher Anderson claims, "Teddy, like the rest of his family, was engaged in an almost frantic pursuit of power, money, and sex."

In a particularly bizarre revelation, Carmen remembered drinking wine one late afternoon with Marilyn in her living room. The star was dressed in a stunning gown but wouldn't tell her friend where she was going. "I have a date tonight."

The doorbell rang and Marilyn hurried to the bathroom to check her makeup. "Be a doll, Jeanne, and get the door," she called out. Carmen was stunned to open the door to discover both John and Robert Kennedy, with two men standing behind them, presumably Secret Service agents. She ushered them into the living room. JFK claimed, "We don't have much time."

"Marilyn rushed out of the bathroom and gave each of them what looked like a prolonged tongue kiss," Carmen claimed. "Neither the President nor the Attorney General seemed embarrassed. Of course, Bobby and I had been intimate, so I didn't expect him to turn red-faced. I guess Jack Kennedy, considering his lifestyle, was beyond mere embarrassment at that point in his life."

She claimed that the brothers didn't stay long, and that both of them left very soon.

During her extensive grilling by the FBI, Carmen revealed these details but apparently Marilyn never confided any specifics about where she was taken that night by the Kennedy brothers.

Charles (Chuck) Spalding later revealed that JFK had told him that Marilyn was taken to the private villa of a friend of his in Bel Air. Teddy Kennedy arrived later. "Marilyn got to sample not only Jack's charms but Teddy's and Bobby's that night. Of course, as president, JFK was first in line." At least that is what Spalding claimed that JFK had revealed to him.



Beginning in 1961, when his brother, JFK, sat in the Oval Office, J. Edgar ordered the FBI to stay on the trail of young **Teddy Kennedy** (*photo above*). “Who knows?” J. Edgar told his aides. “the little fucker might become president one day.”

When Teddy went on a good will tour of Latin America, the FBI arranged for an undercover agent to be posted within his group. He reported back to the FBI that one night, Teddy rented an entire Chilean brothel for himself and his cronies.

Like his brothers, Bobby and Jack, Teddy also pursued Marilyn Monroe. But unlike Bobby and Jack, who spoke about divorcing their wives and marrying Marilyn, Teddy really meant it when he said he’d divorce his wife for the chance of becoming her next husband.

“I didn’t really love Teddy like I did Jack and Bobby,” MM told her friend Jeanne Carmen, “but he sure knows how to cuddle.”

If this testimony is true, it means that Marilyn and the Kennedy brothers were repeating the theme of their orgy at the Carlyle Hotel in New York, details of which were revealed in those FBI files.

Rumors still persist that Marilyn checked into Southern California’s Cedars of Lebanon Hospital under an assumed name to have President Kennedy’s child aborted. Others insist that it was Bobby’s child. It has never been explained how Marilyn persuaded a doctor to perform an illegal abortion within a major U.S. hospital, when other movie stars were crossing the border into Mexico.

Never revealing the identity of the father, Marilyn claimed she had had a miscarriage. She told that to her publicist, Rupert Allen; her hairdresser Agnes Flanagan; and a Laguna Beach realtor, Arthur James. She was considering at the time buying a house in Laguna Beach.

Marilyn’s gynecologist, Dr. Leon (“Red”) Korhn, denied any abortion stories, although he did say that Marilyn had become pregnant three times, losing each fetus in a miscarriage because of the massive amounts of drugs and liquor she shared with the unborn.

Considering the timing, chances are that if any of the Kennedy brothers had been the father, it would be Bobby and not JFK. Marilyn made a crude joke to Slatzer about “Bobby baby-maker’s big dick.”

When Jackie learned the details of JFK’s affair with Marilyn, she threatened to divorce him, which would have cost him the 1964 election, had he been alive to run for office.

According to Senator Smathers, the President told Jackie, “Look, it really is over. It was nothing anyway.”

Jack told Smathers that his affair hadn’t been worth it. “Jackie more or less gives me free rein around here, and I don’t want to fuck this up. Let’s face it: Marilyn’s day has peaked in Hollywood. For these 36-year-old glamour gals, it’s all downhill from there. I can live without Marilyn. In fact, she’s become a god damn nuisance calling up all day. It’s time for an *adios*.”

There would be one more grand event incorporating the lives of Marilyn, Bobby, and JFK. It would eventually capture the imagination of the world and become part of the JFK/MM legend.

When Jackie learned that Marilyn had been invited to his birthday celebration, she said, “Screw Jack” and left the room. Then she packed to leave town, heading for Virginia.

On May 19, 1962, Marilyn ran away from the set of her film, *Something’s Got to Give*, to sing for the President in New York City at a fund-raising birthday party at Madison Square Garden. Peter Lawford was the Master of Ceremonies.

After Marilyn missed her first cue, Peter introduced her as “the late Marilyn Monroe,” a word usage that would soon after prove eerily prophetic.

She dazzled the world that night in her tight, glittering, almost transparent \$12,000 Jean-Louis dress of “skin and beads.” The flesh-colored dress had to be sewn on her. She didn’t wear underwear, of course.

The President stared in fascination at Marilyn. “What an ass! Gene. What an ass!” that was JFK’s comment to his writer Gene Schoor, who sat in the presidential box with him.

When JFK came onto the stage, he joked with the audience, “Now I can retire from politics after having ‘Happy Birthday’ sung to me in such a sweet, wholesome way.”

After her appearance before the entire world, Marilyn retreated to her dressing room where she had to be cut out of her designer dress. After a bath, she headed for a party given by Arthur Krim, the theater magnate, president of United Artists.

Statesman/politico Adlai Stevenson was there. He later claimed, “I never got to dance with her. Bobby Kennedy put up strong defenses around her. He was dodging around her like a moth around the flame.”

Dorothy Kilgallen reported in her column that Bobby danced with Marilyn five times. What she didn’t report was that Ethel, in a far corner of the room, stood glaring at them with a bubbling fury about to spill over.

Before dawn the next day, Marilyn was slipped into the Carlyle where she later told Peter, “I had sex in one bedroom with Jack, then I came to the other bedroom and took care of Bobby.” This was the last time the president, as far as it is known, ever saw Marilyn again. Bobby still lay in her future, his exact role the subject of ferocious debate today.

JFK was seen leaving the Carlyle at around 6am the following morning. Bobby left at ten o’clock that morning.

In a stern chastisement of her son, Rose Kennedy urged Bobby to drop Marilyn “and spare your family another disgrace.”

Although the lid had been kept on them for years, by 1963, stories about JFK and Marilyn were about to break wide open in the press. JFK told Senator Smathers, “It’s all become too public. I can’t see her anymore.”

JFK even sent William Haddad, a former *New York Post* reporter working at the time for the Peace Corps, to the top editors at *Time* and *Newsweek*, cautioning them not to print news about his alleged affair with Marilyn. “It simply isn’t true,” Haddad claimed.

Peter Lawford later said that “Marilyn couldn’t get it through her head that the party was over. I kept telling her that she didn’t know Bobby and Jack like I did. When they’re through with a woman, they’re toast. She really knew that, but somehow couldn’t bring herself to admit it. She wrote constant letters to Jack at the White House begging him to take her back. At one point, she was so bitter she told me that Jack made love like a thirteen-year-old boy. When she wouldn’t let up, Jack sent Bobby out here to cool her down.”

Like Jack, Bobby believed that his romance with Marilyn was becoming high profile, and he, too, retreated from her. He also claimed that she was consistently reckless because of her high consumption of alcohol and drugs. “Bobby is moving on from me the way Jack did,” Marilyn told Peter. “The Kennedy brothers ... they treat women like that. They use you, then they dispose of you like so much rubbish.”

She also confided to Jeanne Carmen that she exempted Teddy from that charge. “He truly loves me, and wants to be with me anytime I’m willing. I let him do it because he loves it so much, but I’m not in love with Teddy. What I really want is for Jack and Bobby to make love to me at the same time. At the Carlyle one night, they both made love to me but not in the same bed at the same time.”

In California, Bobby delivered the news to Marilyn in person. She was not to see Jack or him again. Nor was she to place any more calls to the White House or the Justice Department.

In hysterics, she began to scream after hearing this ultimatum from Bobby himself. He tried to comfort her. When a man went to comfort Marilyn, that meant only one thing, sex. At least for a moment, he was overcome by her seductive charms.



Author Truman Capote was a close friend of **Marilyn Monroe** (above photo, left). He'd wanted her to appear as Holly Golightly in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, but the role went to Audrey Hepburn instead.

Capote often met Marilyn for lots of drinks. One night, she shared her dream with him. "**Jack Kennedy** (right) told me only last week that he plans to divorce Jackie and marry me. No later than 1964, I will be by his side when he seeks election. Imagine, me, First Lady of the land. I will preside over America from 1964 to 1968, but I'll be a very different First Lady from Jackie."

But by the following morning, a clearer head would emerge on Bobby. Holding onto power, both for himself and his brother, was far more important to Bobby than bedding an aging sex symbol.

Marilyn refused to obey Bobby's ultimatum and continued to call both Jack and Bobby in Washington.

"Jack was the first to refuse my calls to the White House," Marilyn told Carmen. "And now Bobby won't speak to me at the Justice Department either. But Teddy is in touch with me. He still loves me and we're going to get together soon. I don't love Teddy, but I'm in love with the idea that one of the Kennedy brothers still worships me, unlike those older meanies."

"I've already sent word to both Jack and Bobby that I'm going to call a press conference and reveal everything about our relationships," Marilyn said. "But because of Teddy I will probably not do that. Peter Lawford is dead set against it too."

"Monroe could not accept that her affair with Bobby was over," said author Lucy Freeman, who interviewed Monroe's psychiatrist on several occasions. "Bobby's rejection reawakened her father's complete abandonment of her. Because of her father's early desertion, she created the sex goddess, the one that no man could possibly abandon."

RFK called Peter Lawford. The two men had never liked each other. The Attorney General ordered Peter to "cut Marilyn off from all contact with the First Family—see to that." Then he abruptly hung up the phone, offending Peter.

Not only had JFK and RFK abandoned her, but on June 2, 1962, her studio fired her. Fox press agents were instructed to launch a negative publicity blitz, defining their former star as mentally ill.

In March of 1962, JFK had gone an entire year without directly speaking to J. Edgar, and rumors circulated throughout FBI headquarters and Washington in general that he was going to be fired by JFK. His replacement, according to gossip, was to be William Boswell, the security director at the Department of State.

The President summoned J. Edgar to the White House for a luncheon that was to last a total of four hours.

His aide, Kenneth O'Donnell, was invited to attend, but for reasons not known Bobby was not at the meeting. Perhaps he'd been invited but couldn't stand dining with J. Edgar.

O'Donnell later recalled that JFK planned to take a risk and fire J. Edgar that day, but was restrained when the FBI delivered a bombshell that threatened Jack's presidency.

Marilyn Monroe remained a continuing problem. Not admitting any FBI surveillance, J. Edgar revealed that the mob, perhaps directed by Johnny Roselli and Sam Giancana, had secretly taped and in a few cases filmed sexual liaisons between the President and Marilyn. "All you need is some of their documentation to be released to the press, and you won't even need to seek re-election in '64. I view Miss Monroe as a possible time bomb that could explode at any minute and threaten your presidency. But you must decide that for yourself."

Jeanne Carmen, Marilyn's close friend, believed that she would have told all if she'd lived. She normally didn't like to carry on feuds, but she was deeply wounded by both JFK and RFK. "She wanted some kind of revenge, and she could have brought down the presidency," Carmen said. "She knew too much. She also attacked J. Edgar Hoover, claiming that the FBI had bugged her phone and her house. She took to calling me from pay phones."

At the White House, J. Edgar issued dire warnings against JFK's continuing involvement with Judith Campbell (Exner), Sam Giancana's girlfriend. It was all there in the FBI dossier. "Judith had unwittingly given J. Edgar the ammunition he needed to blackmail the President," wrote Scripps-Howard News Service reporter Dan Thomasson. Unaware that her phone was bugged, Judith had called JFK at the Oval Office from Giancana's tapped line.

The FBI director knew details about each incident of Judith acting as a go-between flying from Washington to see Giancana in Chicago. She'd even delivered top CIA intelligence on Fidel Castro that Giancana would use in a botched attempt to assassinate the Cuban dictator.

Bobby also issued a warning to his brother to cut off his affair with Judith, but for the next month JFK ignored both Bobby and J. Edgar. His affair with Judith continued into the summer.

O'Donnell once asked him why he was willing to take such a risk. JFK told his aide, "Because she's the best pussy I've ever sampled ... the very best!"

Judith had already told the President that Giancana felt betrayed because Bobby was investigating him, despite the fact that he had been responsible for throwing the presidential election of 1960 to JFK.

She claimed that Giancana felt that the President could have restrained Bobby's investigation into his mob activities. "Jack Kennedy broke the code of the Mafia," Giancana said. "He did not live up to his bargain with me." One night he told her, "You know what we do with guys who do not live up to the code."

In 1974, eleven years after the death of JFK, Judith was summoned to testify before the Church Committee, a Senate investigation of U.S. government involvement in assassinations. She told only a fraction of what she knew, but was forced to admit that she'd had a sexual relationship with JFK.

She didn't want the notoriety, but she also feared for her life. She'd told an attorney, "They killed Sam," a reference to her lover, Sam Giancana. "They killed Johnny" (Roselli). "They killed Marilyn Monroe. They killed Jack ... and Bobby too. I know they'll kill me."

She was obviously referring to Mafia hitmen. Labeled as a Mafia gun moll, Judith was hounded by the press and the FBI for years. Kennedy fans, steeped in the myth of Camelot, reviled her. Until the day aides such as David Powers died, the word from the Kennedy camp was that "there was no affair."

Near the time of her death, Judith told a friend, "I paid a high price for loving two powerful men." After a life of infamy, and suffering from breast cancer, Judith died at the age of 65 on September 24, 1999.

During his luncheon at the White House, J. Edgar had more to discuss than Marilyn Monroe or Judith Campbell. He issued a dire warning to the President: "We've been picking up rumblings that some forces—and we're not exactly sure who they are—are plotting an assassination of you. You must exercise more caution than ever at all public appearances."

JFK, according to O'Donnell, seemed to dismiss such concerns. "Since the day I became president, I always assumed that if anybody wants to trade my life for his, he can do so. It's the risk of being President. Just ask Abraham Lincoln."

O'Donnell later claimed that JFK lacked the courage to follow through on his original intent to fire J. Edgar. He obviously knew too much.

Finally, when J. Edgar excused himself to go to the toilet, JFK whispered to O'Donnell, "I bet he squats on the toilet to piss. Listen, I've been patient long enough. When Hoover comes back, get him out of here. Make up some excuse. The bastard is the biggest bore in Washington."

JFK also told O'Donnell, "If I can hold out a little longer with this faggot, I'll get rid of him anyway. There's a mandatory retirement age of seventy at the FBI. You do the math. It is now 1962, and Hoover was born in 1895."

After that confrontational luncheon whose dialogue involved a sex goddess, a gun moll, and the threat of a possible

assassination of a sitting President, J. Edgar was assured that he'd get pretty much whatever he wanted from then on. That included permission from Bobby Kennedy to wiretap the phones of Martin Luther King, Jr., who was rapidly becoming J. Edgar's "most dangerous man in America." He believed that King was a communist whose intent was to overthrow the United States government.

After leaving the White House, J. Edgar was taken by black limousine back to FBI headquarters, where a nervous Clyde was waiting for him. "We're not getting fired, Junior," he proclaimed. "The Kennedys know I have enough blackmail on them to destroy them. I've got them by the balls and I'm squeezing."

J. Edgar had accurately assessed his own political power and the vulnerable spot the President was in. JFK remained immensely popular with the public, who did not know what was going on behind the scenes. J. Edgar's staff recalled that he looked jubilant when he returned from the White House.

He told Guy Hotell, Clyde, and two of his aides, "I did my duty. I warned Kennedy of the disturbing data that there is some plot afoot to assassinate him. Personally, even if I knew the exact time and place of the assassination, I would not intervene. Lyndon Johnson would become the President, and he has assured me that he would waive the mandatory requirement for me at the age of seventy. I plan to continue in this office until I'm at least eighty-two."

"But, Eddie," Clyde protested. "I'd like the two of us to retire. Won't you consider it?"

"Would you shut your fucking mouth?" J. Edgar snapped at him. "When I want your opinion, I'll ask for it. Power is very addictive. Once you've got it, it's hard to let go. Surely you of all people must understand that."

"I've always had a gut instinct for things, and there is one thing I know," J. Edgar continued. "During the 1964 race for the White House, Kennedy will be out of the picture. Johnson will sweep to victory on the Democratic ticket. Don't ask me how I know that, just accept it as the gospel truth. I'm never wrong about these things."

Someone in his office could have reminded him of Pearl Harbor, but no one dared do that.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Two men with huge egos, Attorney General Bobby Kennedy and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, were on a collision course, with implications that affected the entire nation. As the 1960s dawned, J. Edgar was still on his “commie witch hunt,” and wasn’t all that keen for chasing mobsters the way he’d done during the John Dillinger era of the 1930s. He knew only too well how *Mafiosi* had infiltrated the worlds of politics and business, and he was well aware of Joseph Kennedy’s links with the mob and President Kennedy’s ties with Chicago mobster Sam Giancana.

J. Edgar was shocked when Bobby told him that one of his top priorities would involve going after organized crime. This worthy mission was launched in the midst of a world in crisis, with the Soviet Union threatening nuclear annihilation, a war festering in Vietnam, a potentially destructive arms race in full force, and millions of black Americans demanding their civil rights. Some of them, unlike Martin Luther King, Jr., advocated violence against the government.

When J. Edgar brought up the subject of home-grown communists, Bobby dismissed his fear. “Why go after American communists? Most of their fading membership rolls consist entirely of undercover FBI agents.”

In a rebuttal to RFK’s assessment that the U.S. Communist Party was “feeble,” J. Edgar told a House committee that the party was “a Trojan horse of rigidly disciplined fanatics unalterably committed to bringing this free nation under the yoke of international communism.”

When it came to investigating the criminal underworld or taking an initiative in civil rights, Bobby knew almost from the beginning of his administration that J. Edgar was what he called “a foot dragger.” In frustration, Bobby set up his own investigation force within the Justice Department.

The FBI knew that the Freedom Riders in Alabama were going to be attacked by white bigots, but took no steps to prevent it. These activists were demanding the right of all Americans to use public transportation. “All the FBI men in the area did was take down notes,” Bobby claimed. In his lack of compliance, J. Edgar was catering to his Southern conservative base in Congress who routinely supported him.

J. Edgar’s main role in the civil rights movement involved investigating the private life of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. “We will find a way to stop him,” he told Clyde and his aides. “Put him under twenty-four hour surveillance, tap his phones, gather evidence to blackmail him. We know he’s married and has a different woman sent to his suite every night. We also hear he has homosexual dalliances with studly black men, just like Franklin Roosevelt’s pet, Sumner Welles. Go to work on it. I want to see a file on King that will reach the thickness of John Kennedy’s, another womanizer with an occasional homosexual dalliance. It seems that all the big-time womanizers like to engage every third Thursday in perverted sex. Take Errol Flynn for example. Someone told me it is called ‘the Don Juan complex.’”

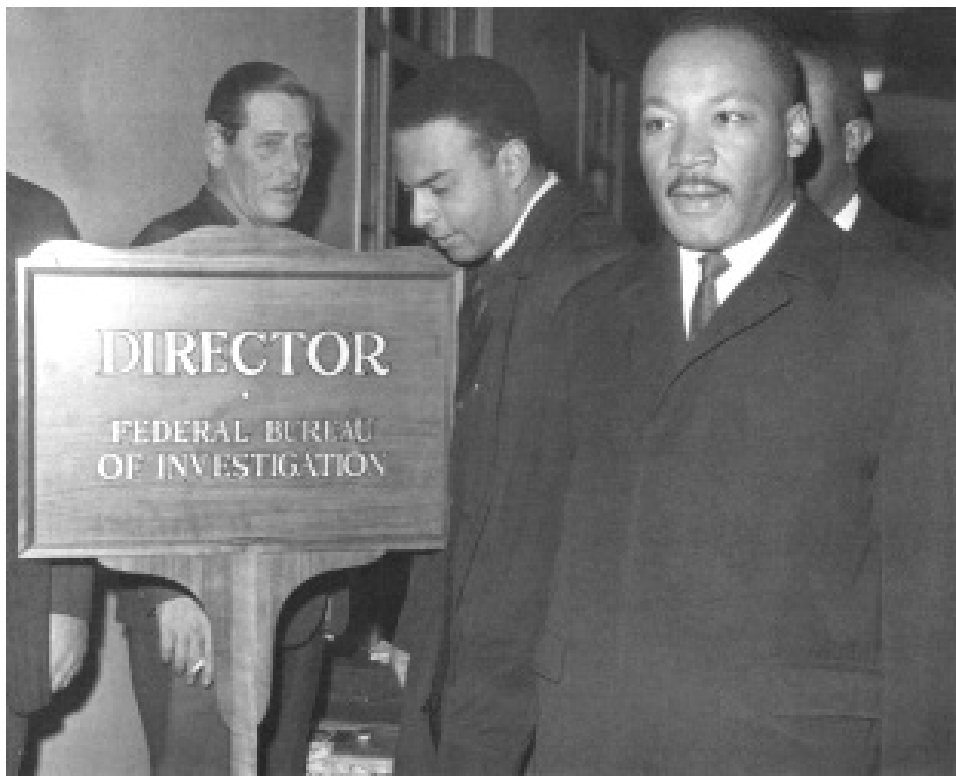
From the beginning, King had a large mountain to climb, and authors such as Michael Hoffman in his *Holiday for a Cheater* weren’t kind, calling King a “despicable hypocrite, an immoral degenerate, and a worthless charlatan.”

Privately J. Edgar called King “a vicious liar, who supports himself by treachery and deceit. I know where he gets his marching orders. We got Dillinger, we’ll get King.”

In investigating King, the FBI went back to his past, even revealing that as a young man he attended the world premiere of the 1939 “racist” film, *Gone With the Wind*.

In 1957 he, along with Ralph Abernathy and other civil rights activists, founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, advocating a non-violent philosophy behind their protests. J. Edgar viewed the SCLC as a communist front.

On September 20, 1958, while King was signing copies of his book, *Stride Toward Freedom*, at a department store in New York’s Harlem, he was stabbed in the chest with a letter opener. His attacker was Izola Curry, a deranged black woman. King narrowly escaped death.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. , is seen arriving at the office of J. Edgar on December 1, 1964 for a much-heralded meeting of two sworn enemies.

"I agreed to the meeting," J. Edgar recalled, "but I held this moral degenerate in utter contempt. He heard the tapes we'd recorded of him having sex with various women in hotel rooms. I told him then and there we'd release those tapes if he didn't stop calling for my resignation. At the end of the meeting, he asked me to pose with him in front of the press corps. I turned him down. 'Don't you ever attack me or the Bureau for as long as you live,' I told him, 'With the enemies you're making, that may not be a long time.'"

"Thank God it was a Negro woman who tried to kill him," J. Edgar told his aides. "Not a white man. Otherwise, Harlem would be on fire tonight."

Eerily, J. Edgar was predicting the future violence that would emerge from King's assassination in the years to come.

J. Edgar had been incensed when King publicly called on the FBI to open its employment rolls to all races. In an attempt to derail both King's civil rights agenda and to re-establish his credentials as a hunter of American communists, J. Edgar fired off a memo to Bobby. "King's closest adviser is Stanley D. Levison, a white attorney and businessman who is his chief fundraiser and legal counsel. He is the actual brains behind King. Their aim is not to promote the agenda of civil rights. That is a mere cover for their true intent, which is a communist takeover of Washington. To achieve that end, they will use the civil rights movement."

Working behind the scenes, Levison had once funneled Soviet funds to the American Communist Party. He also edited King's book, *Stride Toward Freedom* and arranged to have it published. He even prepared King's income tax returns and controlled fundraising and agitation activities of the SCLC. Described as one of King's closest friends, he also wrote many of his speeches.

While investigating Levison, the FBI discovered that one of his chief aides, Jack O'Dell, had links to the Communist Party. Levison put him on the SCLC staff and payroll to assist with the organization's work in New York.

J. Edgar put through a personal call to the President, who chose not to pick up the phone.

As journalist Taylor Branch wrote in 1988, "The message was clear: that the troublesome Negro revolution was Moscow's skirmish line, and that only the omniscient Hoover knew the full details."

Although he was one of the great advocates of the civil rights movement, Bobby did grow alarmed that King didn't heed his warning and break from Levison. "Your goal is the right one, but associations with guys with communist backgrounds will only work against you," Bobby warned King, who paid him no attention.

King continued to irritate J. Edgar with his attacks on the FBI. One speech about conditions in Albany, Georgia, particularly enraged him. This southern town had mobilized thousands of its citizens for a frontal attack on segregation, attracting nationwide attention.

King said, "One of the great problems we face with the FBI in the South is that the agents are White southerners who have been influenced by the mores of the community. To maintain their status, they have to be friendly with local police and people who are promoting segregation. Every time I saw FBI men in Albany, they were with the local police force."

J. Edgar put through a call to King to tell him how misinformed he was. Clyde had called Albany and spoken to the agents

there, finding that four of the five men were from the North. J. Edgar was deeply insulted when King refused to take his call. He would never forgive the minister for that.

As one investigative reporter claimed, “Marilyn Monroe was under lockstep surveillance, and she could not even fart without blowing air into J. Edgar Hoover’s ear. Monroe’s entire house was bugged—audio and video. The guy who bugged her house was later killed in prison to keep the rumor that her murder was actually videotaped out of the realm of absolute proof.”

On August 5, 1962, an emergency call was placed to J. Edgar in Washington. His West Coast agent sounded hysterical. “Mr. Hoover, Marilyn Monroe is dead.”

“I know,” the FBI director said before slamming down the phone. That left the agent wondering how he knew that before authorities in Los Angeles were notified. In the wake of Marilyn’s death, extra FBI agents were rushed to the West Coast.

The most elaborate cover-up in Hollywood history began even before Monroe’s body was sent to its “eternal peace” in a cemetery.

J. Edgar and Clyde were kept busy as well, as the director didn’t want one shred of evidence to remain showing that he had had Monroe under surveillance.

Whatever evidence he had gathered on the Kennedys would guarantee that he could keep his job in the event that a Kennedy dynasty ever really began—JFK, Bobby, Teddy, an ongoing line of presidents with more on the way. As he told Clyde and his aides, “America just might become an elected monarchy.”

J. Edgar ordered his FBI agents in Los Angeles to seize Marilyn’s phone records. There was a great potential for blackmail there. But he was furious when he learned that he was too late. The phone records had already been seized by the L.A. police.

Ironically, the death of Marilyn Monroe opened a door of opportunity for William H. Parker, the Los Angeles Police Chief. A close friend of Bobby Kennedy, he coveted J. Edgar’s job. If JFK were re-elected in 1964, he wanted Bobby to use his influence to have the President fire J. Edgar and name him the new Attorney General.

In a daring move, Parker knew he could save Bobby from a lot of embarrassment. He authorized his policemen to remove Marilyn’s phone records from the company’s files. Once they had done that, Parker studied the calls and realized that most of them were to Bobby at the Attorney General’s office.

If revealed, the public would know for the first time that Marilyn was having an affair with Bobby, or at least an observer might assume that.

Via special courier, these telephone records were delivered to Bobby at the office of the Attorney General in Washington.

It is believed that most of the hardcore facts about Marilyn’s involvement with the Kennedy brothers remained locked in FBI files, if not destroyed.

Bobby had only recently denounced J. Edgar’s continuing pursuit of American communists as “sententious poppycock.” But after Marilyn’s death and knowing the incriminating data J. Edgar had on the Kennedy link with her, he changed his tune. Suddenly, he praised J. Edgar’s pursuit of communism. “I hope Mr. Hoover will continue to serve the FBI and America in general for many, many years to come.”

On hearing this, J. Edgar told his aides, “We’ve silenced the Kennedys forever thanks to Miss Monroe.”

After Monroe’s death, Bobby and J. Edgar almost never talked again. “The Big Chill” had set in, as both the FBI director and the Attorney General went their separate ways, giving each other wide berth.



The Kennedy brothers (left to right)—JFK, Bobby, and Teddy—often passed women around, including Marilyn Monroe. As President of the United States and as Attorney General, both JFK and RFK were vulnerable to scandal, and each of them became duly alarmed at an out-of-control Marilyn, who threatened to destroy their political dynasty. To remove her from the scene, both Jack and Bobby urged her to remarry Joe DiMaggio, thinking he might keep her under control.

Marilyn told them, “Joe is too possessive. He is capable of physical violence.”

She entertained fantasies of marrying either Jack or Bobby, but not Teddy. “He’s just a plaything for me,” she told Jeanne Carmen. “I call him my overgrown Teddy bear.”

J. Edgar avoided talk of Marilyn. He and Clyde told only a few trusted friends, including Ethel Merman, Guy Hotell, and Dorothy Lamour, “Monroe was murdered. It was not a suicide.”

He chose not to reveal the identity of the person who murdered her, although it was obvious that he knew. Clyde also knew who killed Marilyn.

Langdon Marvin, a Kennedy aide, remembered being called to RFK’s Hickory Hill estate in Virginia during January of 1964. There his boss handed him a dozen or so letters, ordering him to “get rid of them—burn them.”

Marvin did as he was told, and shredded each of the letters. Later he learned from RFK they were “love missives” to both JFK and RFK from Marilyn herself. “I should have saved them. If genuine, they would be worth a fortune if sold today to collectors.”

Director George Cukor later said, “Marilyn was not a lady who would have taken aging well. Her forties would have been a horror for her. She didn’t have the integrity of a true actress—she would not have welcomed the richness of character interpretations, as a true actress would have. She was a star trading on certain gimmicks, and in her heart she knew that.”

A sleek black limousine sped through the starless night, leaving Manhattan. It was three o’clock in the morning in March of 1963. In the back seat sat the world’s most famous singer, Frank Sinatra, between two buxom blonde hookers whose names he did not care to know. “Tonight I’m going to find out if both of you are true blondes. Or, if like Marilyn Monroe, you peroxide your pussies.”

“Where are you taking us?” asked one of the hookers.

“I’ve got to go to a graveyard to take a leak,” he said.

“Why a graveyard?” she asked. “Won’t a toilet bowl do?”

“Hell, no! This is one special piss I’ve been saving up after a night of drinking. I’ve been holding it in.”

Sinatra was heading for the gravesite of the newspaper columnist Lee Mortimer, who had died of a heart attack in New York on March 1. In life he had been Sinatra’s chief attacker, exposing his mob ties. Mortimer not only had tied Sinatra to the Mafia, but to the Communist Party.

At Mortimer's gravesite, Sinatra's driver had to guide the drunken entertainer to the grave. Once there, Sinatra unzipped his tuxedo pants and hauled out his penis, which he called "Big Frankie." He urinated on the gravesite before tucking it all back in and heading back to his limousine. In the rear with the two blondes, he ordered the driver to take them back to New York. "Revenge is sweet," he said. "Too bad I didn't need to take a crap."

Sinatra's hatred of Mortimer dated from 1947 when the Chicago-born columnist, radio commentator, crime reporter, lecturer, night club show producer, and author was at the peak of his career.

Among other achievements, Mortimer was one of the leading crime reporters in the nation. As a journalist, he had led the pack attacking Sinatra for his ties to the mob, with exposés dating back to 1947 when Sinatra arrived in Havana carrying two million dollars in illegal profits for mob boss Lucky Luciano.

From that day, Sinatra's hatred of Mortimer grew. Gangster Johnny Roselli suggested to Sinatra that Mortimer should be "wiped off the map." Although he would have been delighted, Sinatra turned down the idea because "too many fingers of suspicion would be pointed at me."

Mortimer not only attacked Sinatra because of his mob links but became the chief critic of his music and his movies. When *It Happened in Brooklyn* was released, Mortimer called it "a terrible, terrible picture. Stay away. Also stay clear of the cheap hoodlums he befriends. As for his fans, they are imbecilic, moronic, screemie-meemie autograph kids."

At FBI headquarters, J. Edgar and Clyde were more concerned that Sinatra was a communist and not by the intimate terms he maintained with the mob.

J. Edgar and Clyde always suspected Sinatra was a communist, ever since he'd published an open letter to Henry Wallace in 1947. In *The New Republic*, Sinatra urged him to run for President "to take up the fight we like to think of as ours—the fight for tolerance, which is the basis of any fight for peace."

Secretly, Clyde met frequently with Mortimer, feeding him information for his column, not just about Sinatra but about other celebrities as well. Their relationship at one point became intimate, and Clyde was seen leaving Mortimer's apartment on several nights.

Under the headline SINATRA FACES PROBE ON RED TIES, Mortimer wrote that "Sinatra is one of Hollywood's fellow leading travelers on the road to Red fascism."

Mortimer's attacks on Sinatra were picked up by other newspapers throughout the country, one editorial calling Sinatra "a pawn of the Kremlin."

The singer was never called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee, but he was frequently mentioned during the hearings when it was claimed that he had links to communist front groups. In *The New York Times Index* for 1949 there is only one entry for Sinatra that year—"Sinatra, Frank: See U.S. Espionage."

In retaliation, Sinatra hired two detectives to investigate Mortimer. The detectives were able to obtain an affidavit from a young man who claimed that Mortimer had performed fellatio on him, for which the young man was paid. Sinatra wanted to go public with the accusation, but his press agent, George Evans, talked him out of it.

The detectives also discovered that Mortimer was having an affair with Clyde, and J. Edgar apparently didn't know about it. Behind Evans' back, Sinatra gathered up this evidence and had it mailed anonymously to J. Edgar. It is believed that the FBI director's faithful secretary, Helen Gandy, intercepted the dossier and destroyed it before J. Edgar could read it.

On the night of April 8, 1947 at Ciro's in Hollywood, Sinatra ran into Mortimer. He came right up to the columnist's table. "You're a fucking homosexual," he shouted. Then he struck Mortimer in the face. Arising from the table, the reporter was grabbed by two of Sinatra's burly bodyguards who held him while he was pounded by Sinatra's Hoboken-trained fists.

"I'll kill you, I'll kill you!" Sinatra shouted in front of some fifty witnesses.

Nat Dallinger, a photographer for King Features Syndicate, rushed to Mortimer's aid but could not stop Sinatra's assault. Dallinger called reporters to cover the incident, and he was also the one who delivered the badly beaten journalist to the West Hollywood Emergency Hospital.

The story of Sinatra's assault held the public spellbound. J. Edgar ordered the West Coast FBI office to send him all the details. It wasn't a case over which he had jurisdiction, but ever since the 1940s he'd had a voyeuristic interest in Sinatra. Perhaps not knowing of Mortimer's affair with his lover, Clyde, J. Edgar always viewed the journalist as a "friend of the family."



Columnist **Lee Mortimer** (top photo) detested **Frank Sinatra** (*inset photo*) and repeatedly attacked him in the press.

When Sinatra encountered Mortimer at a club, he beat him with fury, which led to Mortimer suing the singer, in spite of threats of physical harm from the mob.

Sinatra had Mortimer investigated, discovering that he and Clyde Tolson were having an affair. Sinatra's evidence was turned over to the FBI.

J. Edgar never saw it. It was intercepted and destroyed before it was delivered to the Bureau chief.

Upon reading of the attack, Sinatra's boss at MGM, Louis B. Mayer, said, "If President Eisenhower himself had been assassinated, it wouldn't have gotten this kind of newspaper coverage." He urged Sinatra to "settle this goddamn mess—and soon—or you'll never work another day at MGM."

To the police, Sinatra falsely claimed that Mortimer had called him "a dago bastard." Sinatra was charged with assault and battery, and his gun permit was revoked.

The columnist sued Sinatra for \$25,000 but settled for \$9,000 and an apology. In addition, Sinatra ran up legal bills totaling \$25,000. All in all, in today's dollars that would be worth about \$100,000 out of pocket.

When Mortimer sued Sinatra, he received at least eight death threats from the mob, which he turned over to Clyde at FBI headquarters.

Even after Sinatra's settlement with Mortimer, the reporter continued to snipe at him, calling him "Lucky" Sinatra,

suggesting his link to Lucky Luciano.

Three years after his attack on Mortimer at Ciro's, the columnist was beaten unconscious at the Riviera Club in Fort Lee, New Jersey. The dive was owned by mobster Willie Moretti, Sinatra's mentor and close friend who helped launch his singing career in his New Jersey "casino barns."

After all this bad publicity, Sinatra's career took a "big nosedive," much to the delight of J. Edgar.

Even his own P.R. man, Evans, claimed, "Frankie is losing fans every day and may soon become a has-been."

At MGM, Mayer released Sinatra from his contract, Columbia Records asked him to give back an advance. He was also fired from his radio show. It appeared that Sinatra had become another one of the many victims of McCarthyism. But unlike so many others, he turned out to be the comeback kid, beginning with his Oscar-winning performance as Maggio in *From Here to Eternity* in 1953.

Following Sinatra's death in 1998, reporters pressed the FBI to release its file on him under the Freedom of Information Act. The dossier was six inches thick and 1,275 pages long. It is believed that this file was only one-fourth of the actual dossier that the FBI had compiled on Sinatra over the decades. The rest of the file may either have been destroyed by Helen Gandy, J. Edgar's secretary, or else hidden away somewhere in a vault.

Jeff Leen, of the *Washington Post*, in 1999 wrote: "Spanning five decades, the documents detail the curious and complex relationship between the nation's greatest entertainer and its most powerful law enforcement agency. Born in suspicion and contempt, this relationship proved to be protean and became unexpectedly intimate—a dance of interdependence. In a strange way, Sinatra and Hoover's FBI needed each other. Sinatra gave the FBI what every law enforcement agency needs to stay engaged and in business, a threat that must be tracked. The FBI gave Sinatra what every celebrity needs: protection from lunatics and extortionists. In Sinatra and Hoover, popular culture met the politics of fear."

In the words of the former boyfriend of Jackie Onassis, journalist Pete Hamill, "Frank Sinatra was the most investigated performer by the FBI since John Wilkes Booth."

It was said that the Sinatra files offer a secret history of the American Century.

Months before, J. Edgar had warned President Kennedy about the danger of affairs with Marilyn Monroe and Judith Campbell (Exner).

In the summer of 1963, J. Edgar claimed that it was imperative that he meet with both President Kennedy and Bobby, the Attorney General, in the Oval Office. The message he sent requesting the meeting was brief but emphatic: *YOU ARE INVOLVED WITH THREE SECURITY RISKS. YOUR PRESIDENCY MAY NOT SURVIVE.*

After reading that, JFK could hardly turn down J. Edgar's request. He called Bobby at once to set up the confrontation.

At the height of the Cold War, President Kennedy and, to a lesser extent, Bobby, had become victims of a self-styled "Honey Trap" plotted by the KGB from bases in London and Washington. The purpose of their plot was to use beautiful young women, actually Soviet spies, to seduce prominent politicians and extract secrets from them to send behind the Iron Curtain.

Soviet intelligence in America had provided the Kremlin with data that both JFK and RFK were womanizers, especially the President.

JFK had avidly followed news of the Profumo affair, perhaps fearing that the investigation in London might stretch all the way to Washington.

Even before meeting with J. Edgar in their tensest meeting ever, he suspected what the FBI director was going to reveal to him—and he was right.

Perhaps signaling the beginning of the end for Camelot, J. Edgar had done a thorough investigation of Ellen Rometsch, rumored to be an East Germany spy. Meeting her in Washington at Bobby Baker's Quorum Club, JFK had begun an affair with her, finding her "another Elizabeth Taylor look-alike." A small-town Texas boy, Baker was Lyndon Johnson's major aide. LBJ told J. Edgar and Clyde, "Baker is a wheeler-dealer like I am. He's the first person I talk to in the morning, the last one at night."

The Quorum Club, sometimes known as "The Q Club," was a gathering place for senators, lobbyists, and businessmen seeking government contracts. JFK was immediately enchanted by Rometsch, who wore heavy makeup, including blood-red lipstick on her "Deep Throat" mouth and "glossy upswept ebony hair that looked more like a big pink Teutonic *hour*i bred for the trade," in the words of author Burton Hersch, who also noted that she was known for her "sloe-eyed, come-hither manner."

Baker was the Capitol's leading practitioner of "get-a-contract-with-a-girl" form of doing business. At the Q Club, he employed several prostitutes from communist countries, most notably Ellen Rometsch but also Mariella Novotny. London-born Suzy Chang was also suspected of being a foreign agent. At the FBI, J. Edgar and Clyde had discovered that the President had become sexually involved with all three women. RFK himself was also implicated.

RFK later told Kennedy aide Kenneth O'Donnell, "Jack and I have been fucking the wrong broads. In the future, we'll fuck only Stars & Stripes women, not Hammer & Sickle whores."

When Baker introduced Rometsch to JFK, she was clad in a scanty black, skin-tight uniform, with black mesh hose. She

stood against the background of a wall painting depicting a voluptuous nude woman.

After a night with the spy, JFK called Baker the following morning. “It was the best time I’ve ever had in my whole life. Send her over again on an as-needed basis.”



Pictures don’t lie: At this complicated “summit meeting” in JFK’s Oval Office, **J. Edgar and Bobby Kennedy** clearly detested each other and chose not to look into each other’s eyes during the tense confrontation.

J. Edgar is shown revealing that he knew that both the President and the Attorney General were cavorting with KGB spies, sometimes within the White House. Evoking a warning that would be made to a future president, Richard Nixon, less than a decade later, the chief G-Man told JFK: “There is a cancer growing on the presidency.”

At long last, JFK’s womanizing had caught up with him. A Senate investigation scheduled for after his return from Dallas would have exposed details about his many, often reckless, affairs to millions of American voters.

Clyde at the FBI had wiretapped Baker’s phone and heard this.

The FBI also heard Rometsch’s opinion of JFK. “Jack was as good as it got with oral sex—made me happy.”

As early as October of 1961, a top-level FBI memo had claimed that, “It was alleged that the President and the Attorney General had availed themselves of services of playgirls,” a reference to the prostitutes working The Q Club.

Rometsch became one of the regulars at the naked pool parties at the White House, these events under FBI surveillance by J. Edgar’s spies among the President’s Secret Service.

On occasion JFK arranged for Rometsch to be sent to the Justice Department, where Bobby got to sample her charms in the secret bedroom above his office. He, too, praised her skill as a seductress. In Washington, she was referred to as “The Fellatio Queen of the Potomac.”

She was not the Mata Hari of Washington. J. Edgar liked to reserve that appellation for himself. From the beginning, he had monitored the affair of the East German with the President. Under Clyde’s direction, the FBI accumulated 478 pages within the file they devoted to her.

After his meeting with J. Edgar and the President, Bobby ordered Rometsch deported to West Germany. LaVern Duffy, one of RFK’s aides, personally escorted her to Europe aboard an Air Force plane.

News of Rometsch’s affair with the Kennedy brothers reached a Senate investigating committee.

During October of 1963, a month or so before JFK’s assassination, the noose had already begun tightening around the throat of Bobby Baker. On October 7, 1963 he had been forced to resign as secretary to the Senate. Lyndon Johnson was also trying to limit his connection with Baker and had cut him off. There was a suspicion that LBJ was involved in political corruption, an example of which was the awarding of a \$7 billion contract for a fighter plane to Texas-based General Dynamics.

Unlike Johnson, JFK was not connected with Baker through any financial misdeeds, but through sexual liaisons.



An East German spy and a *femme fatale*, **Ellen Rometsch** could have evolved into a time bomb for JFK had he not been assassinated in Dallas. Journalist Clark Mollenhoff of the *Des Moines Register* claimed, “Had John F. Kennedy lived to run for president in 1964, his House of Cards would have come tumbling down. Perhaps I would have seen to that. I had the goods on that fucker. Sex scandals crippled the government of Harold Macmillan in London. I would have done the same for Camelot.”

“There’s only one man in Washington who can suppress this investigation of Baker, or at least contain it,” JFK told his brother Bobby in front of his aide, Kenneth O’Donnell. “That’s J. Edgar, the old queen himself. Of course, in spite of past favors—financially in Lyndon’s case, sexually in mine—both of us might have to toss Baker under the bus. I can just see the headlines: KGB PROSTITUTES SERVICE THE WHITE HOUSE.”

The President deliberately made the word “prostitutes” plural. As the scenario unfolded, it seemed that Baker had also introduced JFK to two more prostitutes—Mariella Novotny and Suzy Chang—who may have been Soviet spies. Mariella was a bleached blonde Czech and Suzy was a Chinese beauty.

To make matters worse, and glaringly obvious to anyone searching for bait, these two beautiful hookers had been key players in the Profumo scandal that was already rocking the Macmillan government in London.

Had JFK lived, thanks to this particularly incendiary situation, his womanizing would probably have reached the press in spite of any attempted cover-up.

According to J. Edgar’s FBI surveillance, JFK had done little to conceal his illicit involvements with the foreign prostitutes. As a senator in the late 1950s, he had invited Suzy to dinner at “21,” one of the most highly visible dining spots on the celebrity circuit in New York City. Gossip columnist Walter Winchell, a frequent visitor to “21,” spotted the handsome young senator and the prostitute, but chose not to write about it in his influential column.

In London, Mariella, an on-again, off-again striptease dancer, became a notorious prostitute. She traveled to the United States in 1960 in the company of Suzy. Both women were eventually hired by Bobby Baker at the Quorum Club.

In time, Suzy and Mariella were introduced to the two Kennedy brothers, with whom they each had affairs. Baker arranged the introductions.



Both RFK and JFK had affairs with the notorious **Mariella Novotny**, who maintained links to a Soviet spy ring. The FBI arrested Mariella on March 3, 1961 and charged her with solicitation involving men “in high elective office in the United States.”

At the time of her mysterious death in February of 1983, she was writing a tell-all memoir. Her friends suggested she was murdered. One of her closest women friends said, “We always knew that Mariella would be killed by American or British agents, probably the CIA.”

Her unfinished memoirs disappeared after she was found dead.

The daughter of two Chinese immigrants, Suzy had been born in New York City in 1934. During the late 1950s in London, she became involved with osteopath and pimp Stephen Ward, who rounded up prostitutes such as Christine Keeler and Mandy Rice-Davies for sex parties with key members of Her Majesty’s government, including John Profumo. Ward turned out to be a prophet. He told party girl Keeler, “I believe Kennedy will be assassinated. He will not be allowed to stay in such an important position of power in the world. I can assure you of that.” Ward never explained what led him to that conclusion.

One of Ward’s friends was Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, who sat for a portrait painted by Ward. “He’s a snob,” Ward later said, “not the man he used to be at my parties. I knew him before he married ... what’s her face, Elizabeth.”

Although both of the Kennedy brothers had managed to keep news about their adulterous affairs out of the papers, there were various printed hints of what was going on. The *New York Journal-American*, in a blind item, wrote that “a man who holds a very high elective office in the Kennedy administration is linked to a Chinese prostitute.”

Both Mariella and Suzy were not only named as members of the same spy ring that had trapped Profumo a few months earlier, but both women had “connections” to antagonistic communist adversaries of the U.S.

Mariella moved to New York, where she opened an international brothel. After her return to London, she was questioned by Scotland Yard and admitted that she had had sex with JFK in 1960 “at a New York hotel.” She also claimed that her second encounter with the President was simultaneously with two other prostitutes on West 55th Street in Manhattan.

In New York, her partner was Harry Allen Towers, a Soviet agent, who had previously fled from England and was last seen in what was then known as Czechoslovakia.

Mariella's testimony could have been particularly damaging to JFK. Reportedly, she tied up the leader of the Free World for a "mild beating." S&M was her specialty.

Novotny was described by Christine Keller, the famous prostitute at the center of the Profumo scandal: "She had a tiny waist that exaggerated her ample figure. She was a siren, a sexual athlete of Olympian proportions—she could do it all. I know. I saw her in action. She knew all the strange pleasures that were wanted and could deliver them."

Later, Jack reportedly told his brother, "I couldn't keep up with her. I hope you could."

"Nobody ever said I had a bad back," Bobby answered.

In an unpublished memoir written right before her death in the 1970s, Novotny maintained that she had been "recruited" by Peter Lawford to have group sex with JFK right before his inauguration.

In addition to Profumo, Keeler was also having sex with Eugene Ivanov, a naval *attaché* at the Soviet Embassy in London. There was a fear that she was transferring to him government secrets learned during pillow talk with Profumo.

Keeler was known to have visited New York, with Mandy Rice-Davies. Robert Kennedy asked Hoover to see if FBI agents could find out if the President had slept with either girl, especially Keeler. Of course, Bobby could have simply asked his brother, but since JFK slept with so many prostitutes, he simply could not remember.

This revelation appeared in a book called *An Affair of State: The Profumo Case and the Framing of Stephen Ward* by Phillip Knightley and Caroline Kennedy (no, not that one).

The book said that "Robert Kennedy had a right to be concerned. On July 23, 1963, according to an FBI internal memorandum, the tape recording which Christine Keeler had made with her new manager, Robin Drury, mentioned President Kennedy as one of Keeler's lovers. All that needs to be said about this allegation is that if Keeler had indeed slept with Kennedy, then it would have been completely out of character for her to have kept it quiet upon her return to London. She would have told everyone. The fact that she never mentioned it until she was recounting her memoirs for sale to Fleet Street strongly suggests that she invented it to make them a more valuable property."

Apparently, Keeler had wanted to have sex with JFK, but he died before she could orchestrate it. However, because of her notoriety, she received many offers for sex. She claimed that movie stars Warren Beatty, Maximilian Schell, and George Peppard "banged" her.

In February of 1983, Mariella Novotny was found dead in London. Police reported an overdose of drugs as the cause, but Keeler didn't believe that. "I think she was murdered. She knew too much."

As the investigation of Baker continued in Washington, more and more roads were leading directly to the Oval Office. The press became aware of the unfolding scandal.

Wesley Pruden, editor of *The Washington Times*, claimed, "A few brave Republicans were screwing up the courage to make something out of it, on the grounds that a President shouldn't be taking off his clothes with a *femme fatale* from the 'Evil Empire.'"

When word leaked out about this impending GOP assault, Bobby Kennedy, in his role as Attorney General, asked J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI to threaten and intimidate inquisitive Republicans in Congress.

Seeking to gain favor with Bobby, whom the FBI director despised, Hoover came through. He warned Republicans on Capitol Hill not to investigate the JFK/Ellen Rometsch affair. "If you do, I'm going to open all of your closets, and believe me, there are skeletons in there that will get you impeached."

J. Edgar reminded the senators—most of them "bitter opponents of civil rights"—that many of them had used "Negro prostitutes for sleep-overs. Surely, you gentlemen wouldn't want this shocking fact exposed to your lily white voters back home, especially when many of you are coming up for re-election this year."

RFK then forced J. Edgar to meet with Mike Mansfield, the Democratic leader of the Senate, and Everett Dirksen, the Republican counterpart. Details about that meeting have been suppressed. J. Edgar obviously had "blackmail on everybody in Washington," as he privately proclaimed to the Senate leaders. In the aftermath of this meeting, the Senate Rules Committee decided not to investigate the Rometsch scandal.

In exchange for this favor, Bobby told J. Edgar that his job at the FBI was secure and allowed him to proceed with his wiretaps on Martin Luther King, Jr.

Betraying RFK, J. Edgar, behind his back, ostensibly worked to suppress the scandal, but also wanted it leaked. Information was supplied by him at various points to investigative reporters Courtney Evans and Clark Mollenhoff. Subsequently, Mollenhoff wrote an article incorporating a highly veiled version of the information in a story for the *Des Moines Register*.

In it, he claimed that the FBI had established "that a beautiful brunette had been attending parties with congressional leaders and some prominent new Frontiersmen from the executive branch of government. The possibility exists that her activity might be connected with espionage is of some concern, because of the high rank of her male companions."

Mollenhoff later claimed, "Had JFK lived to run for president in 1964, his House of Cards would have come tumbling down. Perhaps I would have seen to that. I had the goods on that fucker. Sex scandals crippled Macmillan's government. I would have done the same for Camelot."

During the closing months of JFK's presidency, the attorney general was kept busy "putting out brush fires," as he characterized it. Some of those fires were threatening to become major conflagrations.

Fearing that he would become the central figure in a U.S. version of the Profumo scandal, JFK as President ordered David Kirkpatrick Bruce, U.S. ambassador to the Court of St. James's, to provide him with a daily behind-the-scenes report on the Profumo scandal then cresting in London.

"To quote Ike, I want to be as clean as a hound's tooth when I run for president in 1964," JFK told Ben Bradlee of *The Washington Post*. "I plan to dump Lyndon. I considered a Democratic governor here and there, but I've come up with an unbeatable choice to offer the Democratic National Convention. A Kennedy/Kennedy ticket. I'll serve out my terms, then Bobby takes over for two terms, and by then we will have groomed Teddy to fill in for two terms. At some point, son John-John will be old enough to run. We could carry this a little further. Caroline might become the first woman president of the United States. Perhaps we could have her run for Senator from New York to get her launched into politics."

That was JFK's political fantasy. The more realistic Lyndon Johnson had a different take: "Not that I'm one to throw stones," LBJ told Bobby Baker, "but I think Jack's womanizing is about to be exposed as a national security risk. You're looking at the next President of the United States. After Jack steps down, I'm the obvious choice to get the nomination. And even win the election. Who are the Republican shitheads to run against me? Barry Goldwater? Ronald Reagan? Get serious."

In 1967, almost four years after JFK's assassination and before the 1968 assassination of Bobby Kennedy, Bobby Baker was convicted on seven of the nine counts of fraud on which he was charged. "I vomited breakfast in the men's room," he later recalled. He had to serve eighteen months in a federal penitentiary. His case has been called "The most bizarre Washington scandal of the 1960s."

Back in Washington during that fateful November of 1963, the case against the president was about to explode. Scheduled for a few days after what would have been his return from Dallas, JFK would have been questioned by a Senate committee about his "relationship with KGB prostitutes."

Journalist John Simkin wrote, "I think it possible that John Kennedy's relationship with Ellen Rometsch played a role in the cover-up of his assassination. LBJ and Hoover both knew that JFK had a sexual relationship with a KGB spy. Did this influence Bobby Kennedy's decision not to publicize his own doubts about the assassination of his brother?"

Some of the most tantalizing "what if's" associated with this case raise some questions:

1. WHAT IF J. EDGAR HOOVER HAD NOT GOTTEN INVOLVED AND DIDN'T THREATEN ALL THOSE SENATORS WITH THE INFORMATION HE WAS HOARING?
2. WOULD THE INVESTIGATION OF THE PRESIDENT HAVE GONE FORWARD? WOULD KENNEDY HAVE BEEN IMPEACHED?
3. AND WOULD KENNEDY, IN THAT CASE, HAVE BEEN IN DALLAS ON NOVEMBER 22, 1963?

J. Edgar was "seriously pissed off" that he and Clyde had to cut short their annual vacation at La Jolla in California where they enjoyed placing "safe bets" on the horses, having been tipped off by the mob before game time.

Predictably, J. Edgar had opposed Martin Luther King's march on Washington, as had President Kennedy, who feared it would evolve into a public relations backlash, thereby damaging his civil rights agenda. Working behind the scenes, J. Edgar ordered the FBI to investigate celebrities participating in the march, including Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and Peter, Paul & Mary.

He personally called Charlton Heston, who refused to give in to his demand to stay out of Washington. At that point J. Edgar threatened Heston. "We have nude pictures of you."

Heston had been an artist's model, often clad only in a velour posing pouch. But one day while changing his underwear for the pouch, one young man had snapped a picture of the star's genitals.

J. Edgar also warned Heston, "Do you want word to get out that you fucked a very young Sal Mineo?"

Despite these threats, which could have spelled disaster for his movie career, Heston still flew to Washington.

Before the march, J. Edgar and Clyde filed an FBI dossier on its organizer, a Pennsylvania-born black, Bayard Rustin. They discovered that Rustin had been arrested on a morals charge in a men's toilet where he committed an act of fellatio on a vice cop. When arrested, he protested to the policeman, "But you came in my mouth." He was booked and charged anyway.



A triumphant moment in the career of **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**, involved his speech, “I have a Dream” in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC.

What was not known at the time was that he delivered the speech even as J. Edgar was threatening to reveal his womanizing, his alleged link to communists, even some rumored homosexual dalliances.

But King moved bravely ahead, even though he’d heard recordings of the wiretapped conversations that he’d had in bugged hotel suites during his sexual dalliances on the road.

Many civil rights leaders attacked Rustin’s sexuality, but King stood by him. Rustin’s sexuality came in for severe attacks from both white segregationists in the South and “Black Power” militants.

In the 1970s, long after the march, he would become a public advocate on behalf of gay and lesbian rights. Giving testimony on behalf of the New York State Gay Rights Bill in 1986, he gave his famous “The New Niggers Are Gays” speech.

Before the march, FBI secret tapes revealed King talking about Rustin. “I hope Bayard doesn’t take a drink before the march,” the minister said. “He might grab one little brother, ‘cause he will grab one when he has a drink.”

On that same tape, King was trying to explain his adultery to his close allies. “I’m away from home 25 to 27 days a month. Fucking’s a form of anxiety reduction.” King often talked about being the “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in all of us.” After listening to the tapes, J. Edgar claimed King was “a tomcat with obsessive degenerate sexual urges.”

King’s wife, Coretta, once said that her husband was a “guilt-ridden man.”

The same could be said of J. Edgar himself.

On August 28, 1963, King led a triumphant march of 250,000 African Americans and their supporters to the foot of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington. It was to be the apogee of his political career. For J. Edgar watching the march on television, “It is my darkest day,” perhaps not realizing that the word “darkest” could be interpreted two ways.

Many African Americans claimed that under pressure from the White House, the march had become too sanitized. Malcolm X called it “the Farce of Washington,” and the Nation of Islam warned its members not to attend.

For most people, the march was a success, the largest protest march in the history of Washington. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech electrified the crowd. His most ardent fans ranked it up there with Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address or Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “a date that will live in infamy” speech after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

J. Edgar took a more skeptical view. Noting the numerous charges of plagiarism that had plagued King for some of his writings, J. Edgar skeptically said, “Good speech. Who did he steal it from?”

As the autumn winds of 1963 blew through the cherry trees of Washington, J. Edgar feared his days in office were numbered. Lyndon Johnson had called and told him that if JFK were re-elected, he was considering him for an ambassadorship to Switzerland, where he had ancestral links. Perhaps jokingly, Johnson also told him that Robert Kennedy had recommended him for Boxing Commissioner.

J. Edgar called the White House and requested an urgent meeting with President Kennedy. Without the presence of Bobby, the *tête-à-tête* took place in the Oval Office, and was viewed as an off-the-record meeting with no notes taken.

It can be assumed that J. Edgar promised the President that he would rescue him from the brewing Ellen Rometsch scandal. Perhaps he promised that he would do what he could to prevent the Senate from holding public hearings. In return for pulling off this coup, J. Edgar demanded that JFK raise the mandatory retirement age for FBI officials when they reached the age of seventy.

The President's response was not recorded. This would be only the sixth meeting between J. Edgar and JFK since he assumed office. It would also be their last.

After that meeting and little more than three weeks hence, Jack and Jackie would be riding in their motorcade through the streets of Dallas, where they were greeted with waving crowds, not knowing that an assassin's bullet lay at the end of the trail.

At that moment when his brother was getting his head blown off in Dallas on November 22, 1963, Robert Kennedy was sitting by his pool at Hickory House in McLean, Virginia with U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, Robert Morgenthau. The men were having a bowl of New England clam chowder and talking over ways to "de-ball" Roy Cohn, RFK's nemesis.



President Kennedy had only moments to live when a bystander snapped this shot of him with First Lady **Jacqueline Kennedy** in the seat beside him. The pink pillbox hat she wore was about to become the most famous fashion accessory in the world.

The whereabouts of that hat is unknown today, although there's a rumor it was acquired by a drag queen in Connecticut.

The skies over Dallas were blue and bright, but it was twilight time for a president as he rode into history on November 22, 1963. Before flying to Texas, JFK tore a groin muscle while swimming. He was forced to wear a stiff shoulder-to-groin brace that locked his body in a rigid and upright position.

When struck by the first bullet, he remained erect for the fatal shot. He didn't slump over, and thereby remained in a stiff position to receive the final shot.

Ethel brought out an extension phone to her husband. "Hoover wants to speak to you."

From FBI headquarters in Washington, J. Edgar's message was brief. "The President has been shot." He put down the phone.

No sooner than that, a call came in from the hospital in Dallas where the slain President had been taken.

Within ten minutes, J. Edgar called again. "It appears your brother's wounds are critical."

"You may be interested to know," RFK said, "that my brother is dead."

As the Attorney General later recalled, J. Edgar did not appear upset in any way—"not quite as excited as if he were reporting the fact that he had found a communist on the faculty of Harvard University."

One aspect of the assassination that intrigued J. Edgar was that John Connally, the Governor of Texas, was riding in the same open-top limousine with JFK and his wife Jackie. A close friend of Johnson, Connally was at the top of the list of men who were viewed as a replacement of J. Edgar as FBI director.

J. Edgar had learned this upsetting rumor when lying in a New York hospital on New Year's in 1963, recovering from prostate surgery. He told Clyde and his aides, "Nothing like a prostate surgery to remind you of your own mortality. But I'll rise from this bed and carry on. You can count on me."

With three television sets blaring in his office, J. Edgar could hardly fail to notice that the entire nation seemed to be

“treating Kennedy’s assassination like news of the Second Coming,” in his disgruntled words. “He was a whoremonger who nearly got New York and Washington blown off the face of the earth, yet he’s being hailed as a fallen hero.”

The next day, urgent calls from all over the world were coming in to J. Edgar’s office, with personalities as diverse as Richard Nixon or Prince Philip phoning from Buckingham Palace in London. But J. Edgar told his secretary, Helen Gandy, to hold all calls. He and Clyde were going to the Pimlico Racetrack in Baltimore.

The day of celebrating the death of JFK was not one of total jubilation. At the track during the sixth race, Clyde complained of a sudden numbness in his right shoulder. His right eye seemed to be experiencing some sort of a spasm. He sat down. An aide nearby noticed Clyde’s distress.

J. Edgar had a lot of money riding on the race, and he hardly seemed to notice. Only when the aide nudged J. Edgar to look at his distressed friend did he focus on Clyde. “Oh, you’re such a hypochondriac.”

Nonetheless, the aide and J. Edgar walked Clyde from the stands to a waiting limousine, where he was taken to the hospital in Baltimore. There he was diagnosed as having had a transient ischemic attack, called a TIA or mini stroke.

Clyde was released that afternoon and driven back to Washington where he was put to bed. J. Edgar spent most of the time at his office at FBI headquarters. The President had died, and Lee Harvey Oswald had been arrested as the suspected assassin.

To his everlasting regret, J. Edgar lost his chance to interview Oswald before a night club sleazeball named Jack Ruby fatally shot him as he was being transferred to a more permanent lockup in Dallas.

At FBI headquarters, J. Edgar put Clyde and the FBI on full alert to get all information they had on Jack Ruby and Oswald. He was particularly terrified if the FBI had had any links with them in the past. “We may have to do a little housekeeping,” he told his aides. “The blame game is on in the Kennedy assassination. We don’t want any fingers pointing at us. I was falsely blamed for being unaware of the oncoming attack on Pearl Harbor. I don’t want the American public to blame me for Kennedy’s assassination, although I know of no man who deserved it more the way he was jeopardizing national security with his reckless life.”

For the next nine months, during most of which Bobby Kennedy remained in a sort of daze, JFK’s brother would still be J. Edgar’s boss before stepping down as Attorney General. At a time when both men might have been communicating daily to see who murdered JFK, they would rarely speak and then only in the briefest of terms.

The new President, Johnson, called J. Edgar at the rate of four or five times daily. He warned J. Edgar to spend less time investigating who killed Kennedy—“and more time looking into who might kill my favorite Texan. I fear I’m targeted for assassination too. Don’t be caught asleep at the wheel.”

In response, J. Edgar offered him his bulletproof limousine and extra security guards not associated with the Secret Service when he made public appearances. “Lyndon trusts me completely,” J. Edgar told his aides, “and I won’t let him down.”

When not on the phone, J. Edgar took on one of the most major tasks of his administration. “There’s a shitty mess to be cleaned up in Texas over this Oswald thing,” he told his aides. “Both Lyndon and I know that slimy little pervert wasn’t the only assassin. But too thorough an investigation might extend to very dangerous levels and even lead to an overthrow of this government. We can’t allow this to happen.”

Normally the Attorney General’s Office would have conducted an inquiry into a presidential assassination, but Bobby remained at home traumatized. In his absence, J. Edgar took over the investigation and opposed any other commission being formed to look into it.

When Johnson told him he was appointing a commission, J. Edgar asked him if he could head it. This was one of the few times when LBJ turned him down, appointing Earl Warren, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, instead.

When J. Edgar heard that Michigan Congressman Gerald Ford had been nominated, he was delighted. “He’s our man. We’ve got blackmail on him.”

It was revealed that the future American president had been secretly taped by the FBI when he took various women to the suite registered in the name of lobbyist Fred Black at the Sheraton-Carlton Hotel in Washington. Bobby Baker, LBJ’s disgraced former aide, also had a key to the suite. He’d later claim that, “Sometimes Jerry would call me and tell me not to use my key to the suite. It was going to be occupied for two hours that afternoon.”

Women viewed Ford in those days as a good-looking football player who had been a male model in New York, often posing with his lover, the beautiful Phyllis Brown, modeling ski clothes for such magazines as *Look*. In his autobiography, Ford claimed they had “a torrid four-year love affair.”

J. Edgar ordered Clyde to gather up all pictures of Ford snapped when he was a male model, the only U.S. President to have worked as a male model. He once posed for the cover of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, but apparently refused to do frontal nudes, in spite of repeated offers, especially from gay photographers in New York.

“I picked Ford because he can become your eyes and ears on the Warren Commission,” Johnson told J. Edgar. “He played football too long without a helmet. He’s also too dumb to walk and fart at the same time.”

Actually Johnson was wrong in his latter assessment. Throughout his 1974-1977 presidency, and during his failed 1976

election battle with his Democratic rival, Jimmy Carter, Ford farted frequently. On every occasion, he blamed it on a nearby member of his Secret Service, lecturing a hapless agent to “Show a little class.”

The new President’s most famous utterance was “I am a Ford, not a Lincoln.”

Johnson may have been wrong about Ford’s farting, but he was right in believing that Ford would be an acquiescent cheerleader for the FBI during his term on the Warren Commission. William C. Sullivan, J. Edgar’s number three man at the FBI, later said, “Ford looked after FBI interests. He came through for us, keeping us advised on what was going on behind closed doors. He was our man, our informant.”

Sometimes Ford brought J. Edgar news he didn’t want to hear. He wanted to dominate all investigations and clashed with key figures on the commission who opposed that. J. Edgar developed a particular distaste for J. Lee Rankin, the chief counsel for the Commission who wanted to investigate why Oswald was heading toward Jack Ruby’s apartment in Dallas immediately after the assassination. On hearing that, J. Edgar said, “We’ll put a stop to that little probe.”

In the weeks following JFK’s assassination, J. Edgar became obsessed with covering up the FBI’s former dealings with Oswald and Ruby.

Since 1959, the FBI had been aware of Lee Harvey Oswald. Police authorities in Dallas even went so far as to suggest to the Warren Commission that Oswald had performed “various tasks for FBI agents.” That accusation caused J. Edgar to explode.

In Fort Worth, Texas, on June 26, 1962, FBI agents had interviewed Oswald upon his return from Russia. Two months later, in August of 1962, when the local Bureau was alerted that Oswald was receiving communist literature such as *The Worker*, Oswald was interviewed at his apartment.



“The Beefcake Chief Executive,” President **Gerald Ford**, was the most athletic president in American history. He was offered contracts to play pro football by both the Detroit Lions and the Green Bay Packers, but turned them down to go to Yale and study law while coaching football (*top photo*). He also showed off his splendid physique in the boxing ring, where he caused bobbysoxers to swoon.

In 1939, Ford posed for the cover of *Look Magazine*. After that, and for three years into the future, he was a male model appearing on the April, 1942 cover of *Cosmopolitan* (*lower photo, above*) with his beautiful mistress, **Phyllis Brown**.

His reputation as a clod came only when he was president, and never before that, when he was referred to as “a stud.”

When Oswald, along with his wife Marina, moved to Dallas in March of 1963, Special Agent James Hosty was given the job of “checking up periodically on Oswald.” After his first encounter with him, Hosty scribbled on his file: “This guy is a nutcase and should be watched.”

J. Edgar was horrified that his FBI had been in contact with Oswald, as he and Clyde worked to conceal any FBI role in his life. “We’ll cover our tracks or else I’ll become an old man on a pension hobbling around my house on a cane,” he told aides.

To protect himself, he censured, transferred, or suspended without pay seventeen of his once-trusted agents in Texas. In time, that toll would rise to more than thirty agents. “Such gross incompetency can hardly be overlooked,” he chastised them.

In a remark that virtually caused J. Edgar to have a mini-stroke, the FBI’s Hosty spoke a day after the President’s assassination. “We knew that Lee Harvey Oswald was capable of assassinating the President of the United States, but we didn’t dream he would do it.”

J. Edgar worked behind the scenes to get the Warren Commission to define Oswald as the lone assassin. William C. Sullivan, his number three man, said he was told to, “Get this thing over with—and quick! We don’t want to be chasing a hundred conspiracy theories. Let’s face it: historians are still debating the assassination of Lincoln.”



The suspected assassin of President Kennedy, **Lee Harvey Oswald**, a former U.S. marine who had briefly defected to the Soviet Union, holds up his manacled hands at police headquarters in Dallas, where he had been arrested for questioning about the death of both a Dallas police officer and JFK.

At this very hour, Oswald is depicted as he is about to become one of the most famous names in America, with one of the most recognizable faces. Earlier, he’d told the police, “I’m being framed. I didn’t shoot Kennedy, although millions of his enemies will make a hero out of the man who did it. But it wasn’t me.”

New testimony about the type of ammunition used in the assassination has raised questions about whether Oswald acted alone, according to a study by researchers at Texas A&M University.

In front of his most trusted aides investigating the case, J. Edgar told them, “There are no co-conspirators. There is no international conspiracy.”

“These instructions were uttered before the investigation had really begun,” Sullivan claimed.

Kenneth O’Donnell and David Powers, two of JFK’s most trusted aides, believed the fatal shots were fired from behind a fence in front of the motorcade rather than from the book depository. But J. Edgar told them, “There is no way. Testify that the bullets came from the building.”

In spite of J. Edgar’s efforts to contain them, accusations continued to emerge. Marina Oswald claimed she was led to believe that her husband “worked for the American government.” Witnesses in New Orleans, where Oswald lived for a time, reported seeing him in the company of FBI agents.

In Dallas, Allen Sweatt, a deputy sheriff, came forward with the charge that the FBI was paying Oswald \$200 a month as an informant. The Warren Commission, under pressure from J. Edgar, chose not to investigate these claims.

J. Edgar also suppressed evidence, as when the FBI turned over Oswald’s address book. One page containing the name, address, and car license plate number of Hosty, his FBI contact in Dallas, had been removed.

J. Edgar also suppressed a note that Oswald had left at the FBI office in Dallas, in the wake of Hosty’s visit to his home. When Oswald learned that Hosty had interviewed his wife, Marina, he went by the local Bureau. In his note he threatened to blow up the office if the FBI didn’t stop “bothering my wife.” The FBI took no notice of that. When J. Edgar heard of this threat, he instructed the FBI in Dallas to destroy Oswald’s threat.

After J. Edgar ordered Hosty to flush Oswald’s threatening note down the toilet, his career with the FBI became a nightmare of transfers to different locales, probations, and suspensions without pay.

Under heavy pressure from the FBI, Marina Oswald testified before the commission, claiming that her husband shot the President. She later recalled meeting J. Edgar. “I was chilled from top to bottom. It was as if you met a dead person. He had a coldness like someone from the grave.”

In Sullivan’s words, “Every day, Hoover tried to put out a brush fire, sometimes a forest fire. Allegations were coming out of the woodwork like termites.”

Waggoner Carr, the Attorney General of Texas, told the press that Oswald was an undercover agent for the FBI. This charge was denied by J. Edgar.

Later, the charge emerged that Jack Ruby was also an FBI informant, and this, too, was denied by J. Edgar, although it emerged that FBI agents did have contacts with the nightclub owner. His FBI file listed Ruby as a P.C.I. meaning “potential criminal informant.”

Records revealed that Ruby had been contacted nine times by the FBI between March 11 and October 2 in 1959, regarding criminal matters in Dallas. J. Edgar demanded that this disclosure be removed from the commission’s report to the public, and its members agreed. “Such a disclosure might be too suggestive to the public at large,” J. Edgar warned the commission.

The only member of the Warren Commission that J. Edgar continued to trust was future President Gerald Ford. In a touch of irony, he learned that one of the women that Ford seduced “on numerous occasions” was none other than Ellen Rometsch herself, the East German spy whose involvement with JFK in 1963 was threatening his presidency as he flew to Dallas. These assignations between Ford and Rometsch took place in a suite rented by lobbyist Fred Black at the Sheraton-Carlton Hotel in Washington.

“Pills and booze had laid Betty Ford low, and I guess Jerry had to take his fun where he could find it,” J. Edgar told his aides.

He prevailed on Ford to alter the commission’s report to claim that the President was shot from behind the neck. JFK was actually shot through the back. By claiming he was shot through the neck and not the back established the downward angle required by the “magic bullet” theory where a single bullet was said to have entered Governor Connally’s body after exiting from the slain President’s body.

During his occupancy of the Oval Office in 1975, Ford became very candid and admitted that he had suppressed “certain FBI and CIA surveil-lance reports that indicated that JFK had been caught in a crossfire in Dallas.”

It wasn’t until 1979 that the Assassinations Committee in Washington reported that “the FBI probe of the murder of the President had been seriously flawed,” and that the Warren Commission was more or less chastised for relying too heavily on the advice of J. Edgar.

The chief counsel for the Warren Commission, J. Lee Rankin, later said, “He may not have believed it himself, but Hoover wanted the lone assassin theory to prevail. Perhaps he knew too much, meaning that an extended investigation would expose a lot of people in government. He knew a hell of a lot more than he told the commission, and he also suppressed vital evidence.”

Perhaps the most revealing comment J. Edgar ever made on the assassination was said to Billy Byars, Jr., the son of Humble Oil millionaire Billy Byars, Sr., who was a close friend of Clyde and J. Edgar and sometimes dined with them.

It was later revealed that on J. Edgar’s phone log on the day of the assassination, he placed only three calls—one to Bobby Kennedy, another to the chief of the Secret Service, and a third to Byars Sr. in Texas.

As revealed to author Anthony Summers, Byars Jr. claimed he once asked J. Edgar, “Do you think Lee Harvey Oswald did

it?"

According to the account Byars Jr. gave to Summers, the director said, "If I told you what I really know, it would be very dangerous to this country. Our whole political system would be disrupted."

LBJ's mistress, Madeleine Brown, later claimed that her very angry suitor told her, "It had something to do with American intelligence and oil" before storming out the door.

Until the day he died, J. Edgar was hounded by inquiries and pressure to reopen the investigation of "The Crime of the Century." In all cases he had a pat response: "OSWALD DID IT, ALONE. CASE CLOSED."

In summation, as author Burton Hersh wrote: "Wriggling inside Hoover's hammerlock, the Warren Commission coughed up the monolithic single-shooter version of events that the Director demanded. Anything less could mean the FBI was guilty of dereliction of duty. Privately, Hoover knew better."

The ill-conceived conclusion of the Warren Commission, much of it orchestrated by J. Edgar and his staff, claimed that the assassination of John F. Kennedy was the work of one "quixotic misfit with grandiose pretensions, Lee Harvey Oswald, who acted alone in shooting the President from the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository overlooking Dealey Plaza in Dallas."

Although he'd been the chief advocate of such a theory, J. Edgar told Clyde and his trusted aides, that he didn't actually believe that Oswald had acted alone "but that's what we're going to run with."



President Nixon (*left*) listens intently to the political opinions of **Gerald Ford** (*right*). Nixon once told Nelson Rockefeller (Ford's future vice president) that, "I find Jerry a bit klutzy."

When Spiro Agnew was forced to resign as Nixon's vice president, Ford stepped up to fill his shoes. When Nixon was forced to resign from office over the Watergate scandal, Ford was automatically elevated to the Oval Office. On August 9, 1994, he became the only man in American history to have been foisted upon the nation by circumstances—twice—and not by an election.

When in 1976 he at last ran for office as part of an election, he lost to a peanut farmer from Georgia, Jimmy Carter.

By May of 1964, J. Edgar in seven months would turn seventy, but Lyndon finally waived the mandatory retirement age and praised him as "an anathema to evil men."

The Senate passed a resolution honoring his fortieth year with the Bureau, citing his unrelenting crusade against the underground world of America.

Life magazine claimed that "The Roman Senate conferred god status on a few emperors while they were still in office. That more or less has happened to J. Edgar Hoover with the passage of Senate Resolution #706. Of course, Hoover has been at least a demi-god for a very long time."

What was J. Edgar doing during this time of glory? Working frantically behind the scenes, he was trying to suppress new evidence about himself as a young man. Once again his arrest record on a morals charge with a young fisherman in New Orleans had surfaced, and he had to eradicate this blight on his record for all time.

With Bobby Kennedy at long last out of the Attorney General's office, J. Edgar felt he could relax a bit. When he congratulated Lyndon Johnson over his upset victory in the 1964 elections, in which LBJ had triumphed over ultra-conservative Barry Goldwater, Johnson too seemed relieved to have Bobby off his staff. The President told J. Edgar, "From now on, I want to be surrounded by men loyal enough to kiss my ass in Macy's window and say it smelled like a rose."

When Bobby left his role as Attorney General in September of 1964 to pursue a role as elected Senator from New York, LBJ referred to him as "the little runt." RFK had called Johnson "a venomous Texas rattlesnake." Even so, J. Edgar had learned that Bobby had sent out a feeler to run as Johnson's Vice President in the '64 election, feeling LBJ needed his name recognition to help him win the November election. But LBJ bitterly rejected him. "Tell him to go back to fucking Jackie Kennedy and leave the politics to me."

J. Edgar had told LBJ, who loved gossip, that Jackie, in her loneliness and desperation, had transferred her love for JFK onto his brother, Bobby, and that his wife, Ethel, knew about it.

Both Johnson and J. Edgar lived in fear of exposure. At one point magazines such as *Life* were constantly threatening to expose them, especially the origins of the President's wealth, made through shady dealings in Texas, and J. Edgar's link to oil millionaires and some leading figures within the Mafia.

So far, J. Edgar had been able to put out brush fires about his private life. But every now and then there was a flare-up, such as when there was a robbery at Roy Cohn's "harem-scarem" townhouse on Manhattan's East Sixty-Eighth Street "where J. Edgar was often invited to enjoy the best entertainment money can buy," a reference to a string of muscled, well-endowed male hustlers.

Cohn called J. Edgar and told him that burglars had made off with his collection of sex tapes. The FBI director had never trusted Cohn, and he feared that he might have secretly taped him indulging in sex with young men.

Immediately J. Edgar swung into action, not considering that the crime was technically the province of the New York Police Department. It is not known how his agents tracked down the robbers and confiscated the stolen merchandise. J. Edgar returned the cash and jewelry to Cohn, but told him, "I'm keeping the sex tapes for my viewing pleasure." They were never returned.

Later in a 1980 interview, Cohn described the stolen films as "kinky—even to me."

The Cohn tapes were added to J. Edgar's obscene file, cabinets of which he kept at FBI headquarters, although certain tapes were taken home for private viewing with Clyde. Eastman-Kodak had presented him in 1936 with a 16mm Kodascope projector, and it was still in use for his private screenings.

The banjo-eyed Roy Cohn, as he moved into middle age, was still a fixture in J. Edgar's life. In Manhattan, he was a big spender, living far beyond his means and still hanging out with the A-list, including Barbara Walters, Cardinal Spellman, and even Aristotle Onassis. Cohn was the first to tell J. Edgar that he felt the Greek shipping magnate was going to marry Jackie, even though he was carrying on an affair with Maria Callas.

J. Edgar also learned through Cohn that Onassis was a fellow cross-dresser and kept a young man stashed in an apartment in Paris and another in Athens, where he subjected them to beatings for his sadistic pleasure.

As author Burton Hersch put it, "Barely thirty, Roy Cohn soon laid his spoor across Manhattan, reconfirming his reputation as the Western World's second most sinister mama's boy. He had a gift for outrageous business practices and high-wire finagling in the courts." Presumably, the number one mama's boy was J. Edgar himself.

Behind the scenes, Cohn was known for his manipulation and once bragged to literary agent Jay Garon, "I never step out the door without a trio of judges in my breast pocket."

As late as July of 1964, Cohn had called J. Edgar, "Anything new from that shit Robert Kennedy?"

"Let me put it this way," J. Edgar told him. "Jimmy Hoffa is enemy number one. You are enemy number two."

Like Johnson and J. Edgar, Cohn was relieved to hear that Bobby had moved on to another venue within a few months of his brother's assassination. But he was still plagued by the "Get Cohn Squad," and was under investigation at the Internal Revenue Service. The probe was led by Robert Morgenthau, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, who had discovered illegal wiretaps, mail fraud, and the abuse of surveillance. J. Edgar refused Morgenthau's request to turn over his FBI file on Cohn.

Cohn had also entertained J. Edgar on *Defiance*, a steel-hulled, 100-foot yacht. He'd often ordered his skipper to leave the various ports where it had docked at three o'clock in the morning to avoid marina fees. The *Defiance* was often the scene of orgies.

J. Edgar may have sailed with Roy and a bevy of hustlers four or five times, although he complained that the only food Cohn ever kept onboard were cans of Bumble Bee tuna and peanut and jelly sandwiches.

Cohn always received his paid companions lying nude on top of a large fur piece that covered the bedroom in his stateroom.

Nicholas von Hoffman in his book, *Citizen Cohn*, wrote: "The boat saw every kind of service. There were floating bacchanals when, late at night, hull down in the water of a cargo of drunken revelers, Roy sent one of the hands, who had a knack for such talent scouting, to the marina bars to come back with young men and women for sex." Why the women? Cohn

was also a voyeur who liked to watch men have sex with women.

When Cohn ran short of money, he turned the yacht into a fiery furnace to collect the insurance money. Regrettably, his first mate was trapped in the flames and burned to death.

Agent William C. Sullivan, who had achieved the post of assistant director of the Domestic Intelligence Division in 1961, left the Bureau with bitter memories in 1971. He was well aware of J. Edgar's "Obscene File."

"He didn't just like porno, he wanted only the vilest kind. He especially liked to see young men—boys, really—getting sodomized by brutes of men. Some of the stuff came from Mexico—women with horses, shit like that, even snuff films. Of course, anything about Marilyn Monroe or Martin Luther King was his favorite pre-nap viewing material."

Cohn's sex tapes remained some of J. Edgar's favorite viewing material, but around Christmas of 1965 a mysterious package arrived at FBI headquarters.

The FBI later discovered that it had been sent by a former aide to Jimmy Hoffa, the boss of the Teamsters Union who had once targeted RFK for blackmail.

Sullivan claimed that J. Edgar's favorite sex tape was of Marilyn Monroe performing fellatio on Bobby Kennedy, or at least a man J. Edgar claimed was the former Attorney General. He showed the tape to Sullivan and several of his most trusted agents. The nude man's face did not appear but Marilyn was clearly visible. Sullivan had seen Bobby in a bathing suit, and the chest in the film definitely looked like that of Bobby's.

Sullivan said that it was a silent three-minute, black-and-white loop. A nude Marilyn appears on her knees giving a blow-job to a man.

J. Edgar said that the loop was secretly taken with a hidden camera that had been planted in Monroe's bedroom in Brentwood.

It was later reported that J. Edgar, in January of 1966, showed the film to Clark Clifford, who had been one of JFK's aides and was serving as an adviser to LBJ.

Clifford said that he later met Jackie Kennedy at a dinner party hosted by Diana Vreeland, the editor of *Vogue*. "Jackie cornered me and asked me if I knew about the sex tape of Bobby and Marilyn. I denied knowing anything about it. She didn't really believe me, but didn't press me either."

With permission reluctantly obtained from then Attorney General Bobby Kennedy, J. Edgar and his agents bugged the hotel rooms of Martin Luther King, Jr., wherever he went from Atlanta to Los Angeles, from Honolulu to New York. President Kennedy was already dead when on February 22, 1964, FBI agents rented an adjoining suite next to King's at the Hyatt House in Los Angeles. For two days they monitored King.

The information on these tapes has never been made available under the Freedom of Information Act. However, Sullivan privately told one of the editors at W.W. Norton, the publisher of his memoirs, *The Bureau: My Thirty Years in Hoover's FBI*, that an orgy was staged. From the tapes, according to Sullivan, King was heard having sex with various women. He was also heard mockingly discussing the late President Kennedy's sex life. "I think he got more poontang than me," King is alleged to have said. He also made reference to the widowed Jackie Kennedy. "Now that's one white woman I'd like to plow myself. She probably didn't get much from Kennedy's little weenie."

Sullivan was one of the few who heard the tapes, but there is no way of verifying if what he claimed is accurate.

The FBI's Sullivan was one of the men responsible for creating the myth of J. Edgar. He sent his boss a memo, calling King "the most dangerous Negro of the future in this Nation from the standpoint of Communism, the Negro, and national security." To stop King, Sullivan suggested that the FBI might have "to resort to tactics that some might not consider legal." After the march, and with great hesitation, Bobby had agreed to move ahead with the wiretaps. "Hoover had so much blackmail at the time on the Kennedy brothers, I didn't think Bobby had a lot of choice in the matter," Sullivan said.

King was also recorded at an orgy at the Willard Hotel in Washington. The FBI wiretap revealed a wild party going on in the living room of the suite, followed by sexual encounters with King in the bedroom with what sounded like three different women. The FBI also recorded the sounds of an orgy at the Los Angeles Hyatt House when the civil rights leader returned for another visit.

In 1997, Bernard Lee, one of King's associates, won a victory in court. The FBI transcripts of the illegal King wiretaps will be sealed until 2027.

Almost every story in the newspapers about King infuriated J. Edgar, including the news that he'd been designated as recipient of the St. Francis Peace Medal from the Catholic Church. After King met with the Pope, J. Edgar wrote, "I am amazed that the Pope gave an audience to such a degenerate."

When the director learned that King was going to win the Nobel Peace Prize, J. Edgar wrote, "He could well qualify for the top alley cat prize!"

What doubly infuriated J. Edgar was that for years he had long coveted the Nobel Peace Prize for himself. In spite of letters of endorsement from prominent Americans, year after year J. Edgar failed to get the votes from the Nobel Committee, who did

not necessarily view him as a man of peace.

A historic meeting between King and J. Edgar was arranged at FBI headquarters in Washington. King was accompanied by Ralph Abernathy, who recalled that J. Edgar never smiled, was “colder than an igloo, and referred to Martin and me as ‘boys.’” Martin got nervous in front of Hoover and started biting his nails. He knew all the shit Hoover had on him.”

After the meeting, King told his aides, “Old Man Hoover talks too much. He gave me two minutes, then lectured me for fifty minutes on the glories of the FBI and all it was doing for the American Negro.”

Before King flew to Oslo to accept the Nobel Peace Prize, J. Edgar ordered the FBI to step up its harassment of King. He was put under even heavier surveillance. At one point, the FBI sent in a false fire alarm to a secret hideaway where King was having sex with two unidentified white women. “He was literally smoked out of his bed,” Sullivan later reported to J. Edgar.

J. Edgar had succeeded in pinning the homosexual label on presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson, and he set about to do the same slander to King.

Noting a general attitude of homophobia within the religious black community, J. Edgar hired three agents to gather evidence that King, like many known womanizers, occasionally engaged in homosexual activities.

According to Sullivan, Clyde Tolson emerged with three young men from Atlanta, each signing an affidavit and agreeing to testify in court that King had performed fellatio on them.

The case against King was still pressing forward at the time of King’s death. Sullivan never knew if these young mulatto men—no dark-skinned ones—were actually bribed to render testimony, or if Clyde and his agents had actually discovered King indulging in some homosexual acts, which could be used to widely discredit him.

When King died, the file was destroyed, and “those boys just faded into the background never to be heard from again,” according to Sullivan.

Under orders from J. Edgar, FBI agents continued to smear King. Nearly all the incriminating data, including photographs supplied to newspapers, were never printed. James Eastland, the Democratic senator from Mississippi, was given a surveillance film loop of King entering his hotel suite with a blonde-haired white woman. Berl Bernhardt, staff director of the Civil Rights Commission, was furnished with rather perfunctory data that King had homosexual dalliances.

J. Edgar sent an FBI tape to President Johnson in which King is heard inviting Ralph Abernathy to have a sexual encounter. Others who listened to the tape claimed it was “mere locker room joshing,” such as when a football player will grab his genitals to mock a fellow player who lost the game. “Come over here, girlie man, and get some of this.”

Using an infrared camera, the FBI obtained pictures of King lying naked on his bed with his gay assistant, a fully dressed Bayard Rustin. Like Johnson himself, King often pulled off all his clothes and talked to key staff members while completely nude. There is no evidence that these were sexual encounters, just idiosyncratic behavior. When Rustin learned of these pictures, he denied that he and King ever had sexual relations.

Eventually, J. Edgar’s case that King was a closeted homosexual petered out. In spite of circumstantial evidence, the director managed to convince no one except Clyde, Roy Cohn, Cardinal Spellman, Richard Nixon, and one of his chief aides, William C. Sullivan.

King’s frequent attacks on the FBI intensified into an all-out war. J. Edgar was given a bulletin that King had sent out to his affiliated groups, claiming that “Hoover is old and getting senile. Let’s hit him from all sides in order to force President Johnson to censure him publicly.”

Under Sullivan’s direction, the FBI compiled a composite tape of the surveillance of King, including only the most embarrassing episodes. These recordings, along with an anonymous letter, were mailed to King’s headquarters in Atlanta. The letter stated:

KING,

In view of your low grade ... I will not dignify your name with either a Mr. or a Reverend or a Dr. And, your last name calls to mind only the type of King such as King Henry the VIII....

King, look into your heart. You know you are a complete fraud and a great liability to all of us Negroes. White people in this country have enough frauds of their own but I am sure they don’t have one at this time that is anywhere near your equal. You are no clergyman and you know it. I repeat you are a colossal fraud and an evil, vicious one at that. You could not believe in God.... Clearly you don’t believe in any personal moral principles.

King, like all frauds your end is approaching. You could have been our greatest leader. You, even at an early age have turned out to be not a leader but a dissolute, abnormal moral imbecile. We will now have to depend on our older leaders like Roy Wilkins a man of character and thank God we have others like him. But you are done. Your “honorary” degrees, your Nobel Prize (what a grim farce) and other awards will not save you. King, I repeat you are done.

No person can overcome facts, not even a fraud like yourself.... I repeat—no person can argue successfully against facts. You are finished.... And some of them to pretend to be ministers of the Gospel. Satan could not do more. What incredible evilness.... King you are done.

King, there is only one thing left for you to do. You know what it is. You have just 34 days in which to do (this exact number has been selected for a specific reason, it has definite practical significant [sic]. You are done. There is but one way out for you. You better take it before your filthy, abnormal fraudulent self is bared to the nation.

Three days after the tapes were sent, J. Edgar branded King “the most notorious liar in the country.”

Some historians have claimed that the intent of Sullivan’s letter was to drive King to commit suicide to avoid personal embarrassment.

King did not bow to pressure but in a very depressed state flew with Coretta to Oslo to accept his prize.

Back from Oslo, King increased his opposition to America’s war in Vietnam, earning him “the eternal loathing” of Johnson and J. Edgar. King claimed that the U.S. interest was solely to turn Vietnam into an American colony. As far-fetched as this accusation was, millions of his followers believed him. He didn’t stop there, claiming that the U.S. was “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today,” citing the outrageous claim that America had murdered one million Vietnamese—“mostly poor, helpless children.”

Life magazine called his provocative statements “demagogic slander that sounded like a script for Radio Hanoi.”

King’s main attack was that the United States was diverting its money and resources that could have been spent on welfare within the country. He charged that all the money being spent on the war was leading “America toward a spiritual death.”

“Only an assassin’s bullet can stop the tongue of this liar,” an infuriated J. Edgar told his aides, including Sullivan. “We must discredit, neutralize, and expose this man. Send agents to Zurich to ferret out secret Swiss bank accounts. I bet he’s stashing away millions overseas.”

Many of the secrets about J. Edgar or Clyde Tolson emerged after their deaths. Perhaps journalists during their life spans were too intimidated by the pair to probe too deeply into the secrets these FBI men kept in the closet.

A startling article appeared in the *New York Post* on February 11, 1993, written by Murray Weiss. He exposed an extortion ring in 1966 that was broken up by the Manhattan district attorney, Frank Hogan, and his “Racket Squads.”

Two blackmailers, Edward Murphy and Sherman Kaminsky, operated a racket called “The Chicken and the Bulls.” They hired well-built, heavily endowed hustlers to prey on older, prosperous-looking men who they would meet at airports and in hotel lobbies, soliciting them for sex to later blackmail them, often with photographs from cameras installed in shabby hotel rooms to which they took their johns for sex.

Sometimes one of the ringleaders of the group would burst into a hotel room with a photographer and catch a victim in bed having sex with one of the young hustlers.

Many prominent people were entrapped in this scam, including movie star Rock Hudson and William Church, a Navy admiral stationed at Key West, Florida, who committed suicide when outed. A prominent congressman, Peter Frelinghuysen, Jr., a Republican who represented New Jersey in the House of Representatives from 1953 to 1975 was also outed. News of the congressman’s arrest first appeared in a book, *Bobby and J. Edgar*, by Burton Hersh.

The raid turned up a candid photograph of J. Edgar posing with Kaminsky. The files of the pair revealed that J. Edgar was one of the outfit’s best customers. Apparently young men were sent to Clyde and J. Edgar gratis. Obviously, Murphy and Kaminsky didn’t dare make trouble for J. Edgar, and rewarded him with young men of his choosing.

When J. Edgar learned of Hogan’s raid, he sent Clyde to New York. All evidence, including that candid photograph of J. Edgar, was removed from the files.

After his imprisonment, Kaminsky mysteriously disappeared, though he was reported to have fled to Colorado, selling wigs and raising rabbits.

Murphy was known as a “chicken hawk,” meaning an adult male who has sex with young boys. After serving time in prison, he became somewhat of a gay icon. When J. Edgar died, he admitted that he supplied young men to both J. Edgar and Clyde.

“They wanted mature men, not boys,” Murphy claimed. He also supplied much younger hustlers to Roy Cohn, which the lawyer used to entrap rich pedophiles in his suite at the Plaza Hotel. “Mother Murphy,” as he was called, said, “I never pretended to be a saint.”

Four months after Murphy’s death in 1989, he was named Honorary Grand Marshall of the Lesbian and Gay Pride Parade in New York.

In 2006, a journalist wrote, “The story of Edward Murphy is fascinating, the way scandalous secrets are, the way evil fascinates. It is also the story of the pre-Stonewall era. Murphy combined prostitution, blackmail, and strong-arm tactics into a lucrative enterprise that ran for ten years until he was brought down by the Manhattan attorney general and a battery of Irish

Catholic New York City detectives. It is a story with all the best ingredients—greed, lust, pride, honor, and most of all, irony.”

J. Edgar came very close to being outed as a homosexual on the floor of Congress by Cornelius E. (Neil) Gallagher, a Democrat from New Jersey’s 13th Congressional District and a major member of the House Government Operations Committee and a key figure on the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. He was almost picked as Lyndon Johnson’s running mate in 1964, but the President abandoned that idea after J. Edgar visited the Oval Office and presented FBI files on Gallagher. Subsequent to that meeting, Hubert Humphrey was chosen as Johnson’s vice presidential running mate.

Sharp-witted and good-looking in a rugged way, Gallagher was as charming as Frank Sinatra on one of his good hair days. One of the most popular congressmen in Washington, he was also a WWII hero based on his command of a rifle company in Europe. Later he saw action in Korea and was wounded three times, receiving eight decorations.

His troubles began on August 9, 1968 when *Life* magazine exposed his links with the Mafia.

In its ground-breaking series on the Mob and its enterprises, *Life* exposed Gallagher as “a tool and collaborator of a Cosa Nostra gang lord, Joe Zicarelli, a New Jersey *capo*. His fellow *Mafiosi* called him “Joe Bayonne,” a reference to his hometown, a New Jersey industrial waterfront city opposite Manhattan’s financial district. The magazine claimed that the Zicarelli/Gallagher business enterprises extended from Montréal in Canada to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic.

The FBI, under J. Edgar’s orders, had put Gallagher under surveillance in 1960. In one bugged and wiretapped conversation, Zicarelli was overheard telling another mob member, “Gallagher is a thing of beauty, like a two-star sapphire pinky ring.”

One scheme the mobster and the congressman concocted was to have laetrile imported and hawked as a cure for cancer. The ingredients were extracted from the pits of apricots and peaches. In defending this enterprise, Gallagher said, “Look, if Bonnie and Clyde had a cure for cancer, you’d listen.” The U.S. Pure Food and Drug Administration rejected the claim.

After the *Life* exposé, Gallagher’s attorney, Larry Weisman, called him, informing him that, “Mr. Hoover is demanding that you resign from Congress and give up your campaign for re-election.” Gallagher adamantly refused.

In a devious move by J. Edgar, he had the FBI spread rumors about Gallagher’s wife, claiming that a minor mob figure had died in her bedroom while making love to her. As the story went, Gallagher came home, found the body, beat up his wife, and placed the corpse in his basement until two burly Mafia members showed up to remove the body from his house and secretly bury it. “Even Goebbels didn’t have the terrible capacity to spread such a lie about a good and decent woman,” Gallagher said.

To get revenge on J. Edgar, Gallagher visited the offices of attorney Roy Cohn. The crooked lawyer and the crooked congressman had been allies since Cohn got Gallagher off on a porno charge in his home state of New Jersey. A company Gallagher owned had been distributing obscene pictures of women in a magazine that was a rip-off of Hugh Hefner’s *Playboy*.

In Cohn’s office, Gallagher presented him the draft of a speech he planned to deliver on the floor of the House of Representatives. At first Cohn thought it was a draft of his resignation speech.

With astonishment, Cohn read:

“Mr. Speaker, it has been called to my attention that the director of the FBI and the deputy director of the FBI, Clyde Tolson, have been living as man and wife for some twenty-eight years at the public expense. As members of Congress, we have an oversight duty and that oversight is to make sure that the funds which go to the FBI are properly spent and don’t end up providing armored cars to this couple to take them to the racetrack and pay for their gambling debts, their hotels, their expensive dinners, or their breakfast the next morning after one of their cuddly nights together.”

Cohn issued his sternest warning that he should not make that speech to the House.

“I may go down, but I’m taking the old fag with me,” Gallagher threatened.

The next day, Cohn in near panic called Gallagher. “I just talked to Mr. Hoover. He is issuing a statement repudiating the transcript of the FBI wiretaps. You are exonerated.”

Gallagher didn’t deliver that speech alleging J. Edgar’s homosexuality. Actually, all the congressmen were well aware of J. Edgar’s reputation. Instead, Gallagher delivered another devastating speech.

“Mr. Speaker, the FBI is corruption at its worst, and its central figure is J. Edgar Hoover. It is he whose unchecked reign of absolute power has intimidated this Congress to the extent that a serious question has not been asked about his management of the FBI for ten years—maybe longer. He has become the American Beria, destroying those who threaten his empire, frightening those who should question his authority, and terrorizing those who dissent from his ancient and anachronistic view of the world.”

Gallagher didn’t completely escape the hook. During the Nixon administration, he was tried and convicted of income tax evasion and perjury and sentenced to serve two years at Allenwood (Pennsylvania) Federal Prison.

As one of his last acts of duty as FBI director, J. Edgar in 1972 reviewed the Gallagher file for a final time. He wrote across it, “He is like an octopus spewing forth its black fluid to hide his true character.”

Virtually on his deathbed, Cohn wrote Gallagher, telling him that J. Edgar had wrongly defamed his wife as part of his campaign to blackmail Gallagher into resigning from Congress. By then, of course, J. Edgar was conveniently dead.

Toward the end of his life, J. Edgar not only struggled to suppress stories of his homosexuality, but he tried on several occasions to muffle rumors of his black ancestry.

The author Gore Vidal, who grew up in Washington, D.C. in the 1930s, told biographer Anthony Summers: “Hoover was becoming famous, and it was always said of him—in my family and around the city—that he was a mulatto. People said he came from a family that had ‘passed.’ It was the word they used for people of black origin, who, after generations of inbreeding, have enough white blood to pass themselves off as white. That’s what was always said about Hoover.”

Hollywood in a major way dealt with this theme of passing in the 1934 film *Imitation of Life*, starring Claudette Colbert and based on the Fannie Hurst soap.

The first major exposé of J. Edgar’s alleged ancestry was published in a book, issued in 2000, called *Secrets Uncovered: J. Edgar Hoover—Passing for White?* by Millie L. McGhee, an influential California educator. In her memoir, she merges a 200-year-old oral family history with modern genealogical data.

As a little girl growing up in McComb, Mississippi, McGhee heard of her family’s links to J. Edgar. She traced the lineage to Clarence Allen, called “Big Daddy,” by his family. Standing seven feet tall and very light skinned, he was her grandfather on her mother’s side. The relation, as she described it, was “J. Edgar Hoover was my Big Daddy’s father’s brother’s child.”

Research has shown that J. Edgar’s grandfather and great-grandfather lived in a segregated black area of Washington, DC, where the census classified them as “colored.” McGhee claimed that her relatives were warned of “dire consequences” if they spoke about their genetic link to J. Edgar.

As rumors grew stronger in the 1960s, J. Edgar dispatched FBI agents to track down the source of this gossip. Blacks interviewed claimed J. Edgar was “a soul brother,” others referring to him as “some kind of spook.”

In his 1995 book, *FBI Secrets: An Agent’s Exposé*, Wesley Swearingen, a former special agent, claimed that privately within the Bureau, agents speculated about J. Edgar’s origins, noting “his tight wiry hair and his unusual facial characteristics.” They also speculated that maybe there was a little hanky-panky in his family tree, which they talked about as having been painted by a “tarbrush.”

A copy of J. Edgar’s birth certificate revealed that it was not filed until 1938, when the FBI director was forty-three years old. He never applied for a birth certificate until the death of his mother, Annie Hoover.

Although dismissed by many historians, McGhee’s account would not be surprising in view of the evidence compiled by such scholars as sociologist Robert Stuckert of Ohio State University, whose research revealed that about twenty-one percent of whites in America have black ancestry within four generations.

J. Edgar was certainly no champion of either gay rights or black civil rights, and did much to hamper the movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr. The specter of racial intermarriage horrified him, and he didn’t want blacks to become FBI agents. Richard Gid Powers in his book, *Secrecy and Power: The Life of J. Edgar Hoover* (1987), claimed that Bureau personnel used the word “Nigger” instead of Negroes in 90 percent of their reports.

If J. Edgar had been exposed to have had black ancestry, he would have been excluded from a high government position, according to the rules of segregation which had been reinstituted throughout the Federal Civil Service during the administration of President Woodrow Wilson.

As McGhee writes in her memoir: “While researching my roots, I was surprised to find that J. Edgar Hoover’s name was listed in my family’s pedigree chart. After much study and findings of other records in libraries and National Archives, it was clear to me that he was indeed part of us. Big Daddy told me that Hoover was his second cousin, and I believe him.”

Gore Vidal once said, “There are two things that were taken for granted in the Washington of my youth—that Hoover was a faggot and that he was black.”

On March 29, 1968 the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his colleague, Ralph Abernathy, flew into Memphis to support black sanitation public works employees who were striking for higher wages. They were booked into their familiar suite (#306) at the Lorraine Motel.

On April 3, King appeared at the Mason Temple where he delivered his last speech, uttering the words, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop.”

David J. Garrow, author of *The FBI and Martin Luther King Jr.*, wrote about how prophetic this speech was. “King’s emotional remarks about death, and his fatalistic attitude toward it, combined with the sound of the heavy rain and thunder, created an atmosphere that was exceptionally eerie. Rarely before had any of his assistants heard him speak publicly about such subjects.”

The next day at 6:01pm, King walked out on the second-floor balcony of the Lorraine Motel for some fresh air. Suddenly, a bullet penetrated through his right cheek, smashing into his jaw. The little missile traveled down his spinal cord before coming to rest lodged in his shoulder.

Abernathy heard the shot and rushed out of the suite to come to King's aid. An ambulance was summoned, and King underwent emergency surgery but was pronounced dead at St. Joseph's Hospital at 7:05pm. A biographer, Taylor Branch, claimed that an autopsy revealed that although King was only thirty-nine years old "he had the heart of a sixty-year-old man."

Within thirty minutes of King's shooting, J. Edgar heard the news at FBI headquarters in Washington. He summoned Clyde, William Sullivan, and his most trusted aides. "We must hunt down King's killer," he said. "If we don't, black America will burn the inner cities."

In that, J. Edgar was a bit of a prophet. When television and radio spread the news of the assassination, a wave of black riots broke out in dozens of cities, including Washington itself, Chicago, Baltimore, Kansas City, and Louisville, Kentucky. Bobby Kennedy urged supporters to follow King's policy of nonviolence, to no avail.

After the tense meeting in his office, J. Edgar turned to Clyde. "Tomorrow, Big Guy, you and I are going to the races." He'd extended the same invitation to Clyde when JFK was assassinated.

Even though King was dead, J. Edgar could not bring himself to abandon his smear campaign. He ordered two agents in Tennessee to track down the rumor that King and Abernathy had entertained three white women in their suite the night before the assassination.

J. Edgar even spread the word to Jack Anderson, a columnist he detested on most occasions, that King had been involved with the wife of a doctor in Los Angeles and that the enraged husband may have flown to Memphis to kill him in a jealous rage. Anderson later interviewed the woman who did admit to an affair with King. But her husband was firmly anchored in California at the time of the assassination. Anderson did note that she was an "incredibly beautiful woman. At least King had good taste."

Watching the rapidly changing events unfold on his office TV, J. Edgar was aware that conspiracy theories would abound in the aftermath of the assassination of King. Conspiracy theories were still raging over the death of JFK. What J. Edgar may not have suspected was that many African Americans would blame him for King's death.

Abernathy put the blame solidly on the FBI. "Martin was killed by someone trained or hired by the FBI, acting on orders of Hoover himself." J. Edgar fired back at this accusation. "Coretta King and Abernathy are deliberately plotting to keep King's assassination in the news by pulling the ruse of maintaining that King's murder was definitely a conspiracy and not committed by one man. This, of course, is obviously a rank trick to keep the money coming in to them."

The FBI trail led to James Earl Ray, a dirt-poor high school dropout from Illinois, who had served in the Army during WWII in Germany. He had been convicted of several robberies, beginning as early as 1949, and had served time in Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary. After his last robbery in 1959, he had been sentenced to twenty years in the Missouri State Penitentiary. In 1967, a year before King's assassination, Ray had escaped in a truck transporting bread from the prison bakery.

Agents picked up his trail which took him to St. Louis and Chicago before he settled in Toronto, Montréal, and finally Birmingham.

In 1967, he drove from Alabama to Puerto Vallarta in Mexico. Under the alias of Eric Starvo Galt, he became a porn director, using mail order equipment to film young prostitutes of both sexes.

The FBI learned but never revealed, according to William Sullivan, that he soon switched to child porn, using underage Mexican girls and boys, some as young as ten. Apparently, he never exported this child porn into the United States, but dealt exclusively with pedophiles in Switzerland and Germany through mail order.

From Mexico City, agents sent J. Edgar and Clyde copies of these porn films. In one, Ray is seen sodomizing a beautiful young Mexican boy who looks no more than thirteen years old. In another, he seduces three teenage Mexican girls in the same bed. There were many close-up shots of Ray's penis, of which he seemed to be proud.



The alleged assassin of Martin Luther King, Jr., **James Earl Ray** (*above*), remains a man of mystery. Speculation continues to this day as to who killed the Rev. King in Memphis. Even J. Edgar has been accused of masterminding the plot.

Ray had a long police record of robberies. In Mexico, he filmed and distributed child porn, featuring underage teenage girls and boys. Sometimes he starred in these porn movies himself, taking on numerous partners. After King's assassination, Ray lived for a time in Portugal, where various prostitutes supported him.

Abandoning Lisbon, he landed in London, where he tried to rob a bank, but bungled the job.

Leaving Mexico on November 16, 1967, Ray drove to Los Angeles where he was a bartender and studied ballet, because he liked the way he looked in tights. In 1968, he aided segregationist George Wallace in his run for the presidency.

As part of a cross-country drive during March of 1968, he arrived in Atlanta, where he avidly followed King's appearances, reading in the *Atlanta Constitution* about his upcoming scheduled arrival in Memphis. From his seedy rooming house, Ray packed his single piece of luggage and drove to Memphis after buying a rifle with accessories.

On June 8, 1968, a little more than two months after King's death, Ray was captured as he tried to leave London's Heathrow Airport to fly to Ian Smith's white supremacist Rhodesia.

J. Edgar deliberately held back news of Ray's arrest in London for two days before releasing it to the press. He waited for the appropriate moment so that he would interfere with another headline—the funeral of his nemesis, the assassinated Bobby Kennedy.

The UK quickly agreed to extradite Ray to Tennessee, where he was charged with King's murder. He confessed to the shooting on March 10, 1969, but recanted this confession three days later, claiming the FBI threatened him with the death penalty if he didn't confess. His recantation was ignored, and his guilty plea earned him a sentence of ninety-nine years in prison. The method of execution at the time in Tennessee would have been electrocution. Ray's lawyers claimed he was a scapegoat similar to the way many conspiracy theorists viewed Lee Harvey Oswald in the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

In June of 1977, Ray escaped prison but was later recaptured and returned to jail. In an interview in 1988, he claimed, "I was framed to cover up an FBI plot to kill King." In 1997, Dexter Scott King, the son of the slain leader, met with Ray in prison and publicly supported his efforts to obtain a new trial.

William C. Sullivan at the FBI said, "I was convinced that Ray killed King, but I doubt if he acted alone. He was so stupid that I don't think he could have robbed a five-and-ten-cent store. He was also sloppy, leaving the rifle he used to shoot King in an alley and beer cans covered with fingerprints in the trunk of his abandoned car. Someone taught Ray how to get a false Canadian passport, how to get out of the country, and how to travel to Europe."

In 1978, the Congressional Assassinations Committee concluded that there had indeed been a conspiracy in the murder of King, but found no evidence that the FBI was involved.

Conspiracy theories abound to this day and perhaps forever more. In 2000, the Justice Department completed its investigation without finding enough evidence to support allegations about a conspiracy.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson was present in Memphis at the time. He said, “I will never believe that Ray had the motive, the money, and the mobility to have done it himself. Our government is very involved in setting the stage for and I think the escape route for Ray.”

King’s friend and colleague, James Bevel, also weighed in with the theory that Ray did not act alone. “There is no way a ten-cent white boy could develop a plan to kill a million-dollar black man.”

J. Edgar and Clyde had long maintained a file on Marlon Brando, but he came under renewed surveillance when he attended the funeral of Martin Luther King, Jr. in Atlanta. Brando made the claim to actor Anthony Franciosa, with whom he shared a room in a hotel, that King had been “eliminated” by J. Edgar because of the minister’s opposition to the Vietnam War. He would later repeat some of these same accusations in a 1979 *Playboy* interview.

“J. Edgar Hoover hates black people, hated Martin Luther King,” Brando told such guests as Peter Lawford, singer Eartha Kitt, Sammy Davis Jr., and author James Baldwin. “If King had stayed in the civil rights area, he might be alive today. But when he got on the issue of the war in Vietnam, his fate was sealed.”

By early 1968, Brando had become more radicalized than ever, and he enjoyed a brief romance with the Black Panthers, an African American revolutionary leftist group active from 1966 to 1982. It had been founded by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton.

From the beginning, J. Edgar Hoover had denounced the Black Panthers as “the greatest threat to the internal security of the country.” He was horrified to learn that such celebrities as Brando, Jane Fonda, and Jean Seberg were supporting a cabal that the FBI stated wanted to overthrow the U.S. government.

Through his secret internal organization, COINTELPRO, J. Edgar and Clyde directed a campaign of infiltration of the Black Panthers, using surveillance, police harassment, and in some cases actual assassination. By 1969, party membership peaked at 10,000 members before it began to decay because of legal woes, jail terms, internal conflicts, expulsions, or just defections, as was the case with Brando.

Bobby Seale bonded with Brando even though he was a “white boy from Nebraska.” When King died, Seale called Brando and asked him to pay his airfare to Atlanta. According to an FBI report, the actor came through and also paid the fares of Earl Niel, the Panthers’ minister of religion, and a third Panther member, a woman with the title of “Captain of the Sisters.”

Wherever Seale and Brando went, an FBI agent was on their trail. One night they followed the pair to the home of Eldridge Cleaver, the dogmatic author who was one of the leaders of the Panthers. Cleaver’s wife, Kathleen, later recalled, “Brando couldn’t take his eyes off my husband, and he and Eldridge talked until dawn.”

After King’s funeral, Brando also attended the funeral of Bobby Hutton, the seventeen-year-old treasurer of the Panthers, who had been gunned down by the police in Oakland. Two FBI agents were at the funeral where Brando gave a brief eulogy on April 12, 1968.

When he later appeared on a television talk show hosted by Joey Bishop, Brando accused the Oakland police of “murdering little Bobby.” His statement was greeted with a six-million-dollar libel suit from the Oakland police. Brando’s attorneys had to fight the case all the way to the Supreme Court before the actor was absolved of any damages.

It was during this time that the bisexual Brando had a brief affair with the black author James Baldwin, who also had an FBI file. Shelley Winters, another one of Brando’s lovers, referred to the Brando/Baldwin mating as “The Beauty and the Beast.” Baldwin was known for his writing, not his looks.



A campaigner for civil rights, actor **Marlon Brando** (*right figure in photo above*) was photographed at the funeral of Bobby Hutton in 1968. Hutton was the slain seventeen-year-old treasurer of the Black Panthers.

The bisexual Brando was rumored to have had brief flings with certain members of the Panthers, including Bobby. J. Edgar leveled the same charges against actresses Jean Seberg and Jane Fonda.

In time, Brando seemed to lose interest in the advancement of African Americans, and turned his attention to the plight of the American Indians, accusing the government of committing genocide on these Native Americans and robbing them of their lands.

In Paris, Baldwin told the author of this book, “After King’s death, Brando fantasized that he should take up the sword of Martin Luther King. He saw himself, a white man, leading black America to a second emancipation.”

Brando even told *Newsweek* that he was giving up his film career to devote his full attention to the cause of “advancing civil rights for the American Negro. I might dye my skin black and live like an African American to better understand the plight of these downtrodden people,” Brando claimed, although quickly forgetting that offer.

Every statement he made, regardless of how outrageous, was recorded in his personal FBI dossier, much of which had been destroyed by the time J. Edgar died.

Actress Jean Seberg, who would later become an FBI target of surveillance, remembered attending a gathering of Black Panther supporters at a private home in Los Angeles. The FBI had two undercover agents at the party. Seberg arrived with Abby Mann, the screenwriter and producer. They listened to Brando give a long, mumbling, and rambling speech, pleading for funds for the Poor People’s Campaign to feed impoverished African Americans.

Seberg whispered in Mann’s ear, “What is this? A take-a-nigger-to-lunch gathering? Brando’s the biggest shit I’ve ever heard.”

In the spring of 1968, Brando, as well as Seberg and Jane Fonda, were accused of sleeping with members of the Black Panthers. Brando, a self-admitted bisexual, had a months-long affair with Ellsworth Jackson, a mulatto piano player he met in San Francisco. He supported Jackson for several months before the entertainer disappeared somewhere in France.

Brando, according to FBI reports, also had affairs with other “Hollywood Bad Boys,” such as Montgomery Clift and James Dean.

J. Edgar and Clyde became voyeuristically intrigued by Brando’s sex life, finding that he’d seduced both Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier when he’d briefly lived with them during the making of Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire*. He’d also seduced such gay authors as Williams himself and Truman Capote, who was always mocking J. Edgar’s gayness at his A-list *soirées*. Some of Brando’s other A-list conquests, the FBI learned, included Cary Grant and Doris Duke, the tobacco heiress.

On a tantalizing note, one FBI report claimed that Brando referred to his penis as “my noble tool,” claiming that it had performed its duties “through thick and thin and without fail.”

It was also learned that Brando had had a long-running affair with Marilyn Monroe, beginning in 1946 when he picked her up in a 10th Avenue hooker bar in Manhattan, back when she was known as Norma Jean Baker.

One of J. Edgar’s favorite pictures for his obscene scrapbook was taken of Brando in 1952 when he was photographed performing fellatio on his roommate, TV actor Wally Cox.

By May of 1968, Brando, who had a short attention span, had become disenchanted with the Black Panthers, as he told

Bobby Seale. He was driven away by the extremists, many of whom advocated “driving the white man out of America,” leaving it for the Indians and the blacks. He particularly objected to some who said that if the Black Panthers asked a member, he or she should kill both their father and mother. “That’s too Gestapo for me,” Brando told Shelley Winters. “I’m out of here.”

After breaking with the Panthers, Brando never publicly criticized them. When he split with Seale, he refused to take any more of his phone calls. In 1978, in an interview with *Playboy*, he said, “Bobby is a vicious, pernicious symbol of something that is destructive in our society. To other people, he’s a poet, an aristocratic spirit.”

J. Edgar scribbled across Brando’s file, “He’s the ultimate *Ugly American*,” a reference to Brando’s 1963 film, in which he played an American ambassador to an Asian country whose arrival stirs up pro-communist elements.

From the White House, an urgent call came in to J. Edgar from President Lyndon Johnson, who had been awakened from his sleep by a member of the Secret Service.

A sleepy Clyde answered the phone to hear, “It’s Lyndon. Roll over and tell lover boy I want to speak to him ... and now.” Awakened by the call, J. Edgar picked up the phone.

“Kennedy’s been shot in Los Angeles. There’s no hope for the fucker. I’ll send Air Force One to retrieve the body when he does croak. Get onto this case! I’m not going to be blamed for his murder like I was that day in Dallas.”

When Johnson had announced that he would not be a candidate for President in the 1968 elections, he had picked his Vice President, Hubert Humphrey, as his choice for the Democratic nomination. It seemed inevitable that Richard Nixon would win the nomination on the Republican ticket.

Senator Eugene McCarthy entered the fray but was later challenged by Robert Kennedy, who held a “carpetbagger” Senate seat from New York, not his native Massachusetts.

If given a choice, J. Edgar would be forced to go with his old enemy, Bobby, because McCarthy had publicly claimed that if elected president his first official duty would be to fire J. Edgar.

Bobby refused to take such a position, knowing the blackmail J. Edgar had on him, including explicit details of his affair with his brother’s widow, Jackie, which was a sure-fire way to turn off voters.

Since January of 1966, RFK had taken an adamant stand against the war in Vietnam, although it still had wide support among Americans at that time. “If we regard bombing as the answer in Vietnam, we are headed straight for disaster.”

After losing a primary in Oregon to McCarthy, (RFK’s 38.8% vs. Mc-Carthy’s 44.47%), Bobby swept to victory on the night of the California primary, 46% vs. 42% against McCarthy. At the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, Bobby emerged downstairs, entering to face a wildly enthusiastic crowd assembled in the Empire Ballroom.

Rising early from bed, J. Edgar and Clyde even skipped breakfast at the Mayflower Hotel, a ritual with them, to read reports coming across the wire from the FBI in Los Angeles. A portrait was emerging of what happened.

He told Clyde and his aides, “The Messiah of the Generation Gap is dead. Americans are such fools they probably would have elected him the 37th President of the United States—and then where would we be at the FBI?”

A few months earlier, Clyde had told FBI agents, “I hope somebody shoots and kills the son of a bitch.”

At 12:15am on June 5, 1968 in Los Angeles, RFK had left the podium after thanking his supporters, including singer Rosemary Clooney, who had gathered at the Ambassador Hotel. Originally, he was to have taken a different route, but the *maître d’*, Karl Uecker, took his hand and guided him toward the back of the hotel and the kitchen for a rear exit.

His last handshake was with a Mexican busboy, Juan Romero.

Suddenly, Sirhan Bishara Sirhan emerged from behind an ice machine, rushing past Uecker and firing into RFK with a .22 caliber Iver-Johnson Cadet revolver.

As Sirhan fired the shots, he shouted, “Kennedy, you son of a bitch!” as witness Richard G. Lubic later reported.

RFK had been shot three times, one bullet, fired at a range of about an inch, entering behind his right ear and scattering brain fragments. Two other bullets entered at the rear of his right armpit, one exiting from his chest and the other coming to rest in the back of his neck. A fourth bullet passed through his jacket.

In addition to RFK, five bystanders were wounded.

Romero cradled the senator’s head and placed a rosary in his hand. RFK asked Romero, “Is everybody safe, OK?”

“Yes, yes,” Romero said, “everything is going to be OK.” Captured by *Life* photographer, Bill Eppridge, this moment became the iconic image of RFK’s assassination.

A group of men forced Sirhan against a steam table and disarmed him. But at one point he wrestled free and grabbed the revolver again, only to be subdued again.

George Plimpton, one of the men who helped subdue Sirhan, later claimed, “He was Satan himself. I’ll never forget those cold, utterly expressionless eyes of this terrorist.”

As Sirhan was being hauled off by the police, one witness reported that his last words before forced out of the kitchen were, “Will I be on television?”

Journalist Pete Hamill, a future boyfriend of Jackie Onassis, was one of the men who helped subdue Sirhan.

Of the seventy-seven people in the pantry that night, eighteen of them were later singled out as key witnesses.

FBI agents were quick to deliver information about the identity of the assassin. A Palestinian refugee with a passport from Jordan, Sirhan was a Christian Arab born in Jerusalem and harboring violent anti-Zionist beliefs. A diary found at his home contained the words, “RFK must die! RFK must be killed!” He violently opposed the senator’s support of Israel.

Sirhan was a stable boy at the Santa Anita racetrack in Arcadia, California. On two different occasions, he had encountered J. Edgar and Clyde at the races.

Doctors at the Good Samaritan Hospital in Los Angeles worked frantically to save Bobby’s life, although they must have known from the beginning how hopeless that was.

When doctors advised the family that he could not survive, Ethel refused to “pull the plug.” She ran screaming down the hospital corridor, “I can’t kill Bobby!”

It took the strong will of the widowed Jackie Kennedy, survivor of an even bigger assassination, to put an end to RFK’s life.

Only weeks before, he’d told her broken heart that he had to end their love affair now that he was seeking the presidency. All of this information was funneled into the office of J. Edgar. He even had a “plant” within the Kennedy family circle, though perhaps not a blood relative.

Bobby died at 1:44am PDT on June 6. For twenty-six hours after the shooting, his heart had continued to beat.

In the immediate aftermath of the assassination, both Johnson and J. Edgar concluded they might be next on someone’s hit list. J. Edgar immediately ordered another layer of armoring for his FBI limousine.

Once again, as in the assassinations of JFK and King, J. Edgar invited Clyde to the races at Pimlico, near Baltimore, the following day. “I just can’t stand the idea of missing the opening race,” J. Edgar said. Before going to the tracks, he wired the widowed Ethel Kennedy. “If my associates or I can be of help in this trying time, please let us know. Bobby’s passing leaves a deep void in the hearts of the entire nation, and we pray that God’s comforting hand will sustain you in your bereavement.”

It wasn’t until after J. Edgar’s death that the final report was released on RFK’s death. Initially the FBI claimed that thirteen bullets were fired, yet Sirhan’s gun could fire only a round of eight.

Many Kennedy historians today conclude that two gunmen were involved, although J. Edgar, for reasons of his own, insisted to his final day that Sirhan was the sole assassin.

On one report, J. Edgar wrote, “Another nutbag psycho taking out another Kennedy—that’s all there is to it. No conspiracy.”

There was only one time J. Edgar wavered from his theory that Sirhan was the sole assassin. As revealed by William C. Sullivan, “For one afternoon, he came to suspect Aristotle Onassis. Hoover was among the first to know that Onassis wanted to marry Jackie—not for love, but for the prestige. Since she was in love with Bobby Kennedy, he stood in Onassis’ way, and he was a man who usually got what he wanted. For the first time, Onassis had come up with a younger man as tough and iron-fisted as he was. But now both of Jackie’s men, Jack and Bobby, were dead meat.”

At the time of RFK’s assassination, the shipping tycoon was beguiling the former First Lady with expensive gifts, including a diamond-and-ruby necklace originally intended for opera diva Maria Callas, his other girlfriend.

Ever since WWII, J. Edgar had disliked Onassis with great intensity calling him both a criminal and a spy. As the biographer of Onassis, Peter Evans, wrote: “Hoover, was a great believer in the no-smoke-without-a-fire theory, and he was always convinced that the Greek was getting away with something.”



In April of 1968, the accused assassin of Robert F. Kennedy, **Sirhan Sirhan**, is seen being escorted out of the courtroom by two police officials, following his conviction for the brutal murder.

To many investigative reporters, including Shane O'Sullivan, author of *Who Killed Bobby?*, the killing of the presidential candidate is still "an unsolved murder." The mystery also remains about who was that girl in the polka-dot dress?

She was with Sirhan in the kitchen pantry of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. Right after the shooting, she was seen fleeing down a fire escape screaming, "We shot him! We shot him!"

Although Sirhan testified that he "killed Kennedy with twenty years of malice aforethought," in 2011 he made the preposterous statement that, "I have no memory of the shooting."

Convicted on April 17, 1969, he was sentenced to death. But in 1972, the sentence was commuted to life in prison.

Writing in his journal, John Bartlow Martin claimed that RFK evoked the spirit of Manolete, Spain's greatest matador. "His fans kept demanding more and more of Manolete in the bullring. He kept giving it until there was nothing left to give but his life—and so he gave them that. So did Bobby."

When J. Edgar read that, he scrawled, "sentimental claptrap!"

On a bizarre note, the only autopsy pictures J. Edgar ever locked up in his personal filing system, away from the main FBI network, were the gruesome color photos of Robert Kennedy's nude body being dissected. In the months ahead, he would on occasion remove these photos and study them carefully.

One of Sirhan's lawyers, Lawrence Teeter, in an attempt to win a new trial, claimed as late as 2003 that Sirhan had been "hypnotized and framed," a sort of Manchurian Candidate as depicted in two movies, the first with Frank Sinatra.

A government conspiracy was suggested. Privately but not in court, Teeter, who died in 2005, told his associates, "I can name who murdered Bobby Kennedy. It was none other than J. Edgar Hoover, who hated him. He knew that if he didn't eliminate him, Kennedy would become President of the United States and fire him."

Teeter also made the claim that Sirhan's revolver contained blanks and that he meant "only to frighten Kennedy."

William C. Sullivan, after he split from J. Edgar and left the FBI in 1971, added a bizarre footnote. "It had nothing to do with solving who murdered Bobby Kennedy, but Hoover some way, somehow—he moved in mysterious ways—obtained a secret film loop depicting Sirhan masturbating in his lone cell while looking at a campaign publicity photo of Bobby he'd removed from the prison library."

Henry Fonda, a rather conservative actor, was always deeply disturbed about his daughter, Jane Fonda, and her involvement with revolutionaries, including the Black Panthers, to which she contributed money. He once received a threat in the mail—ARRANGE DELIVERY AT THE APPOINTED TIME OF \$50,000 IN SMALL BILLS—OR YOUR DAUGHTER

WILL BE KILLED.

Other death threats poured into Jane's world daily, but some supporters in the press called her "the next Susan B. Anthony."

Jane's political activities made her more and more distant from her father. When asked about her by a reporter, the veteran actor said, "Daughter? What daughter? I don't have a daughter."

Fonda turned the threatening letters over to FBI, and they were personally read by J. Edgar. At that time, he had targeted Jane with his Counter Intelligence Program.

He'd also launched a smear campaign against her, sending a fake letter to *Daily Variety* that Jane was heard at a fundraiser, shouting, "We will kill Nixon and other mother-fuckers who get in our way."

J. Edgar's nemesis, columnist Jack Anderson, said, "Because of Jane's political activism, she headed the Enemies List of both Nixon and Hoover. Both men considered the actress very dangerous, even more frightening than a terrorist."

During the early 1970s, J. Edgar ordered that Jane be put under almost constant surveillance, perhaps spending some \$1.8 million of government money trailing her. She was followed at a large Labor Day rally in Pennsylvania where she supported a band of ragtag veterans; she was trailed to the banks of the Delaware River, where she gave a speech attacking the Vietnam War. Jane claimed that the Nixon administration was "a beehive of cold-blooded killers."

Jane's biographer, Patricia Bosworth, in *The Private Life of A Public Woman*, wrote: "Jane Fonda's files at the FBI reveal the Bureau's obsessive, illegal, and ultimately fruitless surveillance of Jane as she opposed the Vietnam War. It went on for years. The files chart the intensive interest in the actress on the part of Nixon and the dirty tricks that were employed against her, including pressuring the Justice Department to charge her with treason. FBI agents opened her mail, tapped her phone, combed through her past, and even planted a false story in the press she wanted to kill the president."



During her tour of North Vietnam in July of 1972, Jane Fonda earned, indelibly, the name "Hanoi Jane," a moniker that will probably haunt

her forever.

She is seen here singing to North Vietnamese soldiers while seated on an anti-aircraft gun designed to shoot down American pilots. She's wearing a Vietnamese pantaloons and blouse, and a Vietnamese soldier's helmet.

Years later, during her more mature years, she referred to the incident as a betrayal of U.S. soldiers.

In 1970, on a six-week anti-war tour through some sixty colleges, signs went up—COME HEAR BARBARELLA SPEAK! Unknown to Jane, a bodyguard assigned to her was a secret FBI agent.

At the Cleveland International Airport, she was arrested. The next morning headlines read: JANE FONDA CAUGHT SMUGGLING DRUGS. JANE FONDA ARRESTED FOR ASSAULTING A POLICE OFFICER. After spending a night locked in a cell with a woman who had dismembered her lover, Jane was freed on bail and the drug charge eventually dropped. It was discovered that she was actually carrying prescription medicine, not drugs, in her handbag.

J. Edgar also wanted spicy details of her first marriage to Roger Vadim, the French director who had helmed her in *Barbarella* in 1968. Vadim was also known as “the man who discovered Brigitte Bardot.”

The FBI learned from informants that Jane may have engaged in lesbian activities during her marriage to Vadim, who insisted on bringing other women home to their bed.

Vadim later said, “Jane seemed to understand and, as always, went all out—all the way.” This was duly noted by J. Edgar.

Unlike most gorgeous movie stars, Jane did not seem to have that many involvements with other A-list stars, with such exceptions as Warren Beatty or else Donald Sutherland, her co-star in the 1971 *Klute*.

Near the end of her marriage to Vadim, the FBI learned he'd told Rock Hudson, “Married to Jane is like babysitting for Lenin.”

The FBI also learned of her involvement with the long-haired activist Tom Hayden, one of the “Chicago Seven,” whom she eventually married. Friends said she was captivated by “Hayden's brilliance and his knowledge of Vietnamese culture.” As Jane bragged to her friends, “And the sex was terrific too.”

Jane followed her own beliefs, even after a stern warning from her father. He'd told her that if he ever discovered her to be a communist, he would “turn you in to Hoover himself.”

She often used her elegant New York apartment for meetings of the Black Panthers. For a while she was rumored to be having an affair with the handsome, charismatic Huey Newton, one of the co-founders of the Panthers. She called him “as beautiful as Harry Belafonte.”

The FBI file on the actress was marked—JANE FONDA, ANARCHIST.

It was later learned that Jane was also spied upon by the Secret Service, the State Department, and the CIA. Nixon had ordered a “punitive” IRS audit of her financial records.

J. Edgar and Clyde learned of Jane's alleged sexual involvements, not only with members of the Black Panthers but of U.S. Army men she met while performing with the F.T.A. troupe.

This traveling group, whose full name was “Fuck the Army,” was founded on February 16, 1971, and was closely monitored by the FBI. Jane saw the entertainers as providing an alternative for right wing Bob Hope's USO tours. “We will amuse soldiers with acts they really want to see,” she said. “We will carry a message of civil disobedience.”

Of course, the Army would not allow them to perform on military bases, but they found nearby coffeehouses, even high school gyms, in which to entertain the soldiers with their anti-war skits. Most of their acts were secretly recorded by undercover FBI agents sent by J. Edgar.

In 1972, Jane made the most controversial trip of her life, flying to North Vietnam in the midst of its war with the United States. The FBI had informants in Hanoi during her controversial visit and tracked her every move, even recording her propaganda broadcasts. After that trip, which caused outrage among millions of Americans, she was forever labeled “Hanoi Jane.”

The image of her perched on an anti-aircraft gun, poised to shoot down American pilots, became the most iconic image of her life. In later years, she claimed that “my two-minute lapse of sanity has haunted me for the rest of my life.”

When this picture was later spread across the frontpages of American newspapers, a massive cry went up, charging her with treason. J. Edgar at FBI headquarters was bombarded with letters that he should personally arrest her upon her return to the United States.

“Pinko slut” was one of the kinder descriptions of Jane that arrived at FBI headquarters.

When Jane's plane touched down at Kennedy Airport in New York on July 27, 1972, she wore black Vietnamese silk pajamas and a coolie hat. Her arrival was secretly photographed by an undercover FBI agent.

Jane, of course, outlived her two major enemies, with J. Edgar dying in 1972 and Nixon's political career beginning to unravel that same year over the Watergate scandal. She told a reporter, “The people who wanted to put me in jail are going to jail themselves.”

George Wallace, running on an anti-integration platform in 1968, actually called J. Edgar and asked him to appear on the ticket as his vice presidential running mate. Knowing Wallace didn't have a chance to occupy the White House, J. Edgar politely turned him down.

When Nixon triumphed over Hubert Humphrey in that '68 presidential election, J. Edgar was already seventy-three years old, three years past the mandatory retirement age of seventy. But he felt no immediate threat from Nixon. That would come later.

In appointing John Mitchell as Attorney General, Nixon warned J. Edgar a second time not to investigate his background. Privately, J. Edgar told his aides, "Mitchell is the biggest liar ever to set foot in Washington. He even fabricated a story that he served on that god damn PT-boat crew commanded by that whore-mongering fart, John F. Kennedy."

It was perjury that got Mitchell sentenced to prison over the Watergate break-in in 1977, but by then J. Edgar was in the cold, cold ground.

In his continuing disputes with J. Edgar, William C. Sullivan finally walked out of the Bureau in October of 1971, telling colleagues that he found "Hoover a disgusting man, not sane, a child-molesting pervert, and a corrupt official who should have been forced out of office long ago."

At one point, Sullivan, right before his death, was dictating his memoirs, but as some observers at the FBI noted after reading the book, "He left out a lot of the real juicy stuff that would have damaged Hoover's reputation forever."

Retiring Attorney General Ramsey Clark received a private memo from FBI agents in Los Angeles, citing J. Edgar's increasing "senility and megalomania." No longer was the press afraid of him. Editorials across the country demanded to know if Nixon planned to appoint a new FBI director.

Once, J. Edgar had been a revered hero to Americans, but public opinion was going against him, against the Vietnam War, and against his opposition to civil rights movements, which he continued to label as "communist inspired."

But as Nixon swept into office, he told Clyde, "Dick will save us." During Nixon's time in exile after losing to JFK, J. Edgar and Clyde had been a frequent visitor at the home of Richard and Patricia Nixon. "He's my buddy and always will be," J. Edgar told his aides. "Of course, everybody in public life makes a mistake here and there."

Before Johnson left office, J. Edgar received an urgent call from him. "I want extra protection from the FBI, not just the Secret Service. I've looked after you. Now you've got to look after me. I'm the most hated man in America because of the Vietnam War, and I need your help."

J. Edgar assured his old friend that "protection from crackpots out to shoot you will be provided—rest assured of that."

Actually J. Edgar had little concern for his longtime friend now that he was losing his power. All his attention was focusing on the newly elected president from California, Richard Milhous Nixon.

J. Edgar went so far as to plant an underground FBI agent on October 20, 1968 among the observers at Jackie Kennedy's marriage to Aristotle Onassis on his private Greek island of Skorpios.

When J. Edgar read that Onassis gave his age as sixty-two, he ordered Clyde to look into his file. Passport documents at the Department of State revealed that Onassis was actually born in 1900.

J. Edgar pounced on that report with a certain glee, claiming, "That proves my point. Onassis is a liar and a total fraud. He even lies about his age, like that old Nazi spy, Marlene Dietrich."

By 1968, Jack and Bobby Kennedy had been assassinated, but there remained one Kennedy brother that J. Edgar considered a possible threat—their younger brother Teddy.

Nixon had telephoned J. Edgar, telling him that a "spy" within the Kennedy camp had informed him that Teddy was positioning himself to challenge Nixon during his bid for re-election in 1972. "He must be stopped, and there's plenty of shit you can get on this little whoremonger."

"I'm already on the job," J. Edgar assured Nixon. "We here at the FBI have been keeping a file on him since 1961 when Jack Kennedy became president, defeating you—the man who should have won the office, and actually did, had it not been for voter fraud."

In addition to details about a string of sexual affairs with women, a great deal of Teddy's FBI files—in fact, hundreds of pages, deal with death threats against him. Most of them were in the vein of ... "two down and one to go!"



J. Edgar planted an FBI spy at the October, 1968 wedding of **Jacqueline Kennedy** to shipping magnate **Aristotle Onassis**.

Rose Kennedy said, “Jackie is one of the world’s most expensive women to maintain, and Onassis has one of the world’s greatest fortunes.”

In Rome, *L’Espresso* Magazine noted that the 39-year-old former First Lady of The United States was marrying “this grizzled satrap, with his liver-colored skin, thick hair, fleshy nose, and wide horsey grin, who buys an island, then has it removed from all the maps to prevent the landing of castaways.”

One of the most intriguing threats against Teddy came from Sirhan Sirhan, in prison for fatally shooting RFK in 1968. He was said to have offered a guarantee of one million dollars to a fellow prisoner about to be released if he would assassinate the third Kennedy brother. The prisoner declined and reported Sirhan’s offer to the warden. The question remains, how did Sirhan, a former stable boy, have access to one million dollars—that is, if the offer were serious?

Throughout most of the 1960s, J. Edgar and Clyde had sustained a “Deep Throat” as a plant within Teddy’s camp. That was a reference to the label Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward had given the “mole” inside the Nixon White House during the Watergate scandal. The FBI’s mole supplied the Bureau with details on Teddy’s secrets that never saw newsprint during his lifetime.

At this jaded point in his life, when he knew so much about so many prominent Americans, J. Edgar was hardly surprised at any revelation. But Helen Gandy, his secretary, told friends that, “Mr. Hoover was shocked to learn that Teddy Kennedy was having an affair with Jackie even after her marriage to Onassis. The younger brother seemed to be following in the footsteps of his older brother, the Attorney General.”

A member of “Kennedy’s Irish Mafia,” JFK legal aid David Powers, saw the affair unfold. J. Edgar learned that Powers had told his cronies, “Let’s face it. Teddy has had the hots for Jackie ever since he laid eyes on her when he was just a kid. If Jackie went for two of the brothers, why not a third?”

When J. Edgar, Clyde, and their aides read these FBI reports from inside Teddy’s camp, the FBI director proclaimed, “I find this some of the most titillating exposés I’ve ever read. Teddy goes in for sloppy seconds. He was the last brother to fuck Marilyn Monroe after Bobby and Jack were done with her, and the last to fuck Jackie after John Kennedy was assassinated and that awful Bobby Kennedy dumped her when he announced he was going to run for President.”

Journalist Leon Wagener was the first to break the story. He quoted a source close to Teddy who claimed, “When Ted finally made love to Jackie, he fulfilled the dream he’d had to possess his brother’s beautiful wife. Obviously he knew it was a grievous sin and an insult to his late brother, but he couldn’t control himself.”

Wagener quoted another family insider who asserted, “Ted in his diaries wrote about his romance with Jackie in great detail and didn’t want his family, especially his wife, Vicki, and his son, Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy, to read it now when it could cause great hurt.”

Before he died, Teddy confessed his “sin” to a priest and asked for forgiveness.

Powers revealed to Kennedy insiders, who included Ted Sorensen, that “the Kennedy family has long known that Teddy was more than a brother-in-law to Jackie. But it’s a subject that dare not speak its name. No one wants to talk about it. The

revelations about Bobby and Jackie were already too much for this overburdened family. The thing between Jackie and Teddy was just too much to handle.”

One night in Boston, Teddy told Powers, “I’ve always been in love with Jackie, right from the beginning, although I was barely 21 when I met her. She’s always been special to me. When Jack died, I knew she was seeing Bobby, too, but that didn’t stop me. Bobby couldn’t always be with her.”

“She was trapped in a miserable marriage with Onassis,” Teddy said. “After Bobby died, she turned more and more to me as her confidant. We once took a romantic trip to Greece together. It was the happiest moment of my life.”

Jackie’s friendship with Teddy began when he was still an undergraduate at Harvard, and she agreed to help him with his term paper on art history, a subject he didn’t know much about and she did.

Neither Teddy nor Bobby wanted Jackie to marry Onassis. But when Teddy saw that she was determined to go through with it, he agreed to fly with her to Greece and handle financial matters with her new groom. He didn’t welcome the task “but for you, Jackie, I’ll do it. Someone has to see that your interests are protected.”

Of the many powerful men she knew, Jackie wanted Teddy to negotiate the details of a pre-nuptial agreement with Onassis. During the most intense of the negotiations, Jackie flew to Athens on a shopping expedition, leaving her husband-to-be with her brother-in-law and lover.

Onassis was known as a hard bargainer, but Teddy found him willing to relent to his demands. The senator revealed that Jackie’s income from the Kennedy Trust was only \$175,000 a year, which shocked Onassis. “So little money for such a rich family,” he told Teddy, who quickly explained that Bobby had been supplementing that with a check for \$50,000 a year. Teddy also pointed out that by marrying again, Jackie would lose her \$10,000 annual widow’s pension from the government as well as the protection of the Secret Service.



Coveting his brother's former wife, **Teddy Kennedy** shares an intimate moment with **Jacqueline Onassis**. According to author Gore Vidal, when Teddy and Jackie came together, they made "the Devil's pact."

According to insiders, the pact involved the promotion of the legend of Camelot, with the goal of transforming Teddy into the living symbol of a Kennedy-style liberalism. While this was going on, they fell in love.

As Jackie told author Truman Capote, "I'm in love with two men at the same time, both Bobby and Teddy. What to do?"

Onassis assured him that he would replace the pension and also ensure that she was protected. He invited Teddy to inspect his kennel of well-trained German shepherd police dogs which would patrol Skorpios.

When Jackie returned from Athens, Teddy reported that the negotiations had gone splendidly, and that Onassis had agreed to everything—and more. To celebrate, Onassis invited both of them for a party aboard the *Christina*. Knowing Teddy's fondness for beautiful young women, he arranged for eight of them to be flown in from Athens.

Partly as a means of concealing his affair with Jackie, Teddy deliberately made a play for one of the blonde bimbos. For whatever reason, Onassis had invited Nico Mastorakis, a professional journalist and photographer, aboard as well.

When Mastorakis snapped a photo of Teddy, soaked in ouzo and holding a blonde in his arms, the senator became furious. He grabbed the camera from Mastorakis and tossed it overboard. "If you report any of this," Teddy shouted at him, "I'll have your ass."

The next day, Jackie and Teddy told Onassis they had to discuss private Kennedy business, and he turned over the *Christina* and its crew to them to sail to an uninhabited nearby island. He assigned two of his security guards to accompany them. Suspicious of their motivations, Onassis ordered one of his guards to discreetly spy on Jackie and Teddy.

Once they arrived at the island, Teddy asked one of the guards to direct them to its most secluded cove. The guard found a beauty spot for them with warm water and white sands. Teddy instructed the guard to stand at a lookout point and signal if anyone was coming, and he also asked the guard to turn his eyes away to allow them some privacy.

Of course, the guard didn't do as instructed and spied relentlessly on his two charges. He later reported to Onassis that he'd seen them nude and lying together on a blanket, kissing each other passionately. And whereas the Greek tycoon had long ago learned about Jackie's affair with Bobby, it was the first time that Onassis learned that Teddy was also sexually involved with his sister-in-law.

Although Onassis decided not to confront Jackie with this indiscretion, he vowed to get "revenge" on Teddy. He did not specify what that revenge would be.

Somehow, Teddy learned that Onassis had uncovered details of his affair with Jackie. "Onassis is powerful and he's ruthless," Teddy told Powers. "He could easily put out a contract on me. He's killed others, maybe Bobby himself."

The Massachusetts senator had long been suspicious that Onassis had been behind the assassination of his beloved brother, Bobby. Reportedly, his diaries revealed that Teddy lived in "constant terror" that Onassis might have him murdered. "I'd wake up in a cold sweat, fearing a killer was in the house."

On July 1969, as astronauts were setting foot on the surface of the moon, a car on the island of Chappaquiddick, off Martha's Vineyard, going twenty miles an hour, was headed for Dike Bridge, a wood-timbered span angled obliquely to the road. It was unlit, with no guardrail.

The driver of the vehicle was an inebriated Teddy Kennedy. In the passenger seat sat a pert blonde beauty, Mary Jo Kopechne, one of the so-called "Boiler Room Girls," who worked in the secretarial pool for the Kennedy brothers. Ostensibly, Teddy had volunteered to drive Mary Jo to the departure point of the ferry headed back to Edgartown on Martha's Vineyard, but it seemed he had other plans for her that evening.

The car veered off the bridge and crashed into a pond. Teddy managed to free himself through the driver's door and swam to safety. But Mary Jo, trapped in the car, was left to drown.

As it turned out, Teddy would not report the accident to the police until the following morning. Newsmen around the country learned of the accident and flocked to Martha's Vineyard.

One of the greatest of all the scandals associated with the Kennedy brothers was about to unfold. At FBI headquarters in Washington, J. Edgar and Clyde already knew the details before they became frontpage news around the world.

One of the many amazing stories that never surfaced for public consumption that night was that an FBI agent telephoned J. Edgar at his home in Washington.

Around 1:45am, he was informed that Teddy's car had sunk into the pond and that the senator had escaped with his life but "a female passenger had drowned." Obviously J. Edgar was having Teddy trailed that night, and perhaps on many other nights, hoping to accumulate blackmail evidence on him in the way he had on his brothers. That was, in case Teddy ever became president. Above all else, J. Edgar wanted to have enough evidence on Teddy to blackmail him into not firing him should he ever be in a position to do so.

It was never explained why this mysterious FBI agent didn't attempt to rescue Mary Jo after Teddy fled from the scene. He'd been spying on Teddy and had obviously seen him leaving the party with the young blonde, and had then proceeded to tail them. He could have saved her, but perhaps he was more concerned with protecting his anonymity, no doubt on orders from the FBI chief himself, and as such, he never came to the rescue. The FBI agent was apparently instructed not to report the accident and not to let anyone know that Teddy had been the driver. J. Edgar seemingly wanted Teddy to hang himself with the consequences of this tragedy.

After abandoning his car, with Mary Jo trapped inside, Teddy walked to the departure point for the Edgartown ferry, which had long ago shut down for the night. Amazingly, in his weakened condition, he swam the 500-foot channel, although he later claimed he almost drowned.

Back in his room, he took off his clothes and collapsed, but still made no calls. He later said, "I had not given up hope all night long that, by some miracle, Mary Jo would have escaped from the car."

Although he could have, the FBI agent chose not to alert the police, letting the hours go by as Teddy mulled over what to do.

Nixon's former counsel, John Dean, testified that, "Politically until Chappaquiddick, Nixon was convinced that he was going to be running against Teddy Kennedy. After Chappaquiddick, he wasn't sure, but I think he certainly wanted to make sure, if it did happen, that he could hang Chap-paquiddick around Kennedy's neck."

With that resolve, Nixon called J. Edgar once again, demanding more details that the police might have overlooked.

On Nixon's instructions, J. Edgar and his agents investigated the background of the doomed girl. An FBI agent obtained a statement from her fellow co-worker. "Mary Jo was nothing but a whore. She'd go to bed with any man who had Kennedy written on his zipper."



One of Teddy Kennedy's most trusted advisers privately

told Kennedy staffers that on the night of **Mary Jo Kopechne's** last car ride, which ended in a watery grave on Chap-paquiddick, Teddy was going to ask her to abort their child. He saw it as the only way to save his political career and maintain his image as a devout Catholic.

If Teddy had immediately reported the fact that his car had plunged off a bridge and into a pond, it might have saved her life, in the event

that she had been trapped in an air pocket.

But he did not, and instead tried to create a false alibi for himself after he swam across the channel to the neighboring island of Martha's Vineyard.

As the FBI probed deeper, J. Edgar and his men discovered that early in 1968 Mary Jo had had an affair with Bobby.

When she joined his secretarial pool, Bobby and Mary Jo launched a torrid sexual tryst still going on at the time of his assassination.

According to an FBI report, after mourning Bobby's death, she switched her affections to Teddy. From a secret source in a hospital on Martha's Vineyard, J. Edgar learned that Mary Jo was pregnant with Teddy's child at the time of her death.

All of this information was presented to Nixon, who filed it away for safekeeping, although he came to believe that after Chappaquiddick, Teddy would not have the political clout or support to seek the presidency on the Democratic ticket.

"Good work, Edgar," Nixon wrote in a memo. "You've given me enough to clip off Kennedy's balls if it comes to that."

Wherever Teddy went, an FBI "mole" was sure to be there. Such was the case when Teddy was on a plane with Senator Walter Mondale in April of 1971. Operating on little sleep, Teddy jumped up from his seat, shouting, "They killed Jack and they killed Bobby. Now they're trying to kill me. They're trying to kill me!" Mondale and two other men had to subdue him.

J. Edgar learned that when Teddy traveled, he had a doctor with him. In most places, an ambulance was alerted of his arrival in case there was an assassination attempt at an airport.

On a bizarre note, J. Edgar ordered the FBI in Denver to investigate a report that Teddy was about to be slain with a crossbow.

Upon Teddy's death, a 2,352-page document was released under the Freedom of Information Act. By that time the personal file that J. Edgar maintained on Teddy had presumably been destroyed.

Ever since Elvis Presley burst onto the music scene in the 1950s, J. Edgar expressed his loathing of "this girly" boy, although he seemed to have some bizarre fixation on him.

J. Edgar spent much of his declining years trying to gather proof that Elvis was a bisexual. After investigating the lives of such "lady killers" as Howard Hughes and Errol Flynn, J. Edgar suspected all men who drifted night after night from woman to woman to be closeted homosexuals suffering "the Don Juan complex," as he called it.

When Elvis went into the Army and was stationed in West Germany, the FBI was monitoring his activities from their agents in Europe.

Among those figures appearing in the file was Dr. Laurenz Landau, a South African dermatologist Elvis visited in November of 1959. He falsely claimed he was ninety-eight years old but didn't look a day over forty. Elvis wanted his skin to remain "forever young" and sought treatment from Landau.

Finally, the singer submitted to Landau's Aroma Therapy treatment, in which an "elixir" of roses, carnations, orange blossoms, and resins were rubbed over Elvis's entire body. He required a totally nude Elvis to submit to ten treatments a week, although he much preferred him to have twenty.

As Elvis's biographer, Alanna Nash, wrote: "Elvis was a sucker for shit like that because he was terrified of getting old and because his skin was pretty rough in places. He had pores big enough to hide a tank."

The "doctor" also controlled Elvis' diet, feeding him honey and yogurt.

At twenty-four years of age, Elvis was "in a tizzy" about growing old. Reports are sketchy, but J. Edgar and the FBI learned that at some point Landau tried to masturbate Elvis when he developed an erection during skin treatments.

When Elvis kicked Landau out of his house, the doctor threatened to blackmail him, claiming that he'd had a different preteen or young fourteen-year-old German girl in his bedroom every night. If Elvis didn't pay blackmail money, he would go to the police and make a charge that Elvis was a pedophile.

This fascinated J. Edgar, who even obtained a copy of the report that Elvis made to MPs who came to grill him when Landau showed up at Army headquarters in Germany making charges against Elvis.

J. Edgar was convinced that Elvis was both bisexual and a pedophile, and once considered having him arrested when he brought Priscilla Beaulieu into the United States.

The FBI even rounded up statements that members of Elvis' Memphis Mafia made after parting company with Elvis. Lamar Fike, once a close friend, said: "When it came to sex, you've got to remember that Elvis was more interested in titillation than anything else. He didn't like penetration that much because he was uncircumcised, and sometimes in intercourse tore his foreskin and he'd bleed."

All these reports made tantalizing bedtime reading for J. Edgar and Clyde.

An FBI agent even trailed Elvis and his boys to Paris when he went on leave from the Army in West Germany.

In a memo from an unknown agent in Paris, it was reported that Elvis visited transvestite bars around Place Pigalle and became "involved" with a beautiful British drag queen. The note said: "He has an obsessive interest in transvestitism and may,

in fact, be a transvestite himself. Mr. Presley is alleged to have taken to his hotel an astonishing beautiful female looking performer from the Moulin Rouge in Paris. Reportedly, he told his cronies that back in his hotel suite, he discovered ‘she had a dick bigger than mine.’”

One night Elvis and his Mafia encountered the columnist Dorothy Kilgallen, who was in Paris pursuing a story that Elvis was hanging out with “all those girls, or guys, as the case may be.” When Elvis spotted her, he fled from the club. Some of the girls were so beautiful at the drag clubs, that Elvis was constantly asking his pals, “Is it a he or she?”

Lamar Fike, one of Elvis’ “Memphis Mafia,” traveled to Paris and Frankfurt with his boss. Fike reported that Elvis dated a female contortionist one night at a club in Frankfurt and spent six hours in her dressing room. “He came out of there wringing wet.”

The FBI also kept a running list of all the women Elvis seduced. The singer bragged that he’d seduced 1,000 women before his marriage to Priscilla. Apparently, he never claimed how many women he seduced after his marriage.

At one point he seemed partial to blondes, seducing not only Marilyn Monroe, who wanted him to co-star with her in *Bus Stop*, but her clones such as Mamie Van Doren and Jayne Mansfield. He considered all blondes to be prostitutes. He even seduced Diana Dors, called “the English Marilyn Monroe.”

The most startling information J. Edgar picked up about Elvis came from Dee Presley, Elvis’ stepmother. Dee had married Vernon after the death of Elvis’ beloved mother Gladys. *The National Enquirer* revealed excerpts from a book she was writing. In her manuscript she claimed that Elvis and Gladys had a sexual relationship and that Elvis had a “secret gay life.” She said that Vernon had revealed that to her during their marriage.



Although Richard Nixon agreed to meet with **Elvis Presley** in the Oval Office, J. Edgar ducked out on greeting him personally during Elvis’ visit to FBI headquarters in Washington. J. Edgar’s secretary, Helen Gandy, falsely claimed that J. Edgar was out of town.

Even though he didn’t meet Elvis personally, and even though Elvis wasn’t viewed as a threat to national security, J. Edgar spent a lot of time going over files on his personal life.

J. Edgar wanted to accumulate information that Elvis was a bi-sexual, especially revelations that he’d had an affair with actor Nick Adams.

J. Edgar also wanted the FBI to investigate if Elvis had had an incestuous affair with his mother, Gladys.

J. Edgar wanted the incest theme explored more thoroughly and received a report from a woman named Kim Tracy, who alleged that she had had a five-month affair with Elvis while he was stationed with the Army in West Germany. She also claimed that she became pregnant with Elvis' baby but had a miscarriage. "During lovemaking he would scream out "mama, mama" at the moment of climax. She also said that during intercourse, he would call her Gladys.

The only concrete evidence J. Edgar and the FBI turned up to indicate that Elvis was bisexual was his extended involvement with actor Nick Adams, who had been the best friend and lover of James Dean. Elvis was fascinated with the late actor and would endlessly watch *Rebel Without a Cause* in which Adams also had a brief role.

Adams was known in Hollywood as a "star-fucker," according to FBI reports. In the words of biographer Albert Goldman, Nick was "forever selling himself"—and Elvis had plenty of money.

A close bond between Elvis and Adams was formed the first night they met when Elvis accepted an offer to be Nick's "date" for a preview of the film *The Last Wagon* (1956). Elvis wanted to "hang" with Adams and asked him to show him Hollywood, especially the places Dean had patronized. Within a week, Adams told another one of his lovers, Sal Mineo, that he and Elvis were sleeping together. According to Adams, Elvis preferred oral sex and mutual masturbation. Penetration, apparently, was never an option between them.

In Washington, J. Edgar and Clyde seem to savor this relationship.

Back in the 1950s Elvis was seen driving his white Cadillac all over Los Angeles with Nick in the seat beside him. They patronized the old Villa Capri when it was on McCadden Place, and were seen dining at Googie's Restaurant on Sunset Boulevard.

When Elvis returned to Graceland, he left Nick an airplane ticket. Nick flew to Tennessee two days later. Sometimes at Graceland, Elvis, according to reports, would have a lover's quarrel with Nick, and Nick would be forced to sleep with Vester Presley, Elvis' uncle.

A tabloid ran a story that Nick and Elvis shared the same bed at Grace-land. Late at night, Elvis and Nick could be seen riding their twin Harley Davidson motorcycles around Memphis.

To legitimize their relationship, Elvis hired Nick to accompany him on cross-country tours.

Eventually, Elvis tired of Nick, and they separated. Nick announced to the press that he was writing a tell-all book. Nick's dead body was discovered on February 6, 1968 at his house in Coldwater Canyon in Los Angeles. There was no suicide note. Rumors still persist to this day that Col. Tom Parker, Elvis' manager, had him murdered. Nick's memoirs were not found in the house after his death.

One of Adams' closest friends, Broderick Crawford, said "Nick made a lot of mistakes, but his biggest mistake was to threaten Elvis with blackmail and let Col. Parker hear about that."

At the time of his death, J. Edgar still maintained an "open file" on Elvis as he sunk deeper into drugs and degradation.

While having a massage from a buxom blonde at Graceland, Elvis on an impulse decided he wanted to fly to Washington to meet both Richard Nixon and J. Edgar.

On December 21, 1970 Nixon agreed to meet with a cape-wearing Elvis in the Oval Office. Aides reported that the President seemed uncomfortable around Elvis, but was willing to be photographed shaking his hand. Elvis expressed his patriotism for America and denounced the "hippie drug culture," although he was alleged to have been on drugs himself during the meeting. He asked Nixon for a Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Badge, which was granted.

With a "mole" planted in the White House, J. Edgar wanted to know all the details of the Nixon/Presley meeting, including Elvis' wardrobe of amber-tinted sunglasses, a cardinal purple velvet cape, a cane, a white shirt with a high collar, and a black suede suit. The President noted that Elvis was wearing eye shadow and mascara. Nixon later told Bob Haldeman, his chief aide, that Elvis was "a gay blade."

As in all such meetings, there is often one very awkward moment. That came when Nixon opened his desk drawer and removed clasps with presidential seals to give to Elvis and his cohorts. "Remember, they have wives, too," Elvis said.

When Nixon didn't immediately offer equivalent souvenirs for the wives of his friends, Elvis said, "Now I know why they call you 'Tricky Dicky.'"

Nixon quickly responded, "Now I know why they call you 'Elvis the Pelvis.'"

Before leaving, Elvis did the unthinkable. Evoking Sammy Davis Jr., he actually hugged Nixon in a tight embrace. When he broke away, the President patted Elvis on the shoulder. As they were being photographed, Nixon said, "You dress kind of strange, don't you?"

Elvis responded, "Well, Mr. President, you got your show, and I got mine."

After the meeting, Nixon told the press that Elvis "could send a positive message to young people."

In his initial letter to Nixon, Elvis told him that he was about to be named one of the "Ten Outstanding Young Men of America," and noted "we share something in common," since Nixon himself had once obtained that honor.

When Elvis called the FBI and asked to meet J. Edgar during his tour of the Bureau's headquarters in Washington, FBI agent, M.A. Jones, wrote: "Mr. Presley's sincerity and good intentions notwithstanding, he is certainly not the type of individual whom the Director would wish to meet. It is noted at the present time he is wearing his hair down to his shoulders

and indulges in the wearing of all sorts of exotic dress.”

On December 31, 1970 at FBI headquarters, Elvis and six members of the Memphis Mafia had been flown in by private jet. An FBI agent told Elvis that J. Edgar was out of town but that a tour could be arranged “for you and your boys.”

No member of the public was allowed into the building with weapons, but Elvis brought in a derringer and a .25 automatic. Amazingly, the FBI agents did not confiscate his guns.

There is evidence that J. Edgar wished he had come out to greet Elvis. During his tour Elvis had told FBI agents that “J. Edgar Hoover is the greatest living American.” He claimed he’d read three of his books, including *Masters of Deceit*.

In an FBI memo sent to J. Edgar the next day, an agent wrote: “Mr. Presley claimed that he is of the opinion that the Beatles laid the groundwork for many of the problems we are having with young people by their filthy unkempt appearances and suggestive music while entertaining in this country during the early and middle-1960s. He also advised that the Smothers Brothers, Jane Fonda, and other persons in the entertainment business industry of their ilk have a lot to answer for me in the hereafter for the way they have poisoned young minds by disparaging the United States in their public statements and unsavory activities.”

“Mr. Presley advised that he wished you, Mr. Hoover, to be aware that he, from time to time, is approached by individuals and groups in and outside the entertainment business, whose motive and goals he is convinced are not in the best interests of this country, and who seek to have him lend his name to their questionable activities. In this regard, he volunteered to make such information available to the Bureau on a confidential basis whenever it came to his attention.”

Elvis’ Memphis Mafia concluded that their boss was volunteering to be “Hoover’s stoolie.”

Four days later, J. Edgar responded to Elvis’ praise, sending him a letter in which he said, “Your generous comments concerning the Bureau and me are appreciated, and you may be sure that we will keep in mind your offer to be of assistance.”

Fike said that Elvis later learned that J. Edgar was at FBI headquarters at the time of their visit, but chose not to receive the singer and his Memphis Mafia. “Hoover was probably in his office giving head to Clyde Tolson,” Fike later claimed.

With all the sexual accusations removed from Elvis’ FBI file, the sections that remained for publication dealt mainly with death threats made against him, complaints about his public performances; an extortion attempt; mention of a paternity suit; theft by larceny of an executive jet he owned, and how J. Edgar Hoover responded to citizen complaints.

Originally, the FBI file was thick with anecdotes about Elvis until J. Edgar’s longtime secretary, Helen Gandy, shredded “the really personal stuff.”

Far removed from Nixon’s one known affair with a possible Chinese spy, Marianna Liu, J. Edgar and Clyde became far more intrigued with Nixon’s bizarre relationship with Charles Rebozo, nicknamed “Bebe,” meaning “Baby” in Spanish. Before J. Edgar himself became a guest at Bebe’s home at Key Biscayne Florida, in December of 1971, he had his agents complete a security check on Bebe, turning up some “disturbing” information.

Born of Cuban immigrants to Tampa, Bebe was voted the “most beautiful boy in high school.”

He became the lover in the late 1920s of Donald Gunn, a rather wealthy young man who paid the bills. In 1931, Bebe married Donald’s sister, Claire Gunn, but after four years she claimed the marriage was never consummated. He later remarried her for another two years, perhaps under some sort of arrangement.

He took yet a final wife, Jane Lucke, his lawyer’s secretary, but the marriage didn’t take. She later said Bebe’s favorite things were Richard Nixon, his car, and me a very distant third.” His third and final marriage was called “antiseptic.”

As Nixon biographer Fawn Brodie, noted: “Nixon seemed to have been willing to risk the kind of gossip that frequently accompanies close friendships with a perennial bachelor like Rebozo. This despite Nixon’s known public aversion to homosexuals, and his acute sensitivity to the damage that the label of homosexual on a friend could bring to a public man.”

Senator George Smathers of Florida took a more cynical view. He often dined with Nixon when he came to see Bebe at Key Biscayne. “I think Bebe’s love of Nixon just grew and grew, starting when he became Vice President but bursting into full bloom when he became the actual President. Being President of the United States can make one power-hungry guy fall madly in love with you.”

Bebe was well-known in Miami’s homosexual community. When Nixon was not in residence, he threw Saturday night male-only barbecues at his Key Biscayne home, where he had a longtime affair with a handsome flight attendant on Pan American, Patrick LeLand. Bebe was bisexual, conducting a three-year affair with big-busted Margaret Foresman, the blonde-haired editor of *The Key West Citizen*.

Foresman claimed that with Bebe, Nixon could be quite playful, wrestling together in the pool at Key Biscayne. “When I visited and Nixon was there, we slept in different rooms. But one night around three in the morning when I was heading for the bar in the living room, I secretly spied Nixon emerging from Bebe’s bedroom wearing just the top to his pajamas.”

“I knew when we sailed over to Eleuthera in The Bahamas one week, Nixon and Bebe shared a bedroom and put me in my own quarters somewhere else on the property. One time I returned to Bebe’s home three hours earlier than I said and spotted them sunbathing in the nude around the pool. I slipped out of the house again and came back at the appointed time I told them.

By then they were fully dressed and sitting around Bebe's living room enjoying their first of many cocktails that night."



During his presidency, **Richard Nixon** (*left*) spent far more time with his best friend, **Bebe Rebozo** (*right*) than he did with his wife, Patricia. Because Bebe ("Baby" in Spanish) was well known in Miami's homosexual circles, rumors arose about the two men spending so much time together. Bebe was even assigned his own bedroom and office within the White House.

Nixon and Bebe swam nude together at his home on Key Biscayne. The president also shared several "shady dealings" with Bebe, who maintained notorious links to the mob.

"I don't know how anyone could make love to Nixon, but if there's one person on earth who can stomach the fucker, it's that Cuban faggot, Rebozo, down there in Miami," said Lyndon B. Johnson.

Bobby Baker, LBJ's top aide, claimed that his boss knew that Bebe and Nixon were "close like lovers. Bebe loved Nixon more than he loved anybody. He worshipped Nixon. Nixon was his God. His Little Jesus."

Columnist Jack Anderson later revealed that both Nixon and Bebe had stashed away hidden bank accounts in Switzerland. During Nixon's presidency, Bebe's net worth went from \$750,000 to \$4.5 million.

As for his wife Patricia, Nixon communicated with her mainly through memos signed "The President," or so J. Edgar was informed.

General Alexander Haig, Nixon's last chief of staff, was overheard mocking Nixon's limp-wristed friend and joking about his gay relationship with Nixon, according to author Anthony Summers.

Henry Kissinger, Nixon's Secretary of State, claimed he always resented the presence of Bebe, who was frequently sneaked in and out of Nixon's suite when the President traveled outside the United States. "His presence was always there as I was trying to talk foreign policy with Nixon. Sometimes a drunken Nixon would call me at three o'clock in the morning, with Bebe's foreign policy crackpot ideas. Nixon always warned me, 'Better take his advice, or it'll be your ass, Henry.'"

During Nixon's time in the White House, it is estimated that he spent one out of every ten days with Bebe, and the President made fifty trips to Key Biscayne to see his friend.

Bebe, as J. Edgar discovered, was a close friend of Santos Trafficante, the Tampa Godfather, and also a close friend of Alfred ("Big Al") Polizzi of Cleveland, who was a drug trafficker with syndicated links to gangster Meyer Lansky. Bebe was partners with Polizzi in developing a Cuban shopping center in Miami. The FBI labeled Polizzi as "one of the most influential members of the underground in America."

An FBI agent in Miami reported that in addition to Trafficante, Polizzi, and Lansky, Bebe frequently entertained Vincent (“Jimmy Blue Eyes”) Alo, a close cohort of Lansky.

During Nixon’s presidency, Bebe had access to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, where he was given a private office and a designated bedroom. J. Edgar had long suspected that Bebe was Nixon’s “bag man” to the Mafia and to the eccentric mogul Howard Hughes, the loopy billionaire Nixon referred to as “Daddy Warbucks.”

After J. Edgar’s death, Bebe would come under investigation during the Watergate scandal for transferring a \$100,000 bribe from Hughes to Nixon.

Eventually, Nixon established a residence next to Bebe’s in Key Biscayne. The press nicknamed it the Florida White House.

J. Edgar did not live to see the disgrace of both Bebe and Nixon. Columnist Jack Anderson speculated that Archibald Cox, the Watergate Special Prosecutor, had been fired because he had started to investigate Bebe’s role in accepting covert payments for Nixon.

Through Nixon’s resignation and the President’s subsequent fall, Bebe remained his loyal friend to the end.

Bebe frequently joined Nixon during his years of “exile” in California and was at his bedside nursing him through his final illness in 1994.

The “first friend” would live four more years, dying on May 8, 1998.

In Bebe’s last interview with *The Miami Herald*, he said, “Richard Nixon was everything they say he’s not. He’s a very sensitive man, very thoughtful and, of course, very brilliant. “For forty-four years, he enriched my life.”

Billy Byars, Jr. was the son of a rich Texas oilman, Billy Byars, Sr., who often entertained J. Edgar and Clyde. Byars Jr. remembered how out-spoken J. Edgar was in private company with his wealthy friends, calling Bobby Kennedy “a despicable little shit” or Richard Nixon “a dirty little son of a bitch. Right from the beginning, Nixon never met up with a bribe he didn’t want to pocket.”

J. Edgar’s association with Byars Jr. and some of his friends almost led to his own involvement in a homosexual scandal that even the FBI might not have been able to cover up. J. Edgar soon discovered that he and Byars Jr. shared certain mutual interests.

Byars Sr. and his wife, Emily had adopted the boy. Junior liked to claim that his biological parents were of Russian royalty. Actually, he may have been the offspring of a waitress and a Texas trucker. At one time his father kicked him out of his home in Texas allegedly because of his homosexuality, but they later reconciled.

Apparently, Byars Jr. never offered an explanation as to why his father was one of only three men J. Edgar called on the day of the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Because that mysterious call was made, Byars Sr. often figures in conspiracy books written after JFK’s murder.

In his book on J. Edgar, author Anthony Summers claimed that Byars’ house in Los Angeles, at the summit of the Laurel Canyon, was for a while “a haven for adult homosexuals and male teenagers.” One of J. Edgar’s chauffeurs, who refused to give his name, later maintained that he delivered J. Edgar (without Clyde) one night to this haven.

Byars Jr. was the founder of Lyric International, which produced physique photographs of boys and young men from the late 1960s until 1973. Lyric’s major film was *The Genesis Children*, featuring extensive full nudity of preteen and teenage boys. The boys were both American and European, some of whom came from Germany.

The boys are seen frolicking entirely in the nude in the surf and engaging in other activities such as climbing cliffs. There is no boy-on-boy sex, as Byars did not endorse pornography. However, one of his associates, Guy Strait, did specialize in boy pornography.

In *The Genesis Children*, there are many close-ups of the boys’ pelvic areas.

Deland Anderson, who went under various pseudonyms, was a child pornographer who recruited some of the teenagers for Lyric films. He also pimped those boys who were willing to various pedophiles. During its short existence, Lyric distributed ninety magazines featuring teenagers, and made films with extensive nudity of young men and boys.

Anderson maintained that a few of the boys who appeared in these films were supplied to Clyde and J. Edgar during their vacations in La Jolla. Byars Jr. lived in a bungalow next to J. Edgar’s at the Del Charro Hotel in La Jolla. There is no evidence that he participated in any of this peddling of young flesh.

Many liaisons with young boys and J. Edgar and Clyde were arranged by Anderson. The kids called the FBI director “Mother John,” and for some reason called Tolson “Mother Mike.”

In addition to J. Edgar and Clyde, these teenage boys were also supplied “to some of the biggest names in Hollywood,” according to Deland Anderson, who disappeared from the radar screen late in 1973 when newspapers began writing exposés about him.

When the police seized Anderson’s address book, one tantalizing address was the home address and phone number of Fred Astaire.

Anderson said that he had been told that J. Edgar and Clyde had been lovers when they were young men, but in their dotage they preferred three-way sex with young boys to stimulate their sagging libidos. “My boys just regarded them as two old queens and were willing to go with them because they paid well. One Saturday night I personally drove four boys to Hoover’s cottage. The boys were in there for four hours before they were released. Each was given a hundred-dollar bill, but I took half of it for my fee.”

Anderson recalled that J. Edgar had been particularly impressed with a nude photograph of a muscled, heavily endowed fifteen-year-old boy. “But before I could arrange a rendezvous between Hoover and the kid, the director insisted I take him to the barber. He always preferred a young man with a crewcut and detested what he called ‘long-haired hippies.’”

After J. Edgar’s death, Byars Jr. was indicted, along with thirteen other men, for child molestation and making movies depicting sex acts with boys. By that time, Byars had left the United States to live the life of an expatriate.

The Lyric Studio came to a notorious end in 1973. The Meese Commission, appointed by Ronald Reagan, announced its demise as the destruction of “the first known child pornography ring brought to public view.”

The Los Angeles Times headlined the story as “14 Men Indicted in Sex Movies Featuring Boys Ages 6 to 17.”

Criminal justice proceedings against the defendants more or less wound down with light sentences or \$500 fines. One teenager provocatively claimed he was “dangled over a cliff by two L.A. policemen until I confessed to having sex with Hoover.”

Robin Lloyd in his book, *For Money or Love: Boy Prostitution in America*, claims that Lyric films still command a high price “in the chicken market,” especially one film featuring a blond-haired thirteen-year-old boy.

Nixon’s top aides, H.R. (“Bob”) Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, intensely disliked J. Edgar, and on six different occasions convinced the President to fire him. At the last minute in each case Nixon backed down, fearing the FBI director would take his revenge and expose Nixon’s most guarded secrets.

Behind J. Edgar’s back, Haldeman arranged a meeting between Nixon and Peter Pitchess, the sheriff of Los Angeles County, who was regarded as a suitable replacement for J. Edgar. John Connally was also a candidate for the position. As governor of Texas, he had ridden in that limousine in Dallas in which JFK was assassinated.

Through his spies within the White House, J. Edgar learned of the manipulations of Ehrlichman and Haldeman. The director ordered an investigation into their private lives. “I’ve been hearing scandalous stories,” he told Clyde and his top aides, “but I need proof to present to the President about the two men in whom he’s put his trust.”

Instead of firing J. Edgar, Nixon invited him for a weekend at Camp David. “And bring your boy, Mr. Tolson,” Nixon added. At seventy, Clyde was hardly “a boy” any more. At Camp David, Nixon told J. Edgar that his new boss and Attorney General was to be John Mitchell. The name was familiar to J. Edgar. Mitchell was a noted New York municipal bond lawyer, the director of Nixon’s 1968 race for the White House, and one of Nixon’s closest personal friends.

Nixon had already warned J. Edgar not to make his usual investigation of the Mitchells’ background. The only warning J. Edgar gave Nixon was about Mitchell’s wife, Martha. An alcoholic, she was known for her erratic behavior and her utter lack of discretion. Tanked up on enough booze, she would virtually spill secrets best confined to the closet. Mitchell also was not the model of discretion.

When reporter Carl Bernstein was about to expose his involvement in the Watergate affair, Mitchell issued a warning to Bernstein’s publisher: “Katie’s gonna get her tit caught in a big fat wringer if that’s published.” The reference, of course, was to Katharine Graham. She was not intimidated by Mitchell. If anything, his threat caused her to order her reporters to probe deeper.

Months into the Nixon presidency, Haldeman and Ehrlichman began to resent J. Edgar’s easy access to Nixon, and behind the scenes they worked to limit it.

During their careers in the Nixon administration, Ehrlichman and Haldeman became known as “The Berlin Wall,” which was a play on their German family names and their shared penchant for keeping visitors away from Nixon. They were, in essence, his “gatekeepers.”

Bob Haldeman proudly referred to himself as Nixon’s “son of a bitch,” and he never shied away from firing staffers in person. The only man he wanted to fire, but couldn’t, was J. Edgar himself.

Ehrlichman also held J. Edgar “in total disgust.” Together “The Berlin Wall” set out to undermine the FBI director and get him fired.

In striking back, J. Edgar delivered what he told Clyde and his aides was a “bombshell.” As first revealed in Anthony Summers’ biography of J. Edgar, the FBI was told that Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and yet a third Nixon aide, Dwight Chapin, were indulging in homosexual sex within the White House, along with five members of Nixon’s Secret Service. Chapin was innocently smeared in these allegations, but the FBI had a strong case against Nixon’s two top aides. As it happened, one of J. Edgar’s under-cover agents was one of the youngest and best-looking members of the Secret Service.



Nixon's two top aides, **Bob Haldeman** (left) and **John Ehrlichman**, wanted their boss, Richard Nixon, to fire J. Edgar. But when the FBI director heard about this through his "mole" within the White House, he ordered that the two men be investigated. What FBI agents learned shocked even J. Edgar.

Haldeman and Ehrlichman, sometimes with young members of Nixon's Secret Service, often staged homosexual orgies at the Watergate Complex. When Nixon was staying with Bebe Rebozo in Key Biscayne, Haldeman and Ehrlichman also staged nude swimming parties in the White House pool with well-built young men.

The agent told J. Edgar that although he was straight, he had been propositioned by Ehrlichman, no doubt because of his good looks, to join the homosexual cabal. The agent went on to testify that after he'd refused, Ehrlichman had threatened to dismiss him from the Secret Service.

Through their informants, the FBI had accumulated names, dates, and places of homosexual orgies, some of which, ironically, had transpired within the Watergate complex, the venue for Nixon's ultimate downfall. Attorney General Mitchell had already been alerted to the bombshell J. Edgar had delivered to Nixon.

One night after a cruise aboard the president yacht *Sequoia*, Mitchell met privately with Haldeman and Ehrlichman. "I know boys will be boys sometimes when they get together," he said, referring to the homosexual reports. "But Hoover is sending a warning to us. Stop all this pressure in trying to get Nixon to fire J. Edgar. If you persist, you will be exposed. A scandal like this could bring down the presidency. Welcome to Washington, boys. It's a dirty game, and you'd better know it now."

Ehrlichman and Haldeman waited to see how Nixon was going to handle the exposure of their secret sex lives.

Hoping to smooth things over, Nixon accepted J. Edgar's invitation to dinner at his private home where Clyde was the co-host. The President invited Ehrlichman and Haldeman to go with him. J. Edgar graciously received them, feeding them tender, thick steaks flown in as a gift from Texas oilman Clint Murchison, "Elizabeth Taylor's favorite chili" from Chasen's Restaurant in Beverly Hills, and tree-ripened fresh fruit from a Florida ranch that specialized in exotic flavors.

Ehrlichman found J. Edgar's house "gone to seed." Haldeman later told Mitchell, "I felt I was in the house of some old auntie with lace doilies on the chair and male nude statues placed around, with erotic homosexual friezes from Roman days in the bathroom. In case Hoover had a peep-hole, I fluffed it a bit when I went to take a piss."

Mitchell told this story to his blabbermouth wife, Martha, who spread the gossip at Washington cocktail parties.

Nixon learned that an aide had heard Clyde Tolson tell Sullivan, "Whoever is elected in 1972, Eddie knows he's finished at the FBI—and that means even if Nixon is re-elected. I understand that as each week goes by, Nixon plots another scheme to fire us."

Nixon's reactions to these revelations are not known. There is speculation that he already was well aware of the behind-the-scenes trysts within the White House. When he was away, Haldeman and Ehrlichman sometimes staged nude all-male

swimming parties in the White House pool, where John F. Kennedy had cavorted with naked prostitutes.

J. Edgar didn't seem to feel the noose tightening. He told colleagues, "I'm flying down to Key Biscayne around Christmas. I don't want Nixon to see how bad off Clyde is, so I'll leave him at our hotel when I call on Nixon and his lover boy, Bebe Rebozo."

On J. Edgar's birthday on New Year's Day, Nixon always made a show of wishing him the happy returns of the day. Once again J. Edgar was assured he could remain as FBI director "as long as you choose, or as long as I'm President."

Because of strokes and open-heart surgery, Clyde wanted to retire and live on his government pension, but J. Edgar refused to give him permission. He kept him on the payroll, even though on many a day Clyde was too weak or sickly to show up for work. Because of his failing eyesight, he had to have a secretary read his mail to him.

As time went by, and passion's fire between the two G-Men had long ago died down, they became like a bickering straight couple, constantly nagging at each other.

Instead of being sympathetic to Clyde's rapidly declining health, J. Edgar seemed to hold him in contempt. One day at a luncheon at the Mayflower Hotel, Clyde stumbled and fell. Two waiters rushed to his side, but J. Edgar ordered them away. "Let the asshole get up by himself," he told the waiters.

Even though he faced repeated temptations to fire J. Edgar, Nixon called out for him in the midst of the Watergate crisis. He shouted to his aides, "Where in the fuck is J. Edgar Hoover now that I need him?"

On May 1, 1972 a feeble old man of seventy-seven walked into the Mayflower Hotel for his last luncheon, ordering a fresh grapefruit salad with cottage cheese, followed by coffee. His gray-brown hair, at least what remained of it, was straight and thin, no longer the spiky, curly hair of his youth. Still holding himself erect, his dark brown eyes looked slightly dazed, as if he were daydreaming.

Clyde, his beloved companion for all these years, was too weak and feeble to lunch with him that day, as he had so faithfully every day for years.

J. Edgar, the legendary G-Man of yesterday, had entered twilight time, the sun setting on one of the most notorious careers in U.S. government service.

Three hours earlier, his new chauffeur, Tom Moton, had driven him to FBI headquarters where he took a private elevator to his office. Before his arrival, word spread that, "He's on the way up."

The deputy associate director, Mark Felt, reported that, "Hoover was alert, forceful, typically aggressive."

He called his secretary, Helen Gandy, who had been with him for forty-four years, into his office. "If something ever happens to me, you know what to do." She had long ago been instructed to shred his personal files when he died.

She later claimed that she felt, as never before, "Edgar had a sense of his own mortality. That was made clear when he heard that Clyde had been taken to the hospital that morning for some medical tests."

The first dossier Helen put on J. Edgar's desk was the beginning of a series of the *Washington Post's* exposés on the FBI, written by his dreaded enemy, Jack Anderson. Anderson's column, according to Helen, "devastated J. Edgar, raising his blood pressure to dangerous levels."

Jack Anderson had written:

"FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover, the curmudgeon of law enforcement, fiercely resisted a White House suggestion that he spare a few hundred agents to crack down on drug abuses. But he can spare agents to snoop into the sex habits, business affairs, and political pursuits of individuals who aren't even remotely involved in illegal activity.

"Hoover's gumshoes have loaded FBI files with titillating tidbits about such diverse figures as movie actors Marlon Brando and Harry Bela-fonte, football heroes Joe Namath and Lance Rentzel, ex-boxing champs Joe Louis and Muhammad Ali, black leaders, Ralph Abernathy and Roy Innis.

"It's no secret that the FBI hounded the late Martin Luther King, Jr., the apostle of racial brotherhood and nonviolent protest. We have seen FBI reports on his political activities and sex life. The FBI is now watching the widow, Coretta King."

Anderson also claimed that "Hoover's gumshoes go out of their way to find out who's sleeping with whom in Washington and Hollywood. A famous movie star has been the subject of investigation, even though he has no criminal record or fingerprint data. His FBI contains nothing but rumors about his sex life, showing that he is definitely a homosexual." Anderson did not name the actor.

Over the intercom, J. Edgar ordered Helen to bring him the files on Rock Hudson. At his desk, he went over it carefully. It was all there, including his *faux* marriage to a secretary Phyllis Gates, a well-known lesbian. Hudson's list of seductions was long: porn star Paul Baresi, studio publicist Tom Clark, Errol Flynn, actor Jon Hall, Liberace, Sal Mineo, George Nader,

Tyrone Power, Merv Griffin, Jim Nabors, and talent agent Henry Willson.

A surprising number of women were also on the list—Elizabeth Taylor, Joan Crawford, Mamie Van Doren, and Frank Sinatra’s longtime girlfriend, Marilyn Maxwell.

The FBI even had a report that at a Hollywood party, Hudson had propositioned pint-sized Mickey Rooney who turned him down. “Rock, you know I like girls.”

Many members of the Bureau felt that reading Anderson’s column that day hastened J. Edgar’s death.

When Helen came in to see J. Edgar after he returned from his lunch, she found him staring out the window. “I want to live to see the new building completed sometime in 1974.” He was referring to the new \$102 million FBI building going up on Pennsylvania Avenue.

In the office he reached for her hand. In her fifty-four years of service to him, he had never touched her before. “I must remind you,” he said, “my personal files must never fall in the hands of our enemies. You have never failed me before. Of all the people at this Bureau, you are the only one who is indispensable.”

He looked deeply into her eyes, imbedded in a face that biographers have claimed “evoked Cerberus at the gate.”

Before he left that day, he told her, “Our greatest enemy is time. I hear the sound of time’s winged chariot very loud in my ears.”

Helen officially retired on the day J. Edgar died, but she spent the next few weeks destroying his personal papers, blackmail evidence he’d accumulated on everybody from the Kennedys to Nixon, from Joseph McCarthy to Eleanor Roosevelt and Marilyn Monroe.

She was left \$5,000 in his will, and continued to live in Washington until 1986 when she moved to Deland, Florida to live with a niece. An avid trout fisherman, she died of a heart attack on July 7, 1988.

After his last day on the job, J. Edgar’s chauffeur drove him to Clyde’s apartment. His associate director had long ago given up sleeping over at the home of his boss. Back from the hospital, he looked weak and feeble after suffering a series of debilitating strokes.

He was hardly coherent, fussing over an early dinner prepared by his housekeeper. She’d cooked Omaha steaks, baby peas, baked potatoes, and prepared for each of them three scoops of banana nut ice cream, their favorite.

After dinner, J. Edgar embraced Clyde, the recipient of thousands of embraces over the decades. His chauffeur delivered him to his home at 10:15pm. He said goodnight to his housekeeper, Annie Fields, and spent an hour out in his backyard with his two Cairn terriers, “G-Boy” and “Cindy.” He retired to bed, perhaps around 11:30pm.

An hour later, he was rudely awakened by the urgent ringing of a telephone on his nightstand.

J. Edgar picked up the phone to hear the drunken voice of President Nixon. “It’s Dick,” he said. “Edgar, it pains me to inform you of this, but I must. In the morning, I’m holding a press conference to announce the new director of the FBI. I hope you will understand my decision. A scandal is about to break in California, a real nasty one. About young boys and stuff. If you step down without protest, I think we can cover it up and protect your stellar reputation.”

Perhaps J. Edgar did not need to be told what that scandal was. He already knew. According to John Ehrlichman and Bob Haldeman, J. Edgar did not ask who his successor was.

“Good night, Mr. President,” he said in a weak voice. “I have served my country well, given distinguished service. I have fought all enemies, both foreign and domestic.” He put down the receiver.



Helen Gandy was J. Edgar's long-time secretary. She was so loyal to him that she destroyed his personal files after his death so as not to embarrass him.

Clint Eastwood's movie, *J. Edgar*, depicts Leonardo DiCaprio, cast as the FBI's director, proposing marriage to Gandy.

But before her death in 1988, the usually tight-lipped Gandy said J. Edgar never showed any interest in her other than as a loyal secretary.

However, at the end of WWI, perhaps for the sake of appearances, J. Edgar did conduct a *faux* romance with his former secretary, a woman named "Alice." She soon abandoned him, running off with a young Army officer returning from the war in Europe.

"I wouldn't exactly call it love between Eddie and Alice," Gandy said, refusing to reveal the woman's last name.

In the middle of the night he suffered a fatal heart attack.

Nixon was alerted in the early morning hours when J. Edgar's body, clad in his pajama bottoms, was discovered by the side of his bed by his housekeeper, Annie.

"Jesus Christ," Nixon said. "That old cocksucker."

He immediately ordered eighteen of his Secret Service men to go to J. Edgar's home and remove his private records, which he kept in the basement. "Get them before Clyde Tolson shreds them."

Later that morning, Nixon told the press that J. Edgar "was a legend in his own lifetime, serving forty-eight years under eight American presidents with total loyalty, unparalleled ability, and supreme dedication."

He immediately ordered a state funeral. It attracted 25,000 mourners. His body lay in state on the same bier that once had borne the body of the assassinated Abraham Lincoln. The funeral did not come off without incident. The coffin weighed more than half a ton and two of the eight pall-bearers were injured trying to lift the massive weight.

An Army guard presented Clyde with a U.S. flag that had draped J. Edgar's coffin. It was a public recognition of their special friendship.

That day, Nixon also announced that the new FBI headquarters would bear the name of J. Edgar Hoover in gold letters.

For one day, Clyde was the director of the FBI, but he submitted his resignation to Nixon that afternoon. "Without Eddie around, there is no more need for me to carry on," he told Helen Gandy. "Nixon would have fired me by tomorrow anyway."

Clyde inherited J. Edgar's estate of \$551,000 and moved into J. Edgar's house, where he remained until he died, venturing

out only twice.

On May 2, 1974, the second anniversary of J. Edgar's death, a weak, feeble Clyde went out of his house for only the second time since the death of his long-time companion. He walked with a cane to where a chauffeur waited to take him to the Congressional Cemetery.

At the cemetery, Clyde walked slowly to the grave of J. Edgar and placed a red rose on the burial site. Perhaps he also looked at the plot of land adjoining, where he would be buried himself.

After private words uttered over the grave, he returned to the limousine, where he was driven back to his lonely home where he had received nobody in the wake of J. Edgar's death.

He had spent the previous two years destroying more and more of J. Edgar's files which had been stored in his apartment. He wanted no papers left behind that would damage the reputation of the longtime director of the FBI.

On the third anniversary of J. Edgar's death, Clyde was preparing once again to be driven to the cemetery with his red rose.

But he feared he'd never make it. His final call was to Helen Gandy, J. Edgar's long-time secretary. He inquired about her health and complained of his own. He melodramatically told her, "I'll soon be joining Eddie for eternity."

Death came to him on April 14, 1975. His secrets were buried with him beside J. Edgar.



J. Edgar (left) and Clyde Tolson (right) spent many happy moments together at various racetracks.

Here, they're seen in 1947 at La Jolla in California, playing safe bets with insider information obtained from the mob, who often fixed the race.

The racetrack was also a venue for various "celebrations," including the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy.